



Summary :

Second son of the *meGas domestikos* Andronikos Palaiologos and Theodora; brother of Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos. Born after 1225. Became a general (*strategos*) and also received the titles of *meGas domestikos*, *sebastokrator* and *despotes*. Led the Nicaean army in the battle of Pelagonia (1259) and took part in almost all the wars conducted by Michael VIII both in the western and the eastern front. Patron of monks and opponent to the emperor's union policy.

Other Names

John Komnenos Doukas Angelos

Date and Place of Birth

After 1225

Date and Place of Death

1273/1274

Main Role

Military official - despotes

1. Biography

John was the second son of the *meGas domestikos* Andronikos Palaiologos and of Theodora Palaiologina, brother of the Emperor [Michael VIII Palaiologos](#) (1261-1282), of Irene and Maria. He was born after 1225. John, together with his stepbrother [Constantine Palaiologos](#), was by Michael's side during the tumultuous events, following the death of [Theodore II Laskaris](#): in the summer of 1258, the [Mouzalon](#) brothers were murdered, and Michael emerged by the agency of the aristocracy as the most appropriate to become delegate of the child emperor, [John IV Laskaris](#). The younger Palaiologoi brothers, not having yet obtained any high-ranking titles, joined, after Michael's request, the group of young aristocrats surrounding the young Emperor John IV; it appears, in fact, that John was appointed in charge of his brother's guard. Michael Palaiologos soon managed to gain power in the [Empire of Nicaea](#) and appointed his brother John *meGas domestikos* (1258) allegedly in the name of the emperor.¹

After his coronation as emperor, at the beginning of 1259, Michael VIII Palaiologos honoured some of his relatives and closest associates with high-ranking titles. John Palaiologos became *sebastokrator*. Moreover, wanting to form strong family relations, which would strengthen further his position, the new emperor, in 1259, arranged the marriage of his brother John to one of the daughters of [Constantine Tornikios](#) or Tornikes, as he is often called, a *strategos*. It is not known if John had any children from this marriage.

2. The years of success

On the same year, 1259, the *sebastokrator* John Palaiologos was placed in charge of the Nicaean army, which after having conquered many cities, defeated, in the battle of Pelagonia the numerous but heterogeneous army of the Prince of Achaea William II Villeardouin, the King of Sicily Manfred and the Despotes of Epiros Michael II Angelos.² After this victory, John Palaiologos marched through Thessaly, fortifying the cities and castles in the area. Toward the end of the summer he set up camp in the city of Neai Patrai (Hepate). This event is recorded in the only document that John issued as a *sebastocrator*, in September 1259, in favour of the monastery of Makrinitissa.³



John departed afterwards for central Greece, joined by the army of the illegitimate son of Michael II, John I Doukas, who had defected to the Nicaean army in the battle of Pelagonia. Since Michael II himself had fled to the Ionian islands, John Palaiologos conquered without difficulty the parts south of Thessaly belonging to the Despotate of Epiros. After passing through Leivadia and plundering Thebes, however, John I Doukas deserted him and returned to his father, causing a crucial shift of power. As a result, the conquests of the sebastokrator John were short-lived and they failed to establish the Nicaean rule in the area. What is more, John departed hastily for [Lampsacus](#), where he met his brother, Michael VIII.

John's recent success was followed by new recognition and honours. In 1259, John Palaiologos received the title of **despotes**, which was second to the emperor's in hierarchy. [George Pachymeres](#) wrote that John Palaiologos was a true soldier, for whom war was a pleasure; that 'his actions made him great' and that 'for his benefactions he was even better known than the emperors'.⁴ The same author mentions that John despised wealth, and he stresses his special connection to his soldiers, whom he treated not as a superior but as a brother,⁵ thus gaining great respect from the army.

In the meantime, in Epiros, the Byzantines under the strategos [Alexios Strategopoulos](#) did not have much success neither in 1260 nor in 1262, when the war was repeated. Finally, the Despotas John Palaiologos returned to Epiros, winning an important battle in the summer of 1263 and forcing Michael II Doukas to capitulate, to accept the emperor's authority and to consent to the marriage of his legitimate son Nikephoros I to a niece of Michael VIII.⁶

Due to trouble on the eastern front in 1263, Emperor Michael VIII sent his brother John to Asia Minor to fight against the increasingly dangerous Turkomans. In these encounters, John Palaiologos was somewhat successful and he managed to secure the areas of Maiander, [Tralles](#) and Kaystro. According to Pachymeres, the despotes conducted this war with great flexibility and ability; he was viewed as extremely courageous and he caused fear not only with his presence but by the mere mention of his name.⁷ John Palaiologos remained in Asia Minor until 1267.

