

= Marianos Argyros =

Marianos Argyros ( Greek : ????????? ??????? , fl . 944 ? 963 ) was a Byzantine aristocrat and member of the Argyros family . A monk , in 944 he supported the assumption of sole rule by Constantine VII , and was allowed to leave the monastery and enter imperial service . He held a succession of senior military commands , fighting in southern Italy against local rebels and the Fatimids , and in the Balkans against the Magyars . In 963 , he tried to oppose the takeover of the imperial throne by the general Nikephoros Phokas by assuming control over Constantinople and arresting his father , Bardas Phokas the Elder . During the ensuing clashes , he was hit on the head by a platter , and died on the next day , 16 August 963 .

= = Life = =

= = Origin and the palace coups of 944 = = =

Marianos was the eldest son of the general Leo Argyros , active in the first decades of the 10th century . He had a brother , Romanos Argyros , who in 921 married Agathe , a daughter of Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos ( r . 920 ? 944 ) . The Argyroi therefore were counted among the firmest supporters of the Lekapenos regime . Romanos Lekapenos had risen to power in 919 as regent over the young Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos ( r . 913 ? 959 ) , whom he married to his daughter Helena . By December 920 , his position had become so unassailable that he was crowned senior emperor . To consolidate his hold on power , and possibly aiming to supplant the ruling Macedonian dynasty with his own family , Romanos raised his eldest son Christopher to co @-@ emperor in 921 , while the younger sons Stephen and Constantine were proclaimed co @-@ emperors in 924 . Christopher died in 931 , and as Constantine VII remained sidelined , Stephen and Constantine assumed an increased prominence , although formally they still ranked after their brother @-@ in @-@ law in the college of emperors . However , in 943 , the elderly Romanos drafted a will which would leave Constantine VII as the senior emperor following his death . This greatly upset his two sons , who started planning to seize power through a coup d 'état , with Stephen apparently the ringleader and Constantine a rather reluctant partner .

It is in this context that Marianos Argyros is first mentioned in December 944 . At the time , he was a monk , and a confidant of Stephen Lekapenos . According to the 11th @-@ century historian John Skylitzes , he had earlier been honoured and trusted by Romanos , but Marianos nevertheless supported the coup of the Lekapenoi brothers on 20 December , which successfully deposed their father and exiled him to a monastery on the island of Prote . A few weeks later , however , with the support of the populace , Constantine VII managed to sideline the Lekapenoi , who joined their father in exile . It appears that Marianos had changed sides in time , for he participated in the arrest of the Lekapenoi . As a reward , Constantine VII , now sole ruler , freed him of his monastic vows and raised him to the rank of patrikios and the post of Count of the Stable . His abandonment of the monastic habit earned him the nickname " Apambas " or " Apabbas " ( ???????? / ???????? ) , whose etymology is unclear .

= = = Command in southern Italy = = =

Marianos then disappears from the scene until he was sent at the head of troops from the themes of Macedonia and Thrace in an expedition to southern Italy , dated by modern scholars to 955 . A rebellion that had broken out in the local Byzantine themes of Langobardia and Calabria , involving also the imperial vassal city @-@ state of Naples . The Byzantine expeditionary force encircled and besieged Naples , until the city surrendered . Marianos then took over the governance of the Byzantine provinces of Italy : in 956 , he is attested as strategos ( governor ) of Calabria and Langobardia in a charter of privilege for the monastery of Monte Cassino . At about the same time , following a Fatimid raid on Almeria , war had broken out between the Fatimids and the Umayyad

Caliphate of Cordoba . Fatimid sources report that the Umayyads proposed joint action with Byzantium , but Marianos appears to have been focused on suppressing the rebellion rather than engaging in war with the Fatimids . Byzantine envoys even went to the Fatimid caliph , al @-@ Mu 'izz , and offered to renew and extend the existing truce . Al @-@ Mu 'izz however , determined to expose the Umayyads ' collaboration with the infidel enemy and emulate the achievements of his father , refused .

