



## Summary :

Alexios Strategopoulos was born in the late 12<sup>th</sup> - early 13<sup>th</sup> century. He was an official of the Empire of Nicaea and later served under Michael VIII Palaiologos. He was honoured with the titles of *mezas domestikos* and *caesar*. He fought in the wars of the emperors of Nicaea against the despotate of Epiros, but he is mainly associated with the recapture of Constantinople (July 1261). He died between 1271 and 1275, probably in Constantinople.

## Other Names

Alexios Komnenos Strategopoulos

## Date and Place of Birth

late 12<sup>th</sup> - early 13<sup>th</sup> century; place unknown

## Date and Place of Death

between 1271-1275, probably in Constantinople

## Main Role

military official

## 1. Biography

Alexios Komnenos Strategopoulos<sup>1</sup> was born toward the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> or at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. His place of birth is unknown. Of his family status, it is only known that he was of [aristocratic descent](#), married and father of a son, Constantine, who was blinded by Emperor [Theodore II Laskaris](#) in 1255.<sup>2</sup> He died between 1271 and 1275, possible in Constantinople.

## 2. Career

### 2.1. Strategopoulos' activity under the Laskarids

The name Alexios Strategopoulos first appears in the sources in 1252-1253, when he participated in the war of the then [Emperor of Nicaea, John III Vatatzes](#), against the [despot](#) of Epiros Michael II Doukas (1231-1267). Strategopoulos was commander of a part of the army with orders to plunder the area around the lake of Ostrobou that belonged to the Despotate of Epiros.

After John III's death (1254), Alexios was stationed in Serres, in the service of the new emperor, Theodore II. In 1255, together with the [pinkernes](#) Constantine Tornikes, he marched against Tzepaina in Rhodope. But this poorly planned campaign was unsuccessful, thus causing the rage of the Emperor. This failure probably was the reason why Strategopoulos fell out of favour; an additional reason must have been his friendly relationship with the future emperor [Michael Palaiologos](#), who was suspected of conspiring against Theodore II. Alexios' son Constantine was accused of treason and was blinded by the emperor, while Alexios himself was imprisoned in 1258. At the time, Theodore II was extremely distrustful toward the aristocracy, whom he blamed his occasional failures upon. While the exact time of Strategopoulos' imprisonment remains uncertain, he was probably freed after Theodore II's death (16 August 1258); only a few days later he took part in the revolt of the aristocracy and the army against the [Mouzalon](#) brothers, regents of the underage [John IV Laskaris](#).

### 2.2. Strategopoulos' activity under Michael VIII Palaiologos

Due to his friendship with Michael Palaiologos, Alexios Strategopoulos was one of his firmest supporters for the position of regent and later co-emperor of the young John IV. In late 1258 he accompanied [John Palaiologos](#), [sebastokrator](#) and Michael's brother, in his campaign against Michael II Doukas of Epiros. During that campaign Alexios was promoted to the office of [mezas domestikos](#). In



the battle of Pelagonia (July 1259), which was decisive for the outcome of that war, Alexios captured the reinforcements sent to the despot of Epiros by Manfred of Sicily. Together with John Raoul, the *megas domestikos* pursued Michael II, who had fled to Arta. They besieged Ioannina and, leaving part of their army behind to continue the siege, they advanced against Arta, which fell without resistance. They set free the captives held there by Michael II, the historian [George Akropolites](#) among them.<sup>3</sup> For his contribution to this success, Alexios Strategopoulos received the title of **caesar**.

In 1260 Strategopoulos once again found himself fighting against Epiros. Nikephoros, the son of Michael II Doukas, had fled to Manfred in order to seek help after the battle of Pelagonia. He returned with a unit of Italian soldiers, and attacked Alexios and his forces in the mountainous area of Trikorfon, near Naupaktos. The Byzantine army was defeated and Strategopoulos himself was captured. He was freed shortly afterwards, after a treaty had been signed between the two parties, and returned to Asia Minor at the beginning of 1261 at the latest.