3. The end of his career

The Despotas John Palaiologos issued documents concerning the **metochia** of the patriarchal monastery of Makrinitissa (1267, 1268, 1270),⁸ which illustrate his role in eastern Thessaly. Other documents have also been preserved, revealing that he was the patron of yet more monastic communities.⁹ During his stay in Thessalonike he offered benefactions to the monastery of Megale Lavra of St Athanasios in Mount Athos, but also to the monasteries of Chilandar and Xeropotamos.¹⁰ In general, there is the impression that he was positively disposed towards monasticism, since, according to Pachymeres and during his stay in the East, and in particular in the Lavra of Kellibaroi in mount [Latros](#), he donated the metochion of the Theotokos, which was sometimes called in his honour the metochion "του Δεσπότηου".¹¹

John does not appear to have ever received a specific administrative post in Thessaly, but he rather acted as the emperor's brother and as despotes. However, he had received as a **pronoia** large overland properties in the mainland (in the valley of Strymon) and in some islands (two whole islands, Rhodes and Lesbos).¹²

The career of the despotes John Palaiologos was abruptly finished shortly after losing the war against the now sebastokrator John I Doukas (since his father had died), near the city of Neai Patrai in 1273.¹³ According to



information in Byzantine writers, John willingly gave up the title of despotes.¹⁴ However, modern researchers believe that the Emperor Michael VIII himself took away the title.¹⁵ It is assumed that John Palaiologos died shortly after these events (1273/1274).

1. «τοῦ βασιλέως διδόντος δὴ θεν»: A. Failler (ed.), *Georges Pachymérés, Relations historiques I*, (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 24, Paris 1984), p. 113.
2. One of the most recent works on the battle of Pelagonia has been written by Adžievski, K., *Pelagonija vo sredniot vek* (Skopje 1994), pp. 154-160, where there is reference to all the sources and bibliography on the subject.
3. Miklosich, F. – Müller, I. (eds.) *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi sacra et profana*, IV (Vindobonae 1871), no 19, pp. 384-385.
4. A. Failler (ed.), *Georges Pachymérés, Relations historiques I* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 24, Paris 1984), p. 285, and vol. II, pp. 415-417.
5. A. Failler (ed.), *Georges Pachymérés, Relations historiques I* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 24, Paris 1984), pp. 285-287.
6. Ostrogorsky, G., *Ιστορία του Βυζαντινοῦ Κράτους Γ'* (Athens 1993), p. 137.
7. A. Failler (ed.), *Georges Pachymérés, Relations historiques I* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 24, Paris 1984), pp. 285-287.
8. Miklosich, F. – Müller, I. (ed.) *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi sacra et profana*, IV (Vindobonae 1871), no. 6, pp. 342-344· no. 20, pp. 385- 386· no. 21, pp. 386-387· no. 22, pp. 387-388· no. 23, pp. 388-389 and no. 24, p. 389.
9. On this subject see the extensive writings of Živojinović, M., “O Jovanu Paleologu, bratu Mihaila VIII”, *Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu XIV.1* (1979), pp. 103-122.
10. These benefactions are known to us from the chrysobull of Michael VIII Palaiologos in April 1263, concerning the same monastery, see Lemerle, P. et al. (eds), *Actes de Lavra II de 1204 à 1328* (Paris 1977), no 72, p 14.
11. Janin, R., *Les églises et les monastères des grands centres byzantins (Bithynie, Hellespont, Latros, Galèsios, Trébizonde, Athènes, Thessalonique)* (Paris 1975), p. 231. See also A. Failler (ed.), *Georges Pachymérés, Relations historiques I* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 24, Paris 1984), p. 289.
12. A. Failler (ed.), *Georges Pachymérés, Relations historiques I* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 24, Paris 1984), p. 417. See also Ostrogorsky, G., *Pour l'histoire de la féodalité byzantine* (Bruxelles 1954), p. 100, 109.
13. On the subject of chronology, see Failler, A., “Chronologie et composition dans l’Histoire de Georges Pachymérés”, *Revue des études byzantines* 39 (1981), p. 192, 202.
14. A. Failler (ed.), *Georges Pachymérés, Relations historiques I* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 24, Paris 1984), p. 433; see also Bekker, I. – L. Schopen (eds), *Nicephori Gregorae Byzantina Historia I* (Coprus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1829), p. 120.
15. Ferjančić, B., *Despoti u Vizantiji i južnoslovenskim zemljama* (Beograd 1960), p. 39.

