ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΜΕΙΖΟΝΟΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΜΟΥ

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Summary :

The accession of Constantine IX Doukas to the throne of Constantinople in 1059 marked the seizure of power by the Byzantine aristocracy and the prelude of a period during which family and family relations became a powerful basis for climbing up the hierarchy and partaking of the imperial power.

Main Role

Dynasty

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1. Origin

The aristocratic family of Doukai, originating from Paphlagonia, is attested since the 9th century. However, their lineal descent is not always clear, and so the connection between the branch that formed the Doukid dynasty, and those illustrious Doukai of the 10th century that came as far as claiming the throne, namely Andronikos and his son Constantine, cannot be undoubtedly confirmed.[1] According to the version suggested by the 12th-century historian John Zonaras, the Doukid dynasty was associated with the 10th-century family from maternal lineage.[2] The accession of the family to the power enabled the formation of a tradition mentioned by Nikephoros Bryennios, according to which the Doukai go back to the Roman aristocratic families that followed Constantine the Great to New Rome; the family name Doukas was supposedly reminding of the dignity that the family's forefather had received by Constantine himself.[3]

2. The ascent of the family

At the time when the members of the future dynasty of Doukai claimed a central role in the 11th-century course of events, the future emperor Constantine (X) and his youngest brother John, were already in their mature age. In 1057 they took sides with Isaac (I) Komnenos (1057-1059),[4] who, in head of the uprising of Asia Minor's military commanders against Michael VI, managed to seize power in Constantinople. For his support to the new emperor, Constantine Doukas was bestowed the title of proedros.

Although we do not have much information about the career of the two Doukas brothers before this uprising, Constantine Doukas had already appeared two decades earlier on the side of another member of the Asia Minor aristocracy and ambitious claimer of the throne, of Constantine Dalassenos. The latter was arrested in 1034 by Michael IV Paphlagon (1034-1041), who considered him a dangerous rival and was afraid of his power base in the region of Antioch as well as in Constantinople. The future emperor Constantine (X) Doukas, who had been married to a daughter of Dalassenos, supported his father-in-law and was arrested for a short period of time, while later he withdrew to his estates in Asia Minor.

3. The Doukai in power – the dynasty (1059-1078)

A mighty ally of Komnenos against Michael VI at the capital was the powerful patriarch Michael Keroularios (1043-1058), of whom one of the nieces, Eudokia Makrembolitissa, was Constantine Doukas's second wife. This alliance had established strong ties with Constantinople for both Constantine and his brother John. In spite the fact that Keroularios later turned against Isaac I and died deposed from his office, and that Constantine Doukas objected to the Emperor's reforms, Isaac I Komnenos appointed Constantine his successor when he abdicated from the throne in 1059. This choice is attributed to the great influence of Michael Psellos's, who after all had convinced Komnenos to abdicate as well.[5]

Thus, on November 1059, Constantine X Doukas ascended the imperial throne, initially claiming that he ruled along with Isaac's wife, Empress Catherine.[6] Nonetheless, Constantine Douka's coronation was the final settlement of the accounts between the allies of the uprising of 1057; in this settlement the Doukai prevailed. Constantine's youngest brother, John, was bestowed the highest title of caesar.

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The accession of Constantine Doukas to the throne marked a crucial turning point for 11th-century Byzantium and the continuous conflicts among the aristocratic lineages for the seizure of power, a strife that was intensified after the death of the powerful Emperor Basil II (976-1025) and his brother Constantine XIII (1025-1028), when the Macedonian dynasty was extinguishing without a male heir. The Doukid dynasty tried to establish its legitimacy by ideologically exploiting the birth, for the first time after an entire century, of a purple-born prince, Constantine, during the first year of Constantine's X reign. The significance of this event for the dynasty's ideological foundation becomes clearer with the little purple-born's coronation as co-emperor very soon after his birth. Constantine thus gained a position in the sequence of succession along with Constantine's X elder son, Michael (VII), who had already been crowned, while the middle son, Andronikos, was kept aside. After decades of rivalry within the aristocratic families regarding the throne, the Doukas lineage managed to establish a dynasty based on a firm claim to heredity upon the throne. The family members became bearers not only of power, but also of imperial legitimacy. All other aristocratic families ever since sought to establish marital alliances with the potent family in power.