In spring of the same year, Strategopoulos returned to mainland Greece, by order of Michael VIII Palaiologos. He was in charge of 800 Byzantine and [Cuman](#) soldiers,<sup>4</sup> when he marched in Thrace, mainly to guard the borders with [Bulgaria](#) but also to inspect Constantinople, which at the time was under [Latin rule](#). Constantinople had been left almost unguarded, since the largest part of its guard, together with the [Venetian](#) fleet, was besieging a fortress in the islet of [Dafnousia](#) in the Black Sea; the Latin emperor Baldwin II had remained in the city with very few forces. Upon learning the situation,<sup>5</sup> Strategopoulos directed his army toward Constantinople. On the night of 24<sup>th</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup> of July, Strategopoulos crossed the gate of Selybria (Pege) and, [took over Constantinople](#) by surprise, thus ending the Latin rule imposed upon the city since [1204](#). On August 15, Michael VIII Palaiologos triumphantly entered Constantinople and was crowned emperor for a second time. He allowed Alexios Strategopoulos to conduct a **triumph** amidst the city and ordered his name to be commemorated in churches for a year.

In 1262 Strategopoulos led a new expedition against the despot of Epiros. However, he once again proved unable to prevail over Michael II; he was caught unaware and captured for a second time. He was sent as a hostage to Manfred of Sicily and was only freed in 1265, when the king of Sicily managed to exchange him with his sister Anna (Constance von Hohenstaufen), widow of John III Vatatzes, who had been held in Asia Minor.

Alexios Strategopoulos is last mentioned in a document in December 1270, with which he issues a donation to the monastery of Theotokos Makrinitissa.

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1. See Zacos, G. - Veglery A., *Byzantine Lead Seals I* (Basel 1972), no. 2756: «Σφραγίς κυροῦσα τὰς γραφὰς Ἁλεξίου Στρατηγόπουλου καὶ Κομνηνῶν ἐκ γένους».

2. The family relation between Alexios and the *sebastos* John Strategopoulos, *megas logothetes* in Nicaea in 1216, is not known.

3. At the same time John Palaiologos, along with John Doukas, invaded Thessaly. See Nicol, D.M., *The Despotate of Epiros* (Oxford 1957), p. 186.

4. Bartusis M.C., *The Late Byzantine Army. Arms and Society 1204-1453* (Philadelphia 1992), p. 27.

5. Alexios Strategopoulos heard of the absence of the largest part of the army from the *thelematarioi*, farmers cultivating the lands outside Constantinople. See Nicol, D.M., *The Last Centuries of Byzantium* (London 1972), p. 35.

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	Seal of Alexios Komnenos Strategopoulos <a href="http://www.pbw.kcl.ac.uk/pbw/apps/boulloterion.jsp?bKey=3060">http://www.pbw.kcl.ac.uk/pbw/apps/boulloterion.jsp?bKey=3060</a>

## Glossary :



	<b>caesar</b>
In the Roman Empire the title of Caesar was given to the Emperor. From the reign of Diocletian (284-305) on this title was conferred on the young co-emperor. This was also the highest title on the hierarchy of the Byzantine court. In the 8th c. the title of Caesar was usually given to the successor of the throne. In the late 11th c. this office was downgraded and from the 14th c. on it was mainly conferred on foreign princes.	
	<b>despotes</b>
Title introduced in the 12th century. In administrative hierarchy, the office of despotes was under the emperor and the co-emperor. From the 14 <sup>th</sup> century onwards, the title was given to the governors of the Byzantine Peloponnese.	
	<b>megas domestikos</b>
Supreme military commander of the imperial army. High-ranking title which was generally given to close relatives of the emperor.	
	<b>pinkernes</b>
[also pikernes or epikernes, possibly from the Latin pincerna, a word deriving from the greek verb <i>epikerannymi</i> , meaning to mix (wine)]. Cup-bearer of the palace. Official at the personal service of the emperor. In the Late Byzantine years, the pinkernes was a very honorary title, while in the 14 <sup>th</sup> century it was awarded to very important figures, such as Alexios Philanthropenos.	
	<b>sebastokrator</b>
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	
	<b>triumph</b>
The organising of festivities in Constantinople in order to celebrate the return of the emperor (or a military commander) from a victorious expedition. It included a military parade, lead by the emperor and his generals, followed by prisoners and plunder brought back from occupied territories, as well as games at the Hippodrome. The people of the capital (mainly the demes) usually participated in overwhelming numbers and with great enthusiasm.	

