



Περίληψη :

Constantine Gabras was a key military and political figure in the Byzantine political scene in the 12th century. He was a protosevastos, strategos of Philadelpheia and strategos of Trebizond; in this latter capacity he is mostly known in Byzantine history. As the governor of Trebizond he managed to detach it from the central Byzantine administration and govern it as an autonomous district for a long time, before it was reannexed in the years of John II Komnenos.

Τόπος και Χρόνος Γέννησης

11th century

Τόπος και Χρόνος Θανάτου

12th century

Κύρια Ιδιότητα

Military official

1. Origins

Constantine Gabras was born to the aristocratic [Gabras family](#), who influenced greatly the political, economic and social life of Byzantium. Nothing is known about the origin of the family.¹ The Armenian origin has been suggested in the last decade due to the multiple etymology of the family name, which is related to three Middle East traditions: Persian, Arabic and Armenian.² According to a theory, the name is possibly derived from the Aramaic and Syrian root g-b-r ('man', 'hero').³ According to another theory, the name Gabras comes from the Persian 'gabrak' (the believer in the religion of Zoroaster), the Irani-Kurdish 'gebir' or 'gavir' ('Armenian', from which the Turkish 'gavur', that is, 'unbeliever', derives) and the Arabic 'Kafir' ('unbeliever').⁴ The term 'gabr' indicated the Armenians or Christians within the Muslim community.⁵

2. Biographical Information

Little is known about the early years of Constantine Gabras. He was the son, brother or perhaps nephew of the subsequent [sebastos](#) and [patrikios](#) Theodore Gabras, according to the *Synaxarion of St [Theodore Gabras](#)*.⁶

In the beginning of his career he was a [strategos](#) under Emperor [Alexios I Grand Komnenos](#) (1081-1118) and held the title of [protosebastos](#). One of the missions he undertook was the campaign against Bohemond, governor of the [Duchy of Antioch](#). In 1108 he went to the Balkan peninsula and captured the city of Petroula as well as the stronghold Mylos in the wider region of Dyrrhachium (Durrës) aiming to intercept the crusaders. However, his campaign was not successful and was replaced by strategos Marianos Mavrokatalon.⁷

Then, Constantine Gabras became the strategos of [Philadelpheia](#), commanding a powerful military corps, which aimed to defend the city and the surrounding region against the Seljuk Amir Saisan. In 1112 the Byzantines fought against the Seljuk Turks under Malikshah (Malikshah) at Kelvianon, not far from Philadelpheia. In that battle Gabras gallantly charged first at the enemy lines and urged his soldiers to follow him. As a result, the Seljuks⁸ were defeated and cut up



by the Byzantine army. In 1113 Constantine Gabras, in command of the vanguard, took part in a battle in the valley of Akrokou (near Mount Olympus) under Emperor Alexios I Grand Komnenos.⁹ In 1116, in command of the left wing, he participated in the campaign of the Byzantine emperor in Asia Minor and fought in a battle near Philomelion.¹⁰ In 1119 Gabras was appointed **Dux** of Trebizond (Chaldia) and remained in office until 1140. The association of Gabras with [Trebizond](#) and [Chaldia](#) was based on the fact that the Gabras family has had a long tradition in the administration of the district.¹¹

In 1119, when he was already Dux of Trebizond, he was involved in conflicts among Turkmen tribes of Asia Minor. Ibn Mangudjak (Mangucak), the founder of the dynasty of Erzindjan (Erzincan), sought shelter in Trebizond and asked for protection and alliance with Gabras against Balak of Melitene and Ghazi Gümüştegin, the son of the emir of the Danişmendids. However, the military forces of Gabras and Ibn Mangudjak were defeated by Gümüştegin, thus resulting in the capture and even death of 5,000 Byzantines. Constantine Gabras was captured during the battle and Ibn Mangudjak asked 30,000 dinars to set him free. Finally, after the ransom was paid, Gabras was freed.¹² The defeat of Gabras made the Danişmendids more powerful and enabled them to capture Neocaesarea.

The political and military career of Constantine Gabras is associated with a period characterised by the emergence, climax and decline of the dynasty of the Persianised Danişmendids (1110-1141). They played an important role in the Byzantine-Turkish relations in Asia Minor. After 1126 Constantine returned to Trebizond and governed it in an authoritative manner, taking advantage of the looser control exercised by Constantinople. The autonomous way in which Gabras was governing posed a threat to the influence of Constantinople over Asia Minor. Thanks to the autonomy Trebizond enjoyed in the years of Gabras, his territory became a centre of activities against the central administration of Constantinople. In 1130 the sebastokrator Isaac Komnenos, brother of Emperor [John II Komnenos](#), fled for refuge to Trebizond because of adverse political developments in Constantinople. Between 1139 and 1140 the Byzantine Emperor John II Komnenos launched a campaign to recapture Tzanicha and Chaldia. The campaign was unsuccessful and Neocaesarea was not recaptured by the Byzantine emperor. During the campaign John Komnenos, son of Isaac Komnenos, found shelter among the Seljuk Turks and married Kamero, daughter of the Seljuk sultan Mas'ūd, brother-in-law of Gümüştegin. Although John II Komnenos failed at first, Chaldia was finally reannexed to the Byzantine administration in the mid-1160s. There is no information from the available sources about the last years and death of Constantine Gabras.

