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## POWER AND ARISTOCRACY – TRANSFORMATION AND COMPOSITION OF THE KOMNENOS “CLAN” (1081–1200) – A STATISTICAL APPROACH

Alexios I Komnenos proved to be the creator of one of the most durable systems of power in the history of the Byzantine Empire. Acting in the face of problems plaguing the state in the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Alexios resorted to solutions specific to the environment of the provincial aristocracy to which he belonged. He used his family to support his power. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the Byzantine aristocracy began to form groups for the protection of its interests<sup>1</sup>. Such groups are often referred to as “clans”<sup>2</sup>. They were structures made up of aristocrats of one or more families connected through the bonds of kinship. Their purpose was to protect its common interests. The family in the Byzantine culture was strictly protected by law. Raising a hand on your own relative was considered absolutely unacceptable and was considered as crime. That’s why building a network of alliances through marriages was a common strategy among the Byzantine aristocracy<sup>3</sup>. Alexios I Komnenos, as a usurper taking over power in a very unfavourable period, full of pretenders to the throne, had to stabilize his and his family’s position on the throne. He surrounded himself with allied aristocratic families

<sup>1</sup> J.-C. CHEYNET, *Klasy kierujące cesarstwem*, [in:] *Świat Bizancjum*, vol. II, *Cesarstwo Bizantyńskie 641–1204*, ed. IDEM, trans. A. GRABOŃ, Kraków 2011, p. 205–234.

<sup>2</sup> Terminology concerning Byzantine aristocratic groups, families and kinship can cause some problem and still are a field of discussions. It is tempting to replace the term “clan” with *genos* (γένος), following recent observations on this subject by Nathan Leidholm. Yet he also remarked that it is hard to define the clear limits of a single *genos*, thus using this word in the context of this study could be misleading, as my understanding of the Komnenos “clan” can include multiple and mixed *gene*, cf. N. LEIDHOLM, *Elite Byzantine Kinship, ca. 950–1204. Blood Reputation and the Genos*, Leeds 2019, p. 1, 35, 103–106.

<sup>3</sup> P. FRANKOPAN, *Kinship and the Distribution of Power in Komnenian Byzantium*, EHR 122, 2007, p. 2; P. MAGDALINO, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180*, Cambridge 1993, p. 180–181; IDEM, *Innovations in Government*, [in:] *Alexios I Komnenos. Papers of the Second Belfast Byzantine International Colloquium 14–16 April 1989*, ed. M. MULLETT, D. SMYTHE, Belfast 1996 [= BBT, 4.1], p. 148.

and his kin. To strengthen the relations between one and the other, he connected both of them through a network of marriages that ensured relative security and stability of the alliance. That wasn't a new concept. Alexios' predecessors also pursued similar policy, aimed at creating a loyal and influential party, though never on such a scale<sup>4</sup>. What distinguished the Komnenoi from its predecessors, was how institutionalized and deeply rooted inside the state this new system was. Alexios, seeking a way to achieve the absolute domination of his "clan" and uninterrupted continuation of his dynasty, reformed the system of court dignities. New titles, derived in many cases from the title of *sebastos*, were mostly reserved for the members of imperial family<sup>5</sup>. In this manner the new court hierarchy was created, that served as a special way of elevating the elite "clan" above the rest of the society.

However, the success of the Alexios' work was limited. After the death of his grandson Manuel I, the empire entered another period of crisis. This time of political collapse, followed by the Fourth Crusade was, of course a multifaceted phenomenon rooted in both the internal situation of the country and its foreign policy<sup>6</sup>. Perhaps the most important problem of the last twenty years of the 12<sup>th</sup> century is the decline of imperial authority. The emperor's position in the state throughout all of the 12<sup>th</sup> century remained in inseparable connection with the aristocracy. Hence, the study of the ruling aristocratic family "clan" is the basis for understanding the political condition of Byzantium. It was this group of the wealthiest and most influential aristocrats close to the ruler, that had great impact on the internal situation of the empire. This is clearly seen when one observes that all pretenders and rebels, seeking to gain imperial power in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, derived almost exclusively from the Komnenos "clan"<sup>7</sup>. The existence of such group allowed to rule the state like a family property, but also posed a serious threat, since as Kinnamos and Choniates remarks, claims to power could have been inherited<sup>8</sup>. In a country like Byzantium, without clear rules for inheriting power, the greater the number of potential contenders, the harder it was to maintain stability. If one take into account the clear disparity in the number of revolts for the period 1100–1180 and

<sup>4</sup> R. MACRIDES, *Dynastic Marriages and Political Kinship*, [in:] *Byzantine Diplomacy. Papers from the Twenty-fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge, March 1990*, ed. J. SHEPARD, S. FRANKLIN, Aldershot 1992 [= SPBS 1], p. 272.

<sup>5</sup> M. ANGOLD, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025–1204. A Political History*, London–New York 1997, p. 148; *Annae Comnenae Alexias*, III, 4, 3, vol. I, rec. D.R. REINSCH, A. KAMBYLIS, Berlin 2001 [= CFHB.SBe, 40] (cetera: KOMNENE), p. 96.

<sup>6</sup> On late 12<sup>th</sup> century crisis see especially: *Byzantium 1180–1204. "The Sad Quarter of a Century?"*, ed. A. SIMPSON, Athens 2015; C.M. BRAND, *Byzantium Confronts the West 1180–1204*, Cambridge Mass. 1968.

<sup>7</sup> P. STEPHENSON, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier. A Political Study of the Northern Balkans, 900–1204*, Cambridge 2004, p. 276–277.

<sup>8</sup> *Ioannis Cinnami Epitome rerum ab Ioanne et Alexio Comnenis gestarum*, rec. A. MEINEKE, Bonnae 1836 [= CSHB, 23.1] (cetera: KINNAMOS), p. 53–54; *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, vol. I, rec. I.A. VAN DIETEN, Berolini 1975 [= CFHB, 11] (cetera: CHONIATES), p. 280.

1180–1204<sup>9</sup>, it leads to a fairly obvious conclusion: the reliance on blood-related aristocratic group was helpful in maintaining the dominance of the dynasty, only if the emperor possessed the indisputable position of the head of the family. The position that was successfully achieved by Alexios I, Ioannes II and Manuel I, and was never reached by Andronikos I and the Angelos dynasty. Failure in this scenario meant that this cluster of rich and influential aristocrats of imperial family origin, could become the main source of potential contenders and subversive element undermining the imperial authority. The more numerous this group was the more danger it posed.

Relations between the authorities and the aristocracy in the 12<sup>th</sup> century have already been the subject of much research<sup>10</sup>. However, so far, no one approached the issue of the internal composition of the Komnenian aristocratic elites basing on available prosopographic data. This article is the result of working with such contributions and an attempt to use basic descriptive statistics in order to present the internal composition and transformations occurring in the Komnenos "clan", and show the impact of these on the Byzantine Empire situation. Certainly, such study, based on somewhat incomplete data can stir some controversy and arise the questions of verifiability or justifiability. After all, statistics requires precision and information about some more or less obscure aristocratic families in the medieval period, are anything but precise. Being well aware of the limitations of this kind, I would like to point out two attributes of this work:

First, the primary goal of juxtaposing statistics and prosopography of the aristocracy, is only to show some important general trends, that can be observed inside the "clan" structure even with available limited data. Although some numbers are bound to appear, the purpose of this study is not to give specific and precise values regarding the aristocratic families, as it is undeniably impossible due to limited amount of source information. Therefore, values presented later on, with the help of which the composition of the "clan" will be examined, should be treated as an approximations.