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Νικηφόρος Γρηγοράς, *Ρωμαϊκή Ιστορία*, Bekker, I. and Schopen, L. (ed.), *Nicephori Gregorae Historiae Byzantinae* 1 (Bonn 1829), pp. 89.3-13.

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## Quotations

The historian George Pachymeres on the blinding of Constantine Strategopoulos, son of Alexios, by Theodore II (1258):

Δύο μέντοι γε τῶν μεγιστάνων τῶν ὀμμάτων στερεῖ, ὃν ὁ μὲν εἷς υἱὸς ἦν τοῦ Στρατηγοπούλου Ἀλεξίου, ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος, ὃς ἠξιοῦτο καὶ κήδους—τὴν γὰρ ἀδελφιδὴν τοῦ βασιλέως Ἰωάννου, ἐκείνου διδόντος, εἶχε—περιφανοῦς καὶ μάλα λαμπροῦ, ἄτερος δὲ ὁ Φιλῆς ἦν Θεόδωρος.

Γεώργιος Παχυμέρης, *Συγγραφικαί Ιστορίαι*, Failler, A. (ed.), *Georges Pachymères. Relations historiques* (CFHB 24/1-2, Paris 1984), pp. 41.15-19.

Pachymeres recounts the constant failures of Strategopoulos against Epiros:

Ὁ μὲντοι γε δεσπότης Μιχαήλ, νῦν μὲν καὶ ἀπὸ τούτων κολουθεῖς τῆς δυνάμεως—πλείστη γὰρ ἐχράτο καὶ παρὰ τοῦ τῆς Ἀχαΐας πρίγκιπος τῆ συμμαχία—, ἔτι δὲ καὶ παρὰ τῶν ἀμφὶ τὸν τότε σεβαστοκράτορα Ἰωάννην τὸν Παλαιολόγον μεθ' ὕστερον τὰ πολλὰ κακωθεῖς, ὡς καὶ ἐν στενῷ καταστῆναι πάνπαν τῶν τε χωρῶν καὶ αὐτῆς τῆς στρατιωτικῆς δυνάμεως, πέμψας πρὸς Μαφρέ, τὸν τῆς Πουλείας ῥήγα καὶ γ' ἐπὶ θυγατρὶ γαμβρὸν ἑαυτοῦ, καὶ πλείστην συμμαχίαν λαβὼν, παραδίδωσι τὰς δυνάμεις τῷ υἱῷ αὐτοῦ Νικηφόρῳ—συμπράττων κάκεῖνος—, ὃς καί, συμβαλὼν περὶ τὴν Τρικώρουφον τοῖς ἀμφὶ τὸν καίσαρα καὶ μάχην συρράξας



δεινήν, πλείστους τε πεσεῖν τῶν Νικαέων παρεσκεύασε, πλείστους τε καὶ ἄλλους οὐς μὲν φονεύσας, οὐς δὲ περιοχῶν, καὶ αὐτὸν αἰρεῖ καίσαρα. Ὡς δ' αὐθις σπονδῶν γενομένων ἐλύετο, τότε μὲν τὰ κατὰ τὴν πόλιν συμπράττει, περὶ ὧν αὐτίκα ῥηθήσεται, ὕστερον δ' αὐθις τοῖς δυτικοῖς προσβαλὼν αἰρεῖται πάλιν καὶ τότε παρὰ τοῦ δεσπότη Μιχαῆλ πρὸς τὸν ῥήγα Πουλείας τὸν Μαφρὲ ἀποστέλλεται καὶ γε τῆ παρ' ἐκείνῳ δίδεται φυλακῆ· χρόνῳ δ' ὕστερον τῆς δεσποίνης Ἄννης, ἀδελφῆς οὐσης Μαφρέ, ἀνταμείβεται.