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Glossary :

	despotes
Title introduced in the 12th century. In administrative hierarchy, the office of despotes was under the emperor and the co-emperor. From the 14 th century onwards, the title was given to the governors of the Byzantine Peloponnese.	
	megas domestikos
Supreme military commander of the imperial army. High-ranking title which was generally given to close relatives of the emperor.	
	metochion
In the Byzantine period, <i>metochion</i> meant the estate that was conceded to a monastery for income purposes and operated as its dependency. Usually the <i>metochia</i> were located far from the monastery to which they belonged and included various structures, such as churches, hospices etc.	
	pronoia
("care", "forethought") An institution that goes back to the 11th century. It refers to estates granted to a prominent military official or to the Church; it also designates in general the right of an individual or a religious foundation to receive directly from citizens of farmers whatever dues they would normally be obliged to pay to the state. The holder of a <i>pronoia</i> was called <i>pronoiaros</i> . The <i>pronoiai</i> could not be inherited by the family of military officials after their death, while when a donation was made to the Church, the pronoia was considered full and permanent.	
	sebastokrator
Honorary title of the Byzantine court. The office was established in 1081 by Alexios I Komnenos for his elder brother Isaac, equivalent to the one of regent	
	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

George Pachymeres praises John Palaiologos

Τὸν μέντοι γε δεσπότην Ἰωάννην μετακαλεσάμενος ἐκ Θεσσαλονίκης ὁ βασιλεὺς, μικρὸν ὅσον συνδιατρίψαντα οἱ, ἅμα ταῖς δυνάμεσι πρὸς ἀνατολὴν ἐκπέμπει, τοῖς Πέρσαις ὡς ἦν συμμαίξοντα. Ἦν γὰρ ταῖς ἀληθείαις ὁ ἀνὴρ ὀξύτατος, ὡς νῦν μὲν ἐνταῦθα ἀκούεσθαι, νῦν δὲ παρῆναι ὅπου τις μὴδὲ προσεδόκησεν ἂν πώποτε. ... Διὰ ταῦτα καὶ ἠνδραγάθει τὰ μέγιστα, φοβερὸς ἅπασιν ὢν, ἅμ' ἀκούμενος καὶ ἅμ' ἐφιστάμενος. Τὸ μέντοι γε στρατιωτικὸν καὶ λόγους ἔθαλπε καὶ δώροις ἐθεράπευε καὶ, τὸ μέγιστον, οὐ δεσποτικῶς ἐκείνοις, ἀλλ' ἀδελφικῶς προσεφέρετο, ἀνὴρ θεοφιλὴς καὶ πρᾶος καὶ χρηστὸς ἀνυπόκριτος. Εἰς δὲ φιλοδωρίαν καὶ πάντας ἐνίκα... Τὰ δ' ἄλλα μέτριος ἦν καὶ καρτερικὸς ἐφ' ἅπασιν, εἰς δ' οἰκειακὴν τάξιν καὶ λιαν φιλότιμος καὶ τὸ σύμπαν περιφανής.



Failler, A. (ed.), *Georges Pachymérés relations historiques I* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 24, Paris 1984), pp. 285-286.

Chronological Table

After 1225: Birth of John Palaiologos

1258: John becomes *mezas domestikos*

1259: *Sebastocrator*. He marries the daughter of Constantine Tornikios. Wins the battle of Pelagonia. *Despotes*

1259-1263: Wars and stay in the European provinces

1263-1267: Wars and stay in the provinces of Asia Minor

1267-1273: Return to the European provinces

1273: Defeat in the city of Neai Patrai and end of his career

1273/1274: Death of John Palaiologos