Secondly, the current state of research and coverage of the Byzantine aristocracy in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, in particular the Komnenos "clan", is relatively extensive. The early years of the dynasty are especially well described. It is no surprise. During the Alexios' reign, his "clan" was still a small group, counting no more than

<sup>9</sup> According to Cheynet's list of revolts, cf. J.-C. CHEYNET, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963–1210)*, Paris 1990, p. 90–145.

<sup>10</sup> The bibliography on relations between aristocracy and power in the 12<sup>th</sup> century is very extensive. Here are some of the most notable works that are important from the perspective of the Komnenos dynasty: J.-C. CHEYNET, *Pouvoir...*; *The Byzantine Aristocracy IX to XIII Centuries*, ed. M. ANGOLD, Oxford 1984; А.П. Каждан, *Социальный состав господствующего класса Византии XI–XII вв.* Москва 1974; P. MAGDALINO, *Court Society and Aristocracy*, [in:] *The Social History of Byzantium*, ed. J.F. HALDON, Chichester 2009, p. 212–232; *Authority in Byzantium*, ed. P. ARMSTRONG, Farnham 2013.

20 members at best, so all of its members could have been described in one source or another. As this group grew over time, certain family branches disappeared from narratives. Most of them only partially, but some completely. Yet it is still possible to trace down most of them, so it can be safely concluded that majority of the people who formed the “clan” are known. The evidence of this is that until at least 1180, there are rarely aristocrats, at least among this elite group of emperor’s relatives, who could not be identified and located in the family tree. The situation changes at the turn of the century. The lack of complete information, especially in the case of families related to the Komnenoi by affinity, means that their number may be underestimated. A good example is the summed number of sons of both *mega doux* Andronikos Kontostephanos and Andronikos Doukas Angelos, who according to Choniates had 16 sons in total<sup>11</sup>. It is possible to identify 11 of them, the rest remains unknown<sup>12</sup>. The resulting hypothetical higher number of aristocrats is by no means an obstacle, in fact it can even further confirm the conclusions, as it will be evident later. The research sample is therefore reliable and sufficient to form some general conclusions. Its partial incompleteness is nothing uncommon for a historian, as neither historical source material fully reflects the past reality.

As of today, there are different approaches to how the Komnenos “clan” was structured. Perhaps the most comprehensive stratification was presented by Lucien Stiernon, where he used the title hierarchy as a key to this distinction<sup>13</sup>. This study will be however focused on genealogy rather than court dignities. From that perspective, different levels of kinship function as conditions that specify the position of any aristocrat within the described group. Genealogical relations are far less susceptible to changes over a span of one century and allow for a more credible structuring than non-hereditary and prone to change, titles and dignities. From that point of view, there are two most important attributes of the Komnenos “clan” that needs to be examined before presenting the results. These are: elitism and heterogeneity.

The elitism manifested itself within the clearly defined boundaries, differentiating the elevated status of this group clearly from the rest of the society. The line that divided those belonging to the “clan” and those outside from it, is so clear that the whole Byzantine aristocracy in the 12<sup>th</sup> century can be divided into two categories: the elite, that is part of the Komnenos “clan” and the remaining “second class” aristocracy, excluded from the benefits of special status at the imperial court<sup>14</sup>. The first of these groups completely dominated the military offices, exercising virtually full control over the country’s armed force, thus preventing outsiders from gaining

<sup>11</sup> CHONIATES, p. 266.

<sup>12</sup> K. ΒΑΡΖΟΣ, *Η γενεαλογία των Κομνηνών*, vol. II, Θεσσαλονίκη 1984, p. 289.

<sup>13</sup> L. STIERNON, *Notes de titulature et de prosopographie byzantines. Sébastes et Gambros*, REB 23, 1965, p. 222–243.

<sup>14</sup> A. CATANZARO, *The Political Problem of Internal “ἀσφάλεια” in Niketas Choniates’ Chronikè Diéghesis: a Contributing Factor to the Constantinople’s Fall in 1204*, ΒΣυμ 22, 2013, p. 234.

influence in a significant part of the army, which undermined any plans of potential pretenders from outer ranks of the aristocracy. An important element of the status of the "clan" aristocrats was also the wealth and possessions gathered in their hands<sup>15</sup>. In addition to material goods, their special position was also manifested in aforementioned very specific titles reserved only for this group. Their hierarchy was closely related to the degree of consanguinity with the ruling family<sup>16</sup>. This was in line with the trend characteristic of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine society, in which good birth (Εὐγένεια) played a very important role in the development of the aristocratic family identity<sup>17</sup>. This group of the most influential dignitaries was clearly separated from the rest of society not only by their material status and titles. It was the bond of kinship with the ruling dynasty that made them special. The only way to join this circle was through marriage. This greatly limited social mobility in the state and hindered (though not entirely) particularly merited individuals from joining the ranks of aristocracy. On the other hand, such limitations allowed to reduce number of people who could have a real impact on the state's policy and the position of the emperor. By connecting family relations with the apparatus of power, the emperor theoretically could exercise direct control over the process of accession into the elites.

The so called "second class" aristocracy consisted of many influential and wealthy people, often from known and distinguished families, but clearly separated from the ruling "clan". This does not mean that they were irrelevant. On the contrary, one can find very influential individuals and even whole families within this group, who as a result of their actions could later have the privilege of joining the elite circle of the Komnenos "clan", as happened with the family of Kamytzes or Branas<sup>18</sup>. Apart from these few people, who through marriage managed to advance in the social hierarchy, most of this group was effectively cut off from attempts to usurp the throne. In fact, the only rebels who came from this group in the 12<sup>th</sup> century were separatists, focused on forming local dominions, restricted to usually one major city and surrounding region<sup>19</sup>. It is from this group that the Bulgarian

<sup>15</sup> P. MAGDALINO, *The Byzantine Aristocratic oikos*, [in:] *The Byzantine Aristocracy...*, p. 95.

<sup>16</sup> B. HILL, *Alexios I Komnenos and the Imperial Women*, [in:] *Alexios I Komnenos...*, p. 40.

<sup>17</sup> А.П. КАЖДАН, *Социальный...*, p. 37–38.

<sup>18</sup> The Kamytzes family entered the circle of "clan" aristocratic elite through the marriage of Konstantinos Kamytzes and Maria Angelina Komnene, cf. THEODOROS PRODROMOS, *Historische Gedichte*, LXIV, rec. W. HÖRANDNER, Wien 1974 [= WBS, 11] (cetera: PRODROMOS), p. 498. The Kamytzes family was quite distinguished before, this is proved by *proedros* and *chartularios tou staulou* Eustathios Kamytzes who appears on the list of participants of the Blachernai synod in 1094, cf. P. GAUTIER, *Le synode des Blachernes (fin 1094). Etude prosopographique*, REB 29, 1971, p. 218. The Branas family belonged to the provincial aristocracy originating in Adrianople. Although Alexios Branas was connected with the Isaakios Komnenos (brother of Alexios I) line through his maternal line, it wasn't until his marriage with Anna Komnene Vatatzaina that his family became part of the Komnenos "clan", cf. K. ΒΑΡΖΟΣ, *Η γενεαλογία...*, vol. II, p. 396.