The Caliph dispatched new forces to Sicily under Ammar ibn Ali al @-@ Kalbi and his brother al @-@ Hasan ibn Ali al @-@ Kalbi . In spring / summer 956 , the Fatimid fleet clashed with and defeated the Byzantine fleet in two battles in the Straits of Messina , followed by Fatimid raids on the Calabrian coast . In the aftermath of these raids , Marianos travelled to the Fatimid court in person , and sought a truce in exchange for the resumption of a payment of tribute and the annual release of prisoners of war taken in the East . Al @-@ Mu 'izz agreed to these terms , but warfare resumed soon after , when the Byzantine admiral Basil destroyed the mosque built by the Fatimids at Rhegion and raided Termini . Marianos therefore returned to the Fatimid court in a second embassy in 957 , going first through Sicily , where he apparently delivered to the local Fatimid governor , Ahmad ibn al @-@ Hasan al @-@ Kalbi , the agreed tribute . During the reception by al @-@ Mu 'izz , Marianos presented a letter by Constantine VII confirming the terms agreed during the first embassy , but this time al @-@ Mu 'izz rejected the terms . As a result of the breakdown in these negotiations , Constantine VII sent a massive expedition to Italy under admirals Krambeas and Moreleon , while Marianos commanded the land troops . The Fatimids under the Kalbid brothers al @-@ Hasan and Ammar were victorious over Marianos , but following the arrival of the Byzantine reinforcements the Fatimid fleet left Calabria , only to suffer a shipwreck on its return to Sicily . Marianos is no longer mentioned in Italy after that , although he may have led a third embassy to al @-@ Mu 'izz in September 958 , which led to the conclusion of a five @-@ year truce between the two powers .

= = = Command in the Balkans and death = = =

In ca . 959 / 961 , he defeated a raid by the Magyars into Thrace , taking many of them prisoner . In connection with this operation , Theophanes Continuatus refers to him as " monostrategos of the theme of Macedonia and katepano of the West " , a position equivalent to that of the Domestic of the Schools of the West , in command of all the " western " ( European ) troops . It is unclear , however , whether this means a permanent appointment or was an ad hoc position , i.e. as strategos of Macedonia and temporary overall commander of detachments from the other European themes . The latter is more likely , as it is documented that Leo Phokas the Younger held the post of Domestic of the West , but was fighting against the Arabs in the east at the time .

On 15 March 963 , Emperor Romanos II ( r . 959 ? 963 ) unexpectedly died , leaving his young sons Basil II and Constantine VIII as emperors . The powerful general Nikephoros Phokas ( the brother of Leo ) decided to seize the throne for himself , but was opposed by the parakoimomenos and guardian of the young emperors , Joseph Bringas . Seeking support , Bringas offered Marianos the high command in the east and potentially even the throne if he would aid him . Marianos first suggested trying to win over Nikephoros Phokas ' popular nephew and lieutenant , the strategos of the Anatolics John Tzimiskes . The latter not only refused , however , but took his letter straight to his uncle , who summoned his armies to Caesarea and had them proclaim him emperor in early summer . As Phokas ' army advanced across Asia Minor on Constantinople , Marianos then tried to stage a coup in Constantinople with men of the Macedonian regiments and armed prisoners of war . This move was opposed by the populace , however , resulting in clashes in the streets . The populace became especially enraged when Marianos tried to forcibly remove the Phokades ' elderly father , Bardas , from the Hagia Sophia where he had sought sanctuary , on 15 August . Marianos was reportedly hit on the head by a platter , thrown by a woman from a nearby house roof . Mortally wounded , he died on the next day . Phokas ' supporters rapidly prevailed thereafter . Bringas was forced to flee himself to the Hagia Sophia , and on 16 August Nikephoros Phokas was crowned senior emperor as guardian of Basil and Constantine .