3.1. Constantine X (1059-1067)

Constantine X Doukas relied upon his brother's John Doukas help for the exercise of power. He also counted on the support of the high-ranking administrative dignitaries, in which a leading place possessed Michael Psellos, along with the nomophylax and Psellos' old friend John Xiphilinos, who succeeded Constantine Leichoudes on the patriarchal throne of Constantinople (1063-1075) after the death of the latter. Constantine's X favorable policy towards such civil aristocracy and the Church led him to impose heavy taxation, which instigated an uprising against him in 1066, while already in April of 1061 a conspiracy against the Emperor at Constantinople had been exposed by John Doukas.[7]

But Constantine X had also to face too many problems in his foreign policy. In the Balkans, the Turkish tribe of Uzes had crossed Danube and was plundering many regions of Bulgaria, Macedonia and Thrace, without Byzantium being able to put up any significant resistance. Even more serious consequences had the advance of the Seljuks at the East; after capturing Ani in 1064, they invaded the Byzantine territories of Asia Minor. In the face of this threat Constantine X failed to react efficiently. Afraid of the Asia Minor military commanders' power, he followed a rather anti-military policy, while the fiscal retrenchments aggravated the state of the troops. In Byzantine historiography Constantine X passed as the timid emperor who hesitated in front of crucial decisions. He was particularly blamed for the weakening of the Byzantine army, mainly on the eastern front, where the Seljuk's presence was meant to last; and yet, the disintegration of the Empire and the Seljuk's advance can not be considered the result solely of Constantine's X policy.

3.2. Romanos IV Diogenes (1068 - 1071) – Michael VII Doukas (1071 - 1078)

In spite of Constantine' X predominance and his seven years of reign, the place of Doukid dynasty on the throne was not yet safe. When he died in May 1067, he left behind only minors as heirs, still unable to ascend the throne. On his deathbed, the Emperor had asked from his wife Eudokia Makrembolitissa to take an oath in front of the patriarch that she would not remarry. He was, thus, aiming at preserving the throne against potential claimers who might attempt to establish their own dynasties, and have his son Michael (VII) resuming power as soon as he was of age. Nevertheless, the Seljuk menace and the pressure from within the aristocratic cycles led to different results. About a month after Constantine's X death, Empress Eudokia convinced the same patriarch, John Xiphilinos, to absolve her from her vow and she married the illustrious general Romanos IV Diogenes, who on the 1st of January, 1068 was crowned emperor, while Michael Doukas remained co-emperor. It seems that caesar John Doukas was unable to exercise his influence to avert this course of events.[8]

Romanos IV's reign is marked by his effort to re-establish the eastern front against the Seljuks: after two relatively unsuccessful campaigns, the emperor prepared to inflict upon them the decisive blow in the summer of 1071; however, this campaign ended up to disaster for the Byzantine army at Mantzikert. Romanos Diogenes was captured and later set free after coming to an agreement with the Seljuk sultan Alp Arslan; however, during this same period of time a coup d' état was made at Constantinople: with the help of Caesar John Doukas and Michael Psellos, who seems to have been as well Romanos Diogenes' advisor during the fatal campaign to the East,[9] Michael VII Doukas assumed power, while Romanos IV and Eudokia Makrembolitissa were kept off the throne. Besides,

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the Byzantine troops' retreat at Mantzikert, that had left Romanos IV in the hands of the Seljuks, was a move of Andronikos Doukas, son of caesar John.[10] Romanos Diogenes tried to come back on the throne, but he was declared a rebel. While negotiating with Constantinople, he was deceived, handed over and blinded at the end of 1071. A few months later, in 1072, he succumbed to his injuries.

Michael VII Doukas[11] (1071-1078) was a man without will and a weak ruler,[12] under the influence of his tutor Michael Psellos, his uncle John Doukas and later on of the eunuch Nikephoritzes, who had assumed the office of logothetes tou dromou. Nikephoritzes became the actual governor, and his ravishing fiscal measures caused great displeasure among the populace. Michael's VII reign was characterized by the large devaluation of the Byzantine golden coin (from which derived emperor's nickname "Parapinakes") and by a series of rebellious movements throughout the last years of his reign.[13] From the revolt of Roussel de Bailleul, commander of the Norman mercenaries who, having taken John Doukas a prisoner, proclaimed him emperor in 1073,[14] until the revolt of Nikephoros (III) Botaneiates, who seized the imperial throne in 1078, Michael VII seemed unable to oppose his adversaries, while in Asia Minor, after their victory at Mantzikert, the Seljuks met no resistance; on the contrary, their help was asked when Michael VII needed to confront the Norman rebel.