<sup>19</sup> P. STEPHENSON, *Byzantium's Balkan...*, p. 279.

Asenid dynasty and such people as Theodoros Gabras<sup>20</sup>, or Theodoros Mangaphas come from<sup>21</sup>. Determining the composition and number of aristocrats belonging to this part of society is probably impossible. Two basic problems prevent this group from being thoroughly examined. First, Byzantine society was characterized by its lack of strict social hierarchy, comparable to these in the Western Europe<sup>22</sup>. The aristocracy was not a legally defined entity. Belonging to this group was also not completely hereditary, although the role of ancestry and *eugeneia*, certainly played an increasingly significant role as the time gone. Secondly, we do not have a sufficient number of sources, that would allow us to reconstruct the composition of this group. However, it seems very likely that this minor aristocracy constituted the majority outside of Constantinople. It was a very diverse group, where one could find wealthy and influential local governors, administrative officials, all sorts of parvenus, as well as those from the impoverished families, who lost their significance after the Komnenoi came to power.

Blood relations with the imperial family became in the 12<sup>th</sup> century the fundamental defining element of the elite social position of some aristocratic families. Parallel to this, there was also the aforementioned system of court titles devised by Alexios I. However, despite its clear hierarchy and strict rules to which it was subjected, it is not a fully reliable indicator of whether someone belong to the Komnenos "clan" or not. The titles derived from the *sebastos* rank could sometimes be given to people outside the circle of the closest related aristocrats. The Venetian Doge Domenico Silvio was granted the title of *protosebastos* in exchange for help in the Byzantine-Norman war at the beginning of Alexios I rule<sup>23</sup>. His wife Theodora Doukas was the daughter of Konstantinos X Doukas, so that made Alexios and Domenico distantly related<sup>24</sup>. But the title of *protosebastos*, being higher on the ladder than the normal *sebastos*, was usually reserved for someone from the closer family like Adrianos Komnenos brother of Alexios I or the sons of Andronikos Komnenos brother of Manuel I<sup>25</sup>. It is also not uncommon to encounter some aristocrats, that despite being among the closest relatives of the imperial family, either did not use them or it is unknown if they even received them. A good example is Andronikos Angelos Doukas, son of Konstantinos Angelos and Theodora Komnene daughter of Alexios I<sup>26</sup>. None of the available sources indicate that he

<sup>20</sup> Later, one branch of the Gabrades also entered the "clan" through marriage of Michael Gabras and Eudokia Komnene one of the granddaughters of Alexios I, cf. CHONIATES, p. 75.

<sup>21</sup> Neither Asenid nor Mangaphas family were related in any way to the Komnenoi by the late 1180s.

<sup>22</sup> A. KAZHDAN, G. CONSTABLE, *People and Power in Byzantium. An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies*, Washington D.C. 1982, p. 25; J.-C. CHEYNET, *Pouvoir...*, p. 249.

<sup>23</sup> KOMNENE, VI, 5, 10, p. 178.

<sup>24</sup> D. POLEMIS, *The Doukai. A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography*, London 1968, p. 54.

<sup>25</sup> *Ioannis Zonarae Epitomae historiarum libri XVIII, libri XIII–XVIII*, XVIII, 21, 8, vol. III, rec. T. BÜTTNER-WOBST, Bonn 1897 [= CSHB, 31] (cetera: ZONARAS), p. 732; KINNAMOS, p. 126.

<sup>26</sup> K. ΒΑΡΖΟΣ, *Η γενεαλογία...*, vol. I, p. 656–662.

received any of the honorary titles. Obviously this does not prove that he wasn't gifted one. As a distinguished member of the Komnenos "clan", that was on the lead of the embassy to king Baldouin IV, and one of the participants of the Battle of Myriokephalon, he certainly was an important figure at the court<sup>27</sup>. There is no doubt that he received the title of *sebastos* or was called *gambros*, as a cousin of Manuel I but there are no proven records of that.

The unreliability of official titles as a marker of the "clan's" border becomes even more evident from the half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. As Paul Magdalino noted, the official titulature was given less attention later on than the level of kinship. He referenced the synodal lists of participants, where one can observe the omission of the titles, in favour of plain description of the genealogical relation to the emperor<sup>28</sup>. The latter are also a common sight on lead seals<sup>29</sup>. If it is noticeable under the Manuel rule it becomes striking after his death. The hierarchy of court titles from 1180 onward seems quite chaotic. Lavish politics of Alexios III, who apparently was granting the title of *sebastos* to people outside of the aristocracy is only one side of the problem<sup>30</sup>. Together with the expansion of the number of aristocrats belonging to the "clan", the titles value was inflated. It seems that by the end of 12<sup>th</sup> century only those of *kaisar* and *sebastokrator* retained its exceptional value<sup>31</sup>. The lower titles granted usually to the emperor's sons-in-law are harder to trace, although they were probably still in use by the end of the century, as there exist a seal of Leon Sgouros, where he uses the title of *sebastohypertatos*<sup>32</sup>, probably granted to him after he married Eudokia, one of the daughters of Alexios III<sup>33</sup>.

When the titles lost most of its splendour, it was genealogy, that became gradually more important as a determinant of the position in aristocratic elites<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> CHONIATES, p. 180; F. DÖLGER, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des Oströmischen Reiches von 565–1453*, vol. II, *Regesten von 1025–1204*, München 1995, p. 271.

<sup>28</sup> P. MAGDALINO, *The Empire...*, p. 183.

<sup>29</sup> A.A. VOLKOFF, *Power, Family, and Identity: Social and Personal Elements in Byzantine Sigillography*, [in:] *A Companion to Seals in the Middle Ages*, ed. L. WHATLEY, Leiden–Boston 2019 [= RMS, 2], p. 231–232.

<sup>30</sup> Alexios III lavish policy is only a part of the titles inflation problem, that can be traced way into Manuel I reign, cf. CHONIATES, p. 484; L. STIERNON, *Notes de titulature et de prosopographie byzantines. Sébaste et Gambros...*, p. 228.

<sup>31</sup> Both were granted only to emperor's closest kin, cf. K. ΒΑΡΖΟΣ, *Η γενεαλογία...*, vol. II, p. 806.

<sup>32</sup> <https://pbw2016.kdl.kcl.ac.uk/boulloterion/1942/> [20 IV 2020].

<sup>33</sup> CHONIATES, p. 608.

