

= Alexios Strategopoulos =

Alexios Komnenos Strategopoulos (Greek : ??????? ??????? ?????????????) was a Byzantine general during the reign of Michael VIII Palaiologos , rising to the rank of *mezas domestikos* and Caesar . Of noble descent , he appears in the sources already at an advanced age in the early 1250s , leading armies for the Empire of Nicaea against Epirus . After falling out of favour and being imprisoned by Theodore II Laskaris , Strategopoulos sided with the aristocrats around Michael Palaiologos , and supported him in his rise to the throne after Theodore II 's death in 1258 . He participated in the Pelagonia campaign in 1259 , going on to capture Epirus , but his successes were undone in the next year and he was captured by the Epirotes . Released after a few months , he led the unexpected reconquest of Constantinople from the Latin Empire in July 1261 , restoring the Byzantine Empire . He was captured again by the Epirotes in the next year and spent several years in captivity in Italy , before being released . He retired from public affairs and died in the early 1270s .

= = Origin and family = =

Nothing is known of the early years of Alexios Strategopoulos ' life , nor of his exact descent , except that he belonged to the nobility : other Strategopouloi are mentioned in the 11th and 12th centuries , and a John Strategopoulos became *mezas logothetes* (chief minister) of the Empire of Nicaea ca . 1216 , although his relation with Alexios is unknown . Strategopoulos was apparently related to the illustrious Komnenos line , as a seal dated to ca . 1255 has been found bearing the inscription " Alexios Strategopoulos from the Komnenos family " .

The date of his birth is likewise unknown , but as he is called an " old man " in 1258 , it must have been around the turn of the 13th century . Of his own family , it is known that he had one son , Constantine , who according to George Pachymeres was married to a daughter of the *sebastokrator* Isaac Doukas Vatatzes , brother of the Nicaean emperor John III Doukas Vatatzes .

= = Early career = =

Alexios Strategopoulos first appears in the chronicles in 1252 ? 53 , during the reign of John III Doukas Vatatzes , when he led a detachment of the army sent to plunder the areas of the Despotate of Epirus around Lake Ostrovo . In 1254 , he was based at Serres , and in the next year , he participated , along with *mezas primmikerios* Constantine Tornikes , in a campaign against the fortress of Tzepaina in the western Rhodope Mountains . The campaign failed with heavy losses , due , according to George Akropolites , to bad generalship on behalf of both Strategopoulos and Tornikes . They failed to reconnoitre properly the Bulgarian forces opposing them , and instead their army broke and fled leaving behind their equipment and horses " to the Bulgarian shepherds and swineherds " . This failure enraged the Emperor Theodore II Laskaris , who removed both from their offices . In addition , probably because of his close connection to the aristocratic faction around Michael Palaiologos , his son Constantine was blinded for lèse @-@ majesté , and Alexios himself was imprisoned some time later .

Strategopoulos was probably released from prison immediately after the death of Theodore II Laskaris in August 1258 . Along with the other heads of the aristocratic families , he was a prominent supporter of Michael Palaiologos ' successful coup against George Mouzalon in a bid to assume the regency of the under @-@ age John IV Laskaris . In the same year he accompanied the army that was sent , under Michael 's brother , the *mezas domestikos* John Palaiologos , to confront the Epirote designs on Macedonia . When Michael Palaiologos was proclaimed emperor in early 1259 , John Palaiologos was promoted to *sebastokrator* , and Strategopoulos succeeded him as *mezas domestikos* . In 1259 he participated in the campaign that led to the decisive victory over an Epirote ? Sicilian ? Achaean alliance at the Battle of Pelagonia , where , along with Nikephoros Rimpas , he took captive the 400 @-@ strong detachment of German knights sent by Manfred , King of Sicily , to aid the Epirotes .

After the Nicaean victory , John Palaiologos invaded Thessaly , while Alexios Strategopoulos and John Raoul Petraliphas were tasked with reducing Epirus proper . Strategopoulos and Petraliphas crossed the Pindus , bypassed Ioannina , which they left under siege , and captured the Epirote capital , Arta , forcing the Despot Michael II to flee to the island of Cephalonia . At Arta they found and released many Nicaean prisoners , including the historian George Akropolites . For this success , he was raised to the rank of Caesar . In the next year , however , the Nicaean successes were largely undone : Despot Michael with his sons and an Italian mercenary army landed at Arta , and the Epirote population rallied to his cause . The Epirote army clashed with Alexios ' forces at the Trikorfon pass near Nafpaktos ; the Nicaean army was routed , and Alexios himself captured .

= = Recapture of Constantinople = =

Despite these reverses , in early 1261 , Emperor Michael VIII set his sights on capturing the great prize : Constantinople , the capital of the Byzantine Empire , which had been the seat of the Latin Empire since its capture by the Fourth Crusade in 1204 . To this end , Michael concluded an alliance with Genoa in March , and in July 1261 , as the one @-@ year truce concluded after the previous failed Nicaean attack was nearing its end , Strategopoulos , recently released from Epirote custody , was sent with a small advance force of 800 soldiers (most of them Cumans) to keep a watch on the Bulgarians and spy out the defences of the Latins .

When the Nicaean force reached the village of Selymbria , some 30 miles (48 km) west of Constantinople , however , they learned from some independent local farmers (thelematarioi) that the entire Latin garrison , and the Venetian fleet , were absent conducting a raid against the Nicaean island of Daphnousia . Strategopoulos was initially hesitant to take advantage of the situation , since his small force might be destroyed if the Latin army returned too soon , and because he would exceed the emperor 's orders , but eventually decided not to lose such a golden opportunity to retake the city .

On the night of July 24 / 25 , 1261 , Strategopoulos and his men approached the city walls and hid at a monastery near the Gate of the Spring . Strategopoulos sent a detachment of his men , who , led by some of the thelematarioi , made their way to the city through a secret passage . They attacked the walls from the inside , surprised the guards and opened the gate , allowing the Nicaean force entry into the city . The Latins were taken completely unaware , and after a short struggle , the Nicaeans gained control of the land walls . As news of this spread across the city , the Latin inhabitants , from Emperor Baldwin II downwards , hurriedly rushed to the harbours of the Golden Horn , hoping to escape by ship . At the same time , Strategopoulos ' men set fire to the Venetian buildings and warehouses along the coast to prevent them from landing there . Thanks to the timely arrival of the returning Venetian fleet , many of the Latins managed to evacuate to the Latin @-@ held parts of Greece , but the city was lost for good . The recapture of Constantinople signalled the restoration of the Byzantine Empire , and on August 15 , the day of the Dormition of the Theotokos , Emperor Michael entered the city in triumph and was crowned at the Hagia Sophia . The rights of John IV Laskaris were brushed aside , and the young man was blinded and imprisoned .

Alexios was honoured by Michael with a triumphal procession through the city , and by allowing his name to be commemorated in the church services for a year alongside the Emperor and the Patriarch .

= = Later life and death = =

After this feat that earned him fame and glory , in 1262 Alexios was appointed again to lead an army against Epirus . Here , however , he was defeated and captured by Nikephoros Doukas , who sent him to Manfred in Italy . He was ransomed in 1265 in exchange for Constance II of Hohenstaufen , widow of John Vatatzes . He is last mentioned in a document from December 1270 in which he made a donation to the Makrinitissa Monastery near Volos , and died sometime between 1271 and 1275 , probably at Constantinople .