Under the Doukid dynasty, the Norman menace became more and more serious. From 1059, when pope Nicholas II invested the leader of the Normans, Robert Guiscard, as duke of Apulia and Calabria, and within the next 10 years, the Normans expanded to South Italy and to Sicily at the expense of the Byzantine dominance. An attempt, in 1060, to reconquest at least the Apulian territories met only with a temporary success and did not hinder the Norman advance. In April of 1071 Robert Guiscard took Bari, concluding thus the Norman expansion at the expense of Byzantine territorial possessions. In 1074 Michael VII tried to contract intermarriage, between Constantine's son and Guiscard's daughter, hoping not only to stop the Norman activity against Byzantium, but also to encourage systematic recruitment of Norman mercenaries who could confront the Turkish threat in the East. It proved, however, that the Normans were pushing on their own interests over the Balkan Peninsula, and the Norman threat in the Balkans was bequeathed to the following emperors as well.[15]

Michael VII had got married to the beautiful princess of Alania Maria, who in 1074 gave birth to their son Constantine. Michael's most important supporter was Alexios Komnenos, the future emperor Alexios I who, already from that young age had distinguished himself thanks to his strategic abilities and his cunning. Inside the imperial family, however, discord prevailed. John Doukas, who had become a monk under the name Ignatios in order to avoid the emperor's wrath after the failure of Roussel de Bailleul's revolt, tried to resume his power and influence in Constantinople, while purple-born Constantine was undermining his brother's position too. The opposition against Michael VII was powerful in Constantinople and, when on January 1078 the strategos of the theme of Anatolikon Nikephoros Botaneiates proclaimed himself Emperor, he found strong support at the capital. Michael VII was convinced by his uncle John to resign and to withdraw in the Stoudios Monastery, while later he was appointed metropolitan of Ephesos. Nikephoros Botaneiates was crowned emperor on the March 24, 1078.

4. The maintenance of Doukai's power

Although the Doukid dynasty lost the throne, it preserved its prominence as the foundation of the legitimacy of the various pretenders' claims on the throne. Thus Nikephoros III Botaneiates had married Maria of Alania, although Michael VII was still alive, in order to associate himself to the Doukid dynasty. Furthermore, in 1077 young Alexios Komnenos married the granddaughter of caesar John/Ignatios, Irene Doukaina. By taking advantage of this alliance and the influence of John Douka's family, he managed to overthrow Nikephoros III Botaneiates and to seize power on the 1st of April 1081. After all, before the birth, in 1087, of John II Komnenos, son of Alexios I and Irene Doukaina, with whom the Komnenian dynasty was established on the throne, Constantine Doukas, son of Michael VII and Maria of Alania had been designated as Alexios's heir and had been engaged to Alexios's first-born daughter Anna. Within the faction of powerful families formed around the Komnenoi and monopolizing the highest military-administrative positions at the end of the 11th and the 12th century, the Doukai remained a significant factor.[16] The epithet Doukas preserved its glory and its imperial connotations until the end of Byzantium. The Angelid dynasty, the branch of the family that ruled the Despotate of Epirus and the Empire of Thessalonica, even members of the Lascarid dynasty of Nicaea (John III Vatatzes) and

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members of the Palaiologos dynasty, all used the family name of Doukas and added it in their names.

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1. For the main possible family branches see Polemis, D.I., *The Doukai: A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (University of London Historical Studies 22, London 1968), pp. 1-3, 6.

2. Bütner-Wobst, T. (ed.), *Ioannis Zonarae Epitomae Historiarum* 3 (Bonn 1897), pp. 675-676.

3. Gautier, P. (ed.), *Nicéphore Bryennios, Histoire* (CFHB 9, Bruxelles 1975), pp. 67-69.

4. The sources are talking about the significant material support that Constantine Doukas offered for the needs of the uprising; see Τσολάκης, E. (ed.), *Η Συνέχεια της Χρονογραφίας του Ιωάννου Σκυλίτζη* (Ioannes Scylitzes Continuatus) (Institute for Balkan Studies 105, Thessalonika 1968), p. 108.

5. According to Nikephoros Bryennios, Isaac Komnenos' wife, Empress Catherine, accused Psellos directly for handing power over to the Doukai, see Gautier, P. (ed.), *Nicéphore Bryennios, Histoire* (CFHB 9, Bruxelles 1975), p. 81-83.

6. Gautier, P., «Basilikoi logoi inédits de Michel Psellos», *Siclorum Gymnasium*, 32.2 (luglio-dicembre 1980), pp. 717-771. Gautier, P., «Lettre d'avenement au nom de l'autocrator kyr Constantin Doukas», p. 763.

7. Polemis, D.I., *The Doukai: A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (University of London Historical Studies 22, London 1968), pp. 31, 35.