<sup>34</sup> It's especially visible in poems of Theodoros Prodromos who in many occasions stresses the value of *eugeneia*, cf. PRODROMOS, I, XVIII, XLIV, p. 181, 303, 406. It's also strikingly apparent in Nikephoros Bryennios work, cf. *Nicéphore Bryennio Histoire*, Préface, 5; Préface, 9; IV, 26, rec. P. GAUTIER, Bruxelles 1975 [= CFHB, 9] (cetera: BRYENNIOS), p. 57, 67, 295. The art also served as a medium for aristocrats to demonstrate their noble origins, cf. N. OIKONOMIDES, *Pictorial Propaganda in XII<sup>th</sup> c. Constantinople*, [in:] *Society, Culture and Politics in Byzantium*, ed. E. ZACHARIADOU, Aldershot 2005, p. 97; I. SINKEVIĆ, *Alexios Angelos Komnenos, a Patron without History?*, Ges 35, 1996, p. 34; L. KALLIRROE, *Imperial Impersonations: Disguised Portraits of a Komnenian Prince and his Fa-*

Ancestry was more important than non-heritable court dignities, so affiliation with the imperial Komnenos *genos* was the condition of belonging to the elite. Every *genos* had its progenitor, so another question that will help to define the statistical sample is: which of the noble imperial ancestors should be regarded, as the root (ρίζη) of the imperial “clan”? That won’t be Isaakios I Komnenos. Surely he played an important role in raising the status of the Komnenos family before 1081, but he is not a common ancestor for later families belonging to the “clan”<sup>35</sup>. The main line from this perspective follows his brother Ioannes Komnenos father of Alexios I and all his brothers and sisters that were the progenitors of all later elite aristocratic branches<sup>36</sup>. The line of *sebastokrator* Isaakios Komnenos for example, despite not being the imperial one, still remain one of the most distinguished and noble ones. It is visible in the way that the ancestry of certain Andronikos and Ioannes Kontostephanos is glorified. Their mother – Theodora was from renowned Komnenoi (Κομνηνῶν εὐκλεοῦς ἔφυν γένους). She was one of the granddaughters of *sebastokrator* and her lack of direct connection with the imperial line doesn’t seem to diminish her position<sup>37</sup>. It appears that not only the descendants of Alexios I were the heirs of his glory (and claims), but also his siblings and their children. That’s why in this study all of the descendants of Ioannes Komnenos are being considered and not only those coming directly from the imperial line.

It is now necessary to focus on the crucial for this study second attribute of the Komnenos “clan”, its internal heterogeneity. Looking through the genealogy of some family lines connected with the dynasty, one immediately encounter various aristocratic surnames: Angelos, Kontostephanos, Vatatzes, Axouch, Dalassenos, Bryennios and many others. The Komnenos family, although the most revered one and in hold of the power, was only the central part of a much bigger structure. The “clan” was not a monolith. Other aristocrats related to the emperors came from different families, with their own alliances, interests and animosities and usually they retained their independent family awareness<sup>38</sup>. At the same time, however, they didn’t shun from using proudly the Komnenos or Doukas surnames, if there was something to gain from this<sup>39</sup>. The abandonment of the paternal surname in favour of the more illustrious one of maternal ancestor was one of the

ther, [in:] *John II Komnenos, Emperor of Byzantium. In the Shadow of Father and Son*, ed. A. BUCOSI, A. RODRÍGUEZ SUÁREZ, London–New York 2016, p. 156–157.

<sup>35</sup> Isaakios I Komnenos short reign was enough to legitimize claims of Alexios I, but he is rarely mentioned outside of this context in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, cf. BRYENNIOI, Préface, 5, p. 57.

<sup>36</sup> Every Komnenos branch of the 12<sup>th</sup> century traces back to Ioannes Komnenos eight children, cf. BRYENNIOI, I, 2, p. 77–79; K. ΒΑΡΖΟΣ, *Η γενεαλογία...*, vol. II, p. 877.

<sup>37</sup> *Εἰς τὰ φων του Κοντοστεφάνου*, [in:] *Spicilegium Prodromeum*, rec. L. STERNBACH, Cracovia 1904, p. 32.

<sup>38</sup> N. LEIDHOLM, *Elite Byzantine...*, p. 159.

<sup>39</sup> L. STIERNON, *Notes de titulature et de prosopographie byzantines. A propos de trois membres de la famille Rogerios (XII<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, REB 22, 1964, p. 196.

ways of manipulating the reputation of the family, its prestige and identity<sup>40</sup>. It is noticeable both among those that did not have a rich history before joining the "clan" and those who were already at the moment of connection with the dynasty from well established lineages. Bryennioi for example were proud of their most esteemed ancestry going back as far as the 9<sup>th</sup> century<sup>41</sup>. Their connection to the Komnenoi through the marriage of Nikephoros Bryennios and Anna Komnene was only an addition to already rich history of the family, yet their descendants still favoured the use of the imperial surname. The opposite was true regarding the Angeloi, who were a completely unremarkable family before their connection with the imperial dynasty<sup>42</sup>. The offspring of Konstantinos Angelos was higher in the social hierarchy than earlier generations, but still used their patrilinear surname. Benefits of the marriages with the imperial dynasty were most likely limited only to the spouse and his children. This could cause an internal division inside one family. Good example of that is the case of Vatatzoi. Theodoros Vatatzes' descendants belonged to the "clan", and were proud of their dual ancestry, which they manifested by using both Komnenos and Vatatzes surname<sup>43</sup>. There was however also Basileios Vatatzes who shared the same surname, and probably was somehow related to Theodoros, but was not a part of his eminent line. It is proved by Nikeas Choniates' description, who writes that he was from undistinguished family, despite previous connections of alternative Vatatzes line with the emperor's kins<sup>44</sup>. It shows that some families were integrated into the "clan" only partially. Those who were included celebrated their roots by adopting imperial surnames. This common practice of collecting, replacing or using them interchangeably was addressed by Donald Nicol, and can be confusing for an inexperienced historian<sup>45</sup>.

Sources leave somewhat contradictory information when it comes to distinguishing individual families within the broader Komnenos "clan". Isaakios II and Alexios III are described at one point by Choniates as the "Angeloi brothers" (οἱ Ἀγγελώνυμοι κασίγνητοι)<sup>46</sup>. But when the latter was rejected by the citizens of Constantinople, the Byzantine historian describes the reason for that noting: "[the people] didn't want to be ruled by a Komnenos"<sup>47</sup>. Thus it is implied that

<sup>40</sup> N. LEIDHOLM, *Elite Byzantine...*, p. 124–126.

<sup>41</sup> L. NEVILLE, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-Century Byzantium. The Material for History of Nikephoros Bryennios*, Cambridge 2012, p. 15.

<sup>42</sup> CHONIATES, p. 55.

<sup>43</sup> Although they certainly preferred to highlight their connection with the Komnenoi, and as such this name appears as first on most of their seals, cf. <https://pbw2016.kdl.kcl.ac.uk/boulloterion/3874/> [20 IV 2020]; <https://pbw2016.kdl.kcl.ac.uk/boulloterion/3038/> [20 IV 2020]; <https://pbw2016.kdl.kcl.ac.uk/boulloterion/3039/> [20 IV 2020].

<sup>44</sup> CHONIATES, p. 400, 182, 193.

<sup>45</sup> D. NICOL, *The Prosopography of the Byzantine Aristocracy*, [in:] *The Byzantine Aristocracy...*, p. 81.

<sup>46</sup> CHONIATES, p. 538.

<sup>47</sup> CHONIATES, p. 456.

Alexios III was treated as a member of the Komnenos family. It is known that he started to use this imperial surname upon dethronement of his brother, but was that enough to suddenly change his identity in the eyes of the empire's population? Unlikely. It seems that he was treated by Niketas Choniates, as having mixed descent, part Angelos, part Komnenos, as evidenced by the interchangeable use of both surnames in his orations<sup>48</sup>. Eustathios of Thessalonika also differentiates the Angelos family from the Komnenoi, even if only because he wanted to underline this difference in order to strengthen the claims of Isaakios II<sup>49</sup>. Alexios III even as emperor sometimes used his paternal surname on his seals and they prove that he clearly was aware, that he belonged only to one of the matrilineal branches of the imperial family<sup>50</sup>.