Γεώργιος Παχυμέρης, *Συγγραφικαὶ Ἱστορίαι*, Failler, A. (ed.), *Georges Pachymères. Relations historiques* (CFHB 24/1-2, Paris 1984), pp. 125.17-127.6.

A later Byzantine historian describes the triumph of Alexios Strategopoulos after the recapture of Constantinople (1261):

Τρίτον, ἀντάξιον ἀποδοῦναι γέρας Ἀλεξίῳ τῷ Καίσαρι, ὅτι δι' αὐτοῦ Ῥωμαῖοις τὴν τῶν πόλεων βασιλεύουσιν ὁ θεὸς ἐχαρίσατο. τὸ δὲ ἦν θρίαμβον συγκροτηθῆναι πολυαθροπώτατον καὶ περιφανέστατον κελεύσει τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος καὶ ἐπὶ τούτῳ τὸν Καίσαρα πομπεῦσαι διὰ πάσης τῆς πόλεως, οὐ μόνον τοῖς τοῦ Καίσαρος παρασήμοις κοσμούμενον, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τούτοις καὶ στεφάνῳ πολυτελεῖ καὶ μικροῦ δέω λέγειν βασιλικῶ· ὃ δὴ καὶ γέγονε. προσετετάχει δ' ἐπὶ τούτοις ὁ βασιλεὺς διὰ μνήμης καὶ τοῦ Καίσαρος ὄνομα ἄγεσθαι ὁμοῦ τοῖς τῶν βασιλέων ἐν τοῖς ὑμνητηρίοις καὶ εὐφήμοις ἄσμασι πανταχῆ τῆς τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἐπικρατείας ἄχρις ἐνιαυτοῦ.

Νικηφόρος Γρηγοράς, *Ῥωμαϊκὴ Ἱστορία*, Bekker, I. and Schopen, L. (ed.), *Nicephori Gregorae Historiae Byzantinae* 1 (Bonn 1829), pp. 89.3-13.

## Chronological Table

Late 12<sup>th</sup> or early 13<sup>th</sup> century: Birth of Alexios Strategopoulos

1252-1253: Alexios Strategopoulos takes part in the expedition of the Emperor of Nicaea John III Vatatzes against Epiros

1255: Unsuccessful campaign against Tzepaina in Rhodope. Alexios Strategopoulos falls out of favour with the new emperor Theodore II Laskaris. His son Constantine is accused of treason and blinded

1258: Alexios Strategopoulos is imprisoned by Theodore II. He is set free after Theodore's death (16 August 1258). A few days later he participates in the revolt of the army and the aristocracy against the guardians of the underage heir, supporting Michael Palaiologos

1258-1259: Participates in the expedition of the *sebastokrator* John Palaiologos against Michael II Doukas of Epiros. He is promoted to the rank of *mezas domestikos*. Excels in the battle of Pelagonia (July 1259)

1259-1260: Strategopoulos and John Raoul pursue Michael II, besiege Ioannina and occupy Arta. For his contribution to this success, Alexios Strategopoulos is named caesar

1260: Alexios Strategopoulos is defeated by the army of Epiros near Naupaktos and is captured. He is set free shortly afterwards, after a peace treaty is signed, and returns to Asia Minor in 1261 at the latest

25 July 1261: Taking advantage of the absence of the Latin guard of the city, Alexios Strategopoulos recaptures Constantinople

1262: Strategopoulos leads a new campaign against the *despot* Epiros. He is defeated and captured for a second time. He is sent as a hostage to Manfred of Sicily

1265: The king of Sicily manages to exchange Alexios Strategopoulos with Anna – Constance von Hohenstaufen, who had been held in Asia Minor

December 1270: Last mention of Alexios Strategopoulos, in a document with which he issues a donation to the monastery of Theotokos Makrinitissa



Between 1271 and 1275: Death of Alexios Strategopoulos, probably in Constantinople