8. Polemis, D.I., *The Doukai: A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (University of London Historical Studies 22, London 1968), p. 36. In relation to John's political ambitions, it is perhaps indicative that he was the one who commissioned the earliest surviving copy of the work of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, *De administrando imperio*, a 10th-c. work containing the basic guidelines of Byzantine policy and diplomacy.

9. E. de Vries – van der Velden, «Psellos, Romain IV Diogénès et Manzikert», *Byzantinoslavica* 58-2 (1997), pp. 274-310.

10. Polemis, D.I., *The Doukai: A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (University of London Historical Studies 22, London 1968), pp. 36-7.

11. Polemis, D.I., *The Doukai: A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (University of London Historical Studies 22, London 1968), pp. 42-6.

12. The Byzantine historians speak of Michel VII in a very critical tone, pointing out his incompetence and the weakness of his character. See Bütner-Wobst, T. (ed.), *Ioannis Zonarae Epitomae Historiarum* 3 (Bonn 1897), p. 707; Gautier, P. (ed.), *Nicéphore Bryennios, Histoire* (CFHB 9, Bruxelles 1975), p. 57; Τσολάκης, E. (ed.), *Η Συνέχεια της Χρονογραφίας του Σκυλίτζη* (Ioannes Skylitzes Continuatus), (Thessalonica 1968), p. 706. Even Psellos, though well disposed to the Doukas dynasty and Michael's tutor, admits that Michael VII was an indifferent and rather unwilling ruler, Renauld, É. (ed.), *Michel Psellos. Chronographie ou histoire d'un siècle deByzance (976-1077)*, II (Paris 1928), pp. 172-8.

13. Polemis, D.I., *The Doukai: A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (University of London Historical Studies 22, London 1968), p. 44. The epithet Parapinakes was due to the fact that, because of the devaluation of the currency, a nomisma could no longer purchase a *medimnus* (1½ bushel) of grain but only a medimnus less a pinakion (=quarter).

14. Polemis, D.I., *The Doukai: A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (University of London Historical Studies 22, London 1968), pp. 38-9.

15. Magdalino, P. «The medieval empire (780-1204)» in Mango, C. (ed.), *The Oxford History of Byzantium* (New York 2002), pp. 189-90.

16. Patlagean, E., *Un Moyen Âge grec. Byzance, IXe-Xe siècle* (Paris 2007), pp. 136-145.

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Glossary :

- caesar

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.

- logothetes tou dromou

Administrative Byzantine title. Initially official in charge of the public post. From the 7th C he acquired a new role and his responsibilities included ceremonial duties, protection of emperor, general supervision of diplomatic relations and collection of political information.

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nomophylax

Officer responsible for the guard of law and the publication of the resolutions. Quite often the holder of the office undertook the costs himself. In Byzantium he was the *nomodidaskalos* (*nomikos*), the appointed dignitary in charge of the funtion of the Law School.

proedros

A high office of the Byzantine court, first known under Nikephoros II Phokas. The responsibilities of the proedros are rather uncertain. In the 11th c. the title was accorded oftenly, but it disapears after the 12th c. As an ecclesiastical office, proedros was equal to a metropolitan and was accorded to the regent metropolitan of a bishopric or a metropolitan see, until the election of a hierarch there.

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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Chronological Table

1057: The brothers Constantine and John Doukas supported the uprising and the accession of Isaak I Komnenos to the throne. Constantine Doukas gains the title of proedros

November 1059: Isaak I resigns from the throne. Accession of Constantine X Doukas. John Doukas becomes caesar.

23 April 1061: Conspiracy against Constantine X Doukas at Constantinople exposed by John Doukas

1064-5: The Uzes raid and plunder Balkan territories

1064: The Seljuks take Ani and expand over Asia Minor in the followinf years

Summer 1066: riot in northern Greece

May 1067: Constantine X Doukas succumbs to his illness

1st January 1068: Coronation of Romanos IV Diogenes, who had married Constantine's X widow, Eudokia Makrembolitissa

1071: Disaster for the Byzantine troops at Mantzikert. Romanos IV is taken prisoner by the Seljuks. Coup d' état at Constantinople. Michael VII Doukas as sole emperor

1074-5: Revolt of Roussel de Bailleul, leader of the Norman mercenaries

1077: Revolt of Nikephoros Botaneiates at Durrhachion

March 1078: Michael VII resigns and is tonsured a monk. Nikephoros III Botaneiates crowned emperor in Constantinople. He marries Michael's VII wife, Maria of Alania