It is clear that, the Byzantines accurately distinguished kinship and affinity or connection by marriage, as well as kinship through paternal or maternal ancestors. Their awareness in this regard was quite clear, despite the fact that there was a certain, legally unrestricted freedom in terms of shaping the family identity, very different from the most of Western European aristocracy. This is evident in the descriptions of the origin of some people found in the 12<sup>th</sup> century sources. Nikephoros Bryennios, who in his *Ὑλὴ Ἱστορίας* puts so much importance to the value of *eugenia*, precisely distinguishes paternal and maternal line. When he describes the wife of Andronikos Doukas, he indicates that from her father's side (πατρώθεν) she was connected to the Bulgarian tsar Samuel and from her mother's side (μητρóθεν) she came from famous and rich Kontostephanos, Aballantes and Phokas families<sup>51</sup>. This example, which is one of many similar in the 12<sup>th</sup> century sources, illustrates the division that can be translated into the Komnenos "clan"<sup>52</sup>.

Within this group there was a central line of aristocrats who belonged to the Komnenos family through their paternal side. In other words they can be described as the "core" of the "clan". All of power disputes in the period between 1100 and 1185 concentrated around them. The first date marks the moment when other families were finally defeated after many rebellions and plots during the first twenty years of Alexios' I rule. It is around this time that the rebellion of Michael

<sup>48</sup> Niketas Choniates uses surnames of and alludes to both families when writing about Alexios III, cf. *Nicetae Choniatae Orationes et Epistulae*, rec. I.A. VAN DIETEN, Berolini 1972 [= *CFHB*, 3], p. 53, 101, 105, 130; The problem of mixed descent and the familial identity still requires further research. See some remarks on the problem: N. LEIDHOLM, *Elite Byzantine...*, p. 103–106.

<sup>49</sup> Eustathios uses the word *genos* towards the Angelos family, indicating that he clearly differentiates them from *genos* of the Komnenoi, cf. EUSTATHIOS OF THESSALONIKI, *The Capture of Thessaloniki. A Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, ed. et trans. J.R. MELVILLE JONES, Canberra 1988 [= *BAus*, 8] (cetera: EUSTATHIOS), p. 33.

<sup>50</sup> <https://pbw2016.kdl.kcl.ac.uk/boulloterion/2971/> [20 IV 2020]; <https://pbw2016.kdl.kcl.ac.uk/boulloterion/86/> [20 IV 2020].

<sup>51</sup> BRYENNIOI, p. 219.

<sup>52</sup> About the issue of certain priority of paternal descent, cf. N. LEIDHOLM, *Elite Byzantine...*, p. 106–109.

Anemas happened, which was the last conspiracy in this period openly aimed at overthrowing the ruler, whose participants came from outside of the circles of the Komnenos "clan"<sup>53</sup>. The ending date is the rebellion of Isaakios II Angelos, who was the first usurper connected with the Komnenoi only indirectly, through his paternal grandmother. Within this period all conspiracies and rebellions which purpose was to seize power in Constantinople were initiated (or supported) by aristocrats who belonged to the "core" of the "clan", so to the already mentioned direct male line of the imperial dynasty<sup>54</sup>. The plots of emperor's sons-in-law like Nikephoros Bryennios or Ioannes Roger Dalassenos do not deny that. Admittedly, in the case of their victory they would sit on the throne and perhaps establish their own dynasties, but in the first place their claims were based on their connection by marriage (κῆδος) with the imperial dynasty<sup>55</sup>. Such a situation, in which a woman is the element through which claims are transmitted, is nothing new and occurs in both the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>56</sup>. The marriage with a princess was an element ennobling the family of aristocrats who entered into such a relationship, but allowed also to legitimize claims in certain situations. A good example is Ioannes III Doukas Vatatzes who may have been not a person of imperial origin, but after his marriage with one of the Thodoros' I daughters, he could claim the throne, on behalf of his wife<sup>57</sup>.

Another attribute of this "core" of the Komnenos "clan", directly connected to the aforementioned division into paternal and maternal lines, is the way in which surnames function among this group. Although surnames as it was described earlier, can be unreliable as an indicator, there are some aspects of them that can prove helpful while dealing with the internal structure of the "clan". The "core" aristocrats almost exclusively use only a single surname – Komnenos. The adoption of surnames from the maternal side is virtually nonexistent in this group. Alexios I Komnenos is nowhere referred to as Alexios Komnenos Dalassenos, also none of his descendants use the surname of Anna Dalassene. This seems

<sup>53</sup> The conspirators cooperating with Michael Anemas were from senator elites and military aristocracy not connected with the Komnenoi, cf. KOMNENE, XII, 5, 4, p. 372.

<sup>54</sup> J.-C. CHEYNET, *Pouvoir...*, p. 100–119. All of the rebellions that were targeted at achieving the imperial power were either initialized by the "core" Komnenoi (or husbands of such as it is with the cases of Alexios Axouch or Ioannes Roger Dalassenos), or supporting one of its members (i.e. Theodoros Styppeiotos or Ioannes Vatatzes Komnenos rebellions). The rebellion of Isaakios Angelos was the first one that broke the monopoly of imperial power for the male descendants of Alexios I.

<sup>55</sup> Affinity (κῆδος) was enough to put forward claims. It was a quality stressed out by contenders during Manuel I succession, cf. CHONIATES, p. 46.

<sup>56</sup> Perhaps the most known example of such legitimization are the emperors-husbands of the last scions of the Macedonian Dynasty between 1028 and 1056.

<sup>57</sup> Although such a succession was apparently heavily contested as it is evident from the rebellions of Theodoros' I Laskaris brothers Alexios and Isaakios, cf. *Georgii Acropolitae Annales*, 19, 22, [in:] *Constantinus Manasses, Ioel, Georgius Acropolita*, rec. I. BEKKERUS, Bonnae 1837 [= CSHB, 6], p. 35, 37–39.

reasonable. If the surnames were a vital element of the family identity and served as a means of emphasizing the status of given aristocrat, then there was no reason for the descendants of Ioannes Komnenos and Anna Dalassene to took the surname of the latter. The direct descent from the Komnenos imperial family had a value incomparable to the one coming from the Dalassenos origin. If there is a different name used by the “core” group of aristocrats it’s the one of Doukas, because this family, that also exercised imperial power in its time, had the same high value<sup>58</sup>.

The part of the Komnenos “clan”, which consists of aristocracy that is associated with the dynasty only through the maternal line, is the second group that needs clarification. First of all, it consists of various aristocratic families, which through marriage at some point entered the structure of the “clan”. Since the most important element connecting such families with the Komnenoi is the marriage, hence it also seems to be the most appropriate to refer to this group as affine families. Unlike the “core”, it is a group that, while holding the highest positions in the state and receiving highest dignities, is somewhat in the shadow of the main Komnenos line throughout the whole period up to Andronikos I. This subordination to the ruling dynasty is evidenced by the fact, that no candidate to the throne came from this group, until the weakening of the Komnenos family, and the takeover of the Angeloi<sup>59</sup>. For the purposes of this study and because of the greater degree of inaccuracy in available information on these affine families, this group is treated as one entity. This does not mean that it functioned as single block, with the same goals and shared family identity. Rather it only means that it can be regarded as a counterweight to the “core” of the “clan”, as a source of potential contenders for power, in the case of absence of suitable candidates from among the imperial dynasty.