3. Evaluation

The above events indicate the important role Constantine Gabras played in the political and military matters of Asia Minor in the 12th century. Either by allying with the Byzantine Empire against the Seljuk expansionism or by being involved in the conflict among the Turkmen tribes (Danişmendids, Seljuks), he managed to remain a key figure in a period of reshuffle in Asia Minor. He instigated the autonomy of Trebizond and made the city a key factor in political developments and in the relations between the Greek-speaking world and the Turkish dynasties of Asia Minor. The few references to him found in Byzantine sources describe Gabras negatively. Anna Komnene describes Gabras as a 'warlike man' who 'fumed at his enemies'.¹³ However, these references do not seem to be very reliable, as the above texts were written by people who either lived in the court of Constantinople or followed the policies of the Byzantine emperor.



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Γλωσσάριο :

	doukas (lat. dux) Antiquity: Roman military commander who, in some provinces, combined military and civil functions. Buzantium: a higher military officer. From the second half of the 10th c. the title indicates the military comander of a larger district. After the 12th c., doukes were called the governors of small themes.
	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.
	protosebastos High-ranking title usually bestowed upon close relatives of the emperor. The title was introduced by Alexios I Komnenos. In the 12th century it was awarded to close associates of the emperor and to members of aristocratic families, such as the Palaiologos, Tarchaneiotos, Raoul and Metochites families.
	sebastos ("venerable") Title of honour created by Constantine IX the Monomachos in the middle of the 11th century. Originated from the translation of the imperial adjective augustus. This title was given successively to the two mistresses of the emperor.
	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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Παραθέματα

The powership of Constantine Gabras in Trebizond

Ἄμα δὲ καὶ Κωνσταντῖνον τὸν Γαβρᾶν κατασχεῖν ἤδη χρόνον συχνὸν τὴν Τραπεζούντα ὑποποισάμενον καὶ ἤθεσι τυραννικοῖς αὐτὴν διεξάγοντα

Νικίτας Χωνιάτης, *Ιστορία*, Bekker, E. (ed.), *CSHB* (Bonnae 1835), p. 45.

The character of Constantine Gabras

Ἀλλὰ Κωνσταντῖνον τὸν Γαβρᾶν, ἄνδρα ἀρηϊφίλον καὶ πῦρ κατὰ τῶν ἐναντίων πνέοντα, μεταπεμφάμενος εἰς τὴν οὕτω καλουμένην Πέτρουλαν ἀπέστειλεν κατασκευάμενον

Αννα Κομνηνή, *Αλεξιάς 2*, Schopenus, L. (ed.), *CSHB* (Bonnae 1878), pp. 208-109.

Lead seal of Constantine Gabras,

On the front it depicts St George and on the back there is the inscription::

"Κ(ύριε) β(οή)θει Κων(σταντίνω) (πρωτο)νοβελισίμο το Γαβρᾶ".

A. Bryer – A. Dunn – J. W. Nesbitt, "Theodore Gabras, duke of Chaldia (+ 1098) and the Gabrades: Portraits, sites and seals", *Βυζάντιο, Κράτος και κοινωνία, Μνήμη Νίκου Οικονομίδη*, επιστ. επιμ. Α. Αβραμέα – Α. Λαΐου – Ευ. Χρυσός, Αθήνα: Ινστιτούτο Βυζαντινών Ερευνών. Εθνικό Ίδρυμα Ερευνών, 2003, εικ. 8 [= Byzantine Collection Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, no. 55.1.3028.]

Χρονολόγιο

Before 1108: Strategos in the service of emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118) having the title of protosebastos"

1108: Constantine Gabras goes to the city of Petroula in order to intercept the Normans

1112: Victory of Gabras and the Byzantines against the Seljuk Turks at the battle of Kelvianon, not far from Philadelpheia

1113: Battle of Akrokou with the participation of Gabras under the command of emperor Alexios I Komnenos

1116: In charge of the left wing during the campaign of the Byzantine Emperor in Asia Minor. He participates in a battle near Philomelion

Before 1119 and until 1140: Doux of Trebizond (Chaldia)

1119: Gabras is captured by the Danişmendids



1126: Gabras returns to Trebizond

1130: Gabras offers refuge to Isaac Komnenos

1139-1140: Unsuccessful campaign of the Byzantine emperor John II Komnenos in order to recapture Tzanicha and Chaldia

Middle of the 1160s: Chaldia is annexed again to the Byzantine administration