Surnames in the affine group functions quite differently than in the “core”. Double or interchangeable surnames are common occurrence<sup>60</sup>. As it was already presented in the example of the Vatatzes family, children who had mother from the imperial dynasty, often used the Komnenos surname while also adding their paternal one. In some cases, the paternal aristocratic surname could be replaced completely. Such was the case among the descendants of Nikephoros Bryennios and Anna Komnene, who identified themselves as Komnenoi and Doukai rather than Bryennioi<sup>61</sup>. The Angelos family, in turn, is characterized by the completely free use of the Angelos, Doukas and Komnenos surnames<sup>62</sup>. On one hand, this

<sup>58</sup> Theodoros Prodromos defines them as “divine kins” (θεῖα γένη), cf. PRODRAMOS, XIV, p. 269.

<sup>59</sup> See note 54.

<sup>60</sup> D. NICOL, *The Prosopography...*, p. 80–81.

<sup>61</sup> *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents. A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments*, vol. I, ed. J. THOMAS, A. CONSTANTINIDES HERO, Washington D.C. 2000 [= DOS, 35], p. 701; CHONIATES, p. 94; KINNAMOS, p. 128.

<sup>62</sup> CHONIATES, p. 459. Perhaps the best example of this is the first ruler of Epiros – Michael who was described, depending on source, as either Angelos, Komnenos or Doukas, cf. D. NICOL, *The Prosopography...*, p. 82.

proves that in many cases the family identity was not completely lost after merging with the imperial family. On the other hand, it shows a subtle inferiority of these related families, whose members were adding or replacing their paternal surnames, in order to raise their authority.

To sum up this fundamental division. The Komnenos "clan" in this study is understood as consisted of two groups:

– The "core"

This group included all female (excluding their partners and offspring) and male descendants of Ioannes Komnenos, brother of Isaakios I Komnenos. They constituted the central group that exercised power in the Byzantine Empire between 1081 and 1185.

– Affine families

These were the descendants of all female aristocrats belonging to the "core" in the first generation and each subsequent. Their male lineage originated from various aristocratic families. They exercised power from 1185 until the end of the state.

Having established this internal division, it is also necessary to address some other methodological issues regarding this study. The extensive prosopographic material, which has been developed over the years and is still being expanded is invaluable in such research. The monumental work of Konstantinos Varzos still remains the basis for the genealogy of the Komnenos family. It describes in detail all of its members from the first generation (end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century) to the seventh generation (end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>63</sup>. Other generations were included in the list where all known aristocrats from the Komnenos family and related families are listed, up to the twelfth generation (15<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>64</sup>. The author makes no distinction in his genealogy between patrilineal and matrilineal lines, including all descendants of the oldest common ancestor (Isaakios Komnenos father of Manuel Erotikos Komnenos) regardless of their surnames. Thanks to this, the work contains both the aforementioned "core" of the "clan", as well as the affine families.

Other prosopographic contributions are also helpful. The work of Demetrios Polemis about the Doukas family, serves as an additional source of information<sup>65</sup>. There are also some amount of contributions regarding other lesser families, which were closely connected with the Komnenos dynasty<sup>66</sup>.

<sup>63</sup> K. ΒΑΡΖΟΣ, *Η γενεαλογία...*, vol. I, p. 34.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. II, p. 877–895.

<sup>65</sup> D. POLEMIS, *The Doukai...*

<sup>66</sup> D. NICOL, *The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus) ca. 1100–1460. A Genealogical and Prosopographical Study*, Washington 1968 [= DOS, 11]; A. BRYER, *A Byzantine Family: The Gabrades, c. 979 – c. 1653*, [in:] *The Empire of Trebizond and the Pontos*, ed. IDEM, London 1980,

The limitations associated with the use of prosopographic data for statistical research were already mentioned at the beginning of the article, but it is worth to highlight some other more specific issues. The degree to which the “core” of the Komnenos “clan” is described is noticeably higher in comparison with the related affine families. This is due to the fact that the Komnenoi are at the centre of the historical narrative of this period, hence they appear in the sources more often than other aristocrats. Even so, among the ruling dynasty there are still some family lines that eventually just cut off. This applies in particular to the families derived from brothers of Alexios I: Isaakios, Adrianos and Nikephoros. By far the best described is the numerous family line of the oldest of them<sup>67</sup>. This is due to the fact, that many of his descendants were connected with known and famous aristocratic families. The granddaughter of *sebastokrator* Isaakios – Maria Komnene married the well-known commander Alexios Branas, while another by the name of Theodora was married to Andronikos Kontostephanos (not *mega doux* of the fleet from the late 12<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>68</sup>. The families of brothers of Ioannes II and especially Manuel I, are well described. We owe that to many literates of that time, working under the patronage of aristocrats<sup>69</sup>.

Unlike the “core”, other aristocratic families have an uneven degree of description. The Angeloi have quite complete genealogy, which of course is a result of their reign at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century<sup>70</sup>. Others, such as Gabrades or Rogerioi Dalassenoi are not so well described<sup>71</sup>. It is impossible to state unequivocally whether this is due to their actual small number or the lack of source information.

The dates of birth and death also deserve some attention. Unfortunately, both are often indeterminable. It is even unsure when some of the emperors were exactly born as it is in the case of Alexios III<sup>72</sup>. Birth dates are a minor issue. If they are

p. 164–187; A. GKOUTZIOUKOSTAS, A.-K. WASSILOU-SEIBT, *The Origin and the Members of the Kamytzes Family. A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography*, DOP 72, 2018, p. 169–179; J. NESBITT, *Some Observations about the Roger Family*, NRh 1, 2004, p. 209–217.

<sup>67</sup> K. ΒΑΡΖΟΣ, *Η γενεαλογία...*, vol. I, p. 134–174.

<sup>68</sup> See note 37.

<sup>69</sup> A good examples are a series of four poems dedicated to the family of *sebastokrator* Andronikos Komnenos, brother of Manuel I or Michael Italikos monody on the death of Andronikos brother of Ioannes II, cf. PRODRAMOS, XLIV–XLVII, p. 406–434; MICHAEL ITALIKOS, *Μονωδία εἰς τὸν σεβαστοκράτορα κῆρ Ἀνδρόνικον*, [in:] MICHEL ITALIKOS, *Lettres et discours*, ed. P. GAUTIER, Paris 1972 [= AOC, 14], p. 84–88.

<sup>70</sup> The Angelos family comprise almost 30% of eighth generation described by Konstantinos Varzos, starting from nr. 166 to 190a, cf. K. ΒΑΡΖΟΣ, *Η γενεαλογία...*, vol. II, p. 882.

<sup>71</sup> Aside from Michael Gabras, second husband of Eudokia Komnene, only their son – Manuel is known. We don't know if the pair had any other children, cf. K. ΒΑΡΖΟΣ, *Η γενεαλογία...*, vol. II, p. 170. Children of Ioannes Rogerios Dalassenos are scarcely described and their lineages are mostly unknown, cf. *ibidem*, vol. II, p. 135–142.

<sup>72</sup> Alexios III Angelos birth date can only be estimated with accordance to Isaakios II, cf. CHONIATES, p. 452; K. ΒΑΡΖΟΣ, *Η γενεαλογία...*, vol. II, p. 716.

not specifically stated, they can usually be approximated, with the margin of error rarely exceeding 10 years, which is not a problem for this study and won't radically alter the results. The dates of death are definitely more problematic. Unfortunately, their absence is quite frequent phenomenon in the case of side family lines, which as stated, are less of a focus for historical narrative. The only way out of the situation is to use a risky approximate life expectancy. In order to define it, the sample of 87 aristocrats from the period between 1080 and 1200 was used as a base<sup>73</sup>. These 87 persons included only those with either precisely known life span or those who have no more than 5 years margin in that regard. Since the focus of this study are potential pretenders, those who had not reached puberty were rejected because they would understate the result. This sample gives an average life expectancy of 42.6 years. The median is equal to 42 years and the dominant is 50 years. The results corresponds surprisingly well with previous studies on Byzantine demographics made by Angeliki Laiou who concluded that for 14<sup>th</sup> century peasant society, more than 70% of people would have died before reaching 50 years<sup>74</sup>. For this article, the life expectancy was fixed at 50 years, although the issue certainly requires further research.

Since the purpose of this study is to show the impact of changes in the structure of the "clan" on the imperial authority only those who reached mature age are considered. That is 15 years for boys and 12 for girls<sup>75</sup>. Additionally those who have been blinded or otherwise mutilated, are not counted after their loss of full physical ability. Permanent disability prevented from exercising the power in the empire. Thus, the brothers of Isaakios II Angelos, except for the oldest Alexios, are not counted between 1185 and 1200. Their further activity in the army and court matters remains a fact, but they themselves did not pose a threat to the authorities<sup>76</sup>. Hence, Alexios III Angelos encountered no opposition among his siblings. However it doesn't mean they did not have any influence at the court, on the contrary they willingly took part in discussions regarding the possible heir to the throne, readily putting forward their sons as a candidates, as was the case with Konstantinos Angelos Komnenos<sup>77</sup>.

The examined period covers the years 1080–1200. The division into twenty-year intervals seems reasonable in order to visualize the changes taking place in the structure of the "clan". Denser control points make no sense with the limited

<sup>73</sup> The sample was constructed using the aristocrats that are listed in the appendix to this article, from whom those with more certain dates of birth and death were chosen.

<sup>74</sup> A. LAIOU, *Peasant Society in the Late Byzantine Empire. A Social and Demographic Study*, Princeton 1977, p. 296.

<sup>75</sup> C. HENNESSY, *Representations and Roles of Adolescence with a Focus on Apocryphal Imagery*, [in:] *Coming of Age in Byzantium. Adolescence and Society*, ed. D. ARIANTZI, Berlin 2018 [= *Mil.S.* 69], p. 177.

<sup>76</sup> C. BRAND, *Byzantium Confronts...*, p. 79.

<sup>77</sup> CHONIATES, p. 498.

accuracy of the available data. The exception to this rule is the addition of the year 1185 in order to show the impact of Andronikos' reign over the aristocracy.

The results are presented in the table containing the raw numbers and two graphs. The first graph shows the overall number of aristocrats from the "core" and affine families of the Komnenos "clan". The second one shows only men capable of exercising power at given period.

Table 1

**The number of known adult members of the Komnenos "clan", in given periods**

	"Core" male	"Core" female	"Core" total	Affine male	Affine female	Affine total
1080	4	4	8	1	1	2
1100	7	7	14	4	1	5
1120	14	16	30	9	6	15
1140	12	19	31	18	12	30
1160	10	18	28	39	19	58
1180	14	16	30	63	25	88
1185	5	11	16	52	23	75
1200	4	8	12	48	20	68

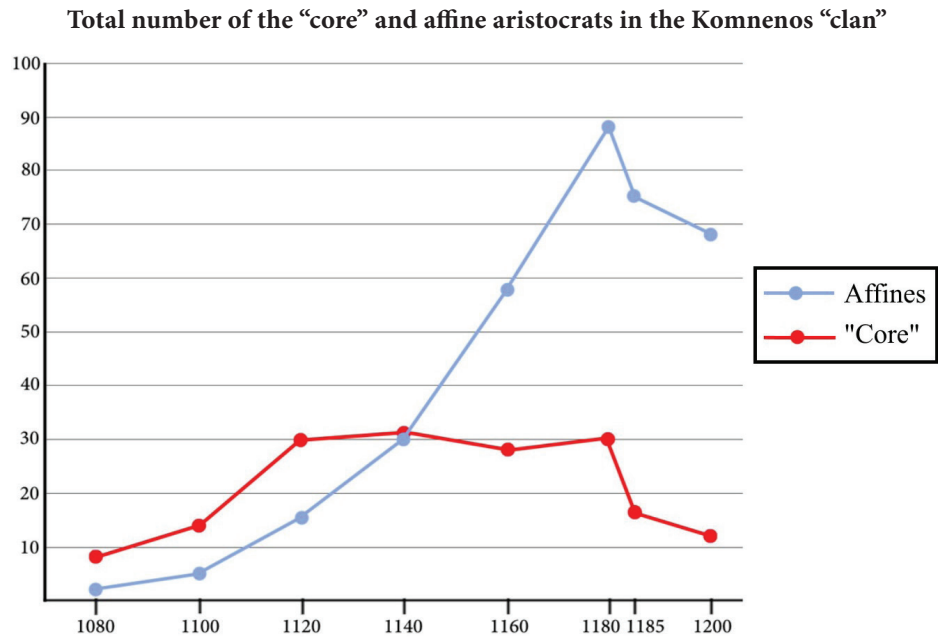
In the early period of the Komnenos dynasty, from 1081 to 1100, the descendants of Alexios I had not yet entered the political scene. This period was a time of consolidation of the power in the hands of the new dynasty and successive removal of threats from other families claimants (among others Nikephoros Diogenes)<sup>78</sup>. Already at that time, the Komnenos family was connected with the Taronitai and Melissenoi<sup>79</sup>. Initially small number of the "clan" members, was doubled during the first twenty years of 12<sup>th</sup> century. It is mostly *sebastokrator* Isaakios Komnenos' family that contributed to this increase<sup>80</sup>. The affine aristocrats remain below the "core".

<sup>78</sup> P. FRANKOPAN, *Challenges to Imperial Authority in the Reign of Alexios I Komnenos: the Conspiracy of Nikephoros Diogenes*, Bsl 64, 2006, p. 259.

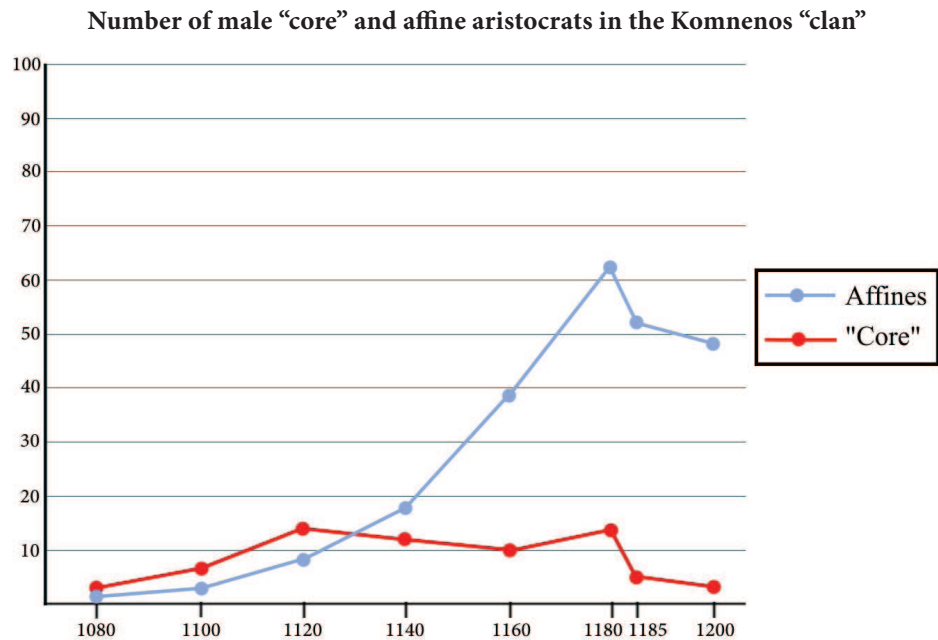
<sup>79</sup> BRYENNIS, I, 6, p. 85–86.

<sup>80</sup> K. ΒΑΡΖΟΣ, *Η γενεαλογία...*, vol. I, p. 79.

Graph 1



Graph 2



The period more or less overlapping with the reign of Ioannes II Komnenos, is a time of steady growth and domination of the Komnenos family, whose number oscillates around 30, including 12 to 14 men potentially able to hold the highest military and court offices. Both Alexios I and Ioannes II had quite numerous families, which significantly influenced the growth of the “core”. The first of them had nine children, from which seven survived to adulthood<sup>81</sup>. Alexios’ daughters were married to aristocrats. The emperor’s strategy was to include in the “clan” those aristocrats whose families had military traditions such as the Bryennioi and Katakalonoi-Euphrobanoi<sup>82</sup>. There was also an attempt to integrate Iasites and Kourtikios families. But the marriage of Eudokia Komnene and Michael Iasites quickly ended up with a scandal and divorce<sup>83</sup>. Konstantinos Kourtikios on the other hand died just after marrying Theodora Komnene<sup>84</sup>. Ioannes II continued his father’s policy with more luck. Kontostephanoi, Vatatzoi, Rogerioi-Dalassenoi and Anemai families were integrated into the “clan”<sup>85</sup>. It is noticeable, however, that almost none of the imperial sons married a local aristocrat<sup>86</sup>. It was most likely a deliberate decision, in order to prevent the uncontrolled transfer of property, including primarily land estate, belonging to the Komnenos family to other aristocratic families. It could also be a way of preventing the formation of strong aristocratic parties, which could support such scion of the dynasty as a pretender to the throne<sup>87</sup>. All spouses of *porphyrogennets* from the Komnenos family were princesses from abroad. The consistent dynastic policy of the emperors Alexios and Ioannes II had its effect clearly visible on the charts. By 1140, the distance between the number of affine aristocrats and the “core” has been levelled out and if we count only men the proportions were even slightly inverted. Between 1120 and 1140 the “core” entered the time of stagnation. At that time, however, when the dynasty was at its peak, that was not a concern.

During this period, however, two alarming facts are already visible. The first is the contraction of some collateral lines of the Komnenoi, especially those coming from the brothers of Alexios I. From the numerous family of *sebastokrator* Isaakios,

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 112–113.

<sup>82</sup> J. DUDEK, *Pęknięte Zwierciadło. Kryzys i odbudowa wizerunku władcy bizantyńskiego od 1056 roku do ok. 1095 roku*, Zielona Góra 2009, p. 217.

<sup>83</sup> ZONARAS, XVIII, 22, 29–31, p. 739.

<sup>84</sup> K. ΒΑΡΖΟΣ, *Η γενεαλογία...*, vol. I, p. 259–260.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 349, 380, 399.

<sup>86</sup> This stands in contrast to the marriage policy for the imperial daughters, who were almost exclusively married to local aristocratic families.

<sup>87</sup> Usually land was only given to sons. Theoretically daughters and sons had equal rights of inheritance and could divide their patrimony evenly. However, there was an unwritten rule: imperial daughters were never given any land as a dowry. The state even under the rule of the aristocracy was still treated more as a common wealth rather than emperor’s patrimony. The Komnenoi gifted their daughters only movables and never violated the integrity of the state through the marriage contract, cf. A. LAIOU, *Family Structure and the Transmission of Property*, [in:] *The Social History...*, p. 67.

the only documented male line that survived the entire 12<sup>th</sup> century, are the sons and grandchildren of Konstantinos Komnenos<sup>88</sup>. The lines of Adrianos Komnenos and Nikephoros Komnenos, younger brothers of Alexios I, fade away. It is impossible to say whether they still existed at a later time. Their absence in the sources can imply that they lost relevance, although it cannot be proved. The second factor that negatively affected the position of the family was the tragic death of the two sons of Ioannes II: the original successor Alexios and his brother Andronikos. They both managed to have offspring, but the loss of these significant *porphyrogenets* was a blow to the dynasty<sup>89</sup>.

It is indeed interesting that Manuel's reign marks the moment when the disproportion between the affine families and the central dynastic line becomes so significant. Many historians agree following Niketas Choniates' account, that Manuel's reign foreshadowed future misfortunes<sup>90</sup>. The sudden inversion in proportions within the Komnenos "clan" visible on the table is not entirely Manuel's fault, but a process that was the result of other factors independent to emperor's policy. It is partially connected with the premature death of some members of the dynasty that hindered the growth of the family in the middle of 12<sup>th</sup> century<sup>91</sup>. In the meantime, the increase in the number of affine aristocrats is progressing exponentially. By 1160, most of the members of the seventh generation (peers of Alexios II) entered adulthood. These were children from marriages with the daughters of Ioannes II and grandchildren of the daughters of Alexios I. 68 of them are known, which is a striking difference in comparison with 19 of the sixth generation and shows how quick was the demographic growth in this group.

The inversion between the "core" of the "clan" and the other families could indeed have been one of the reasons for the growing difficulties in maintaining control over the aristocrats<sup>92</sup>. Manuel I Komnenos is known for his strict policy, which was criticized by the Byzantines<sup>93</sup>. He actively took part in solving issues regarding the seventh degree of consanguinity in marriages, he also tried to exercise control over marriages within the "clan". That way he could play the role of the undisputed head of the family<sup>94</sup>. Such a policy towards elites could serve as

<sup>88</sup> K. ΒΑΡΖΟΣ, *Η γενεαλογία...*, vol. I, p. 286–291; *ibidem*, vol. II, p. 44–46.

<sup>89</sup> CHONIATES, p. 38.

<sup>90</sup> CHONIATES, p. 203–204; Paul Magdalino gives a thorough review and analysis on why Manuel I was negatively evaluated following Niketas Choniates narrative, cf. P. MAGDALINO, *The Empire...*, p. 4–26.

<sup>91</sup> From the brothers of Manuel I only Andronikos had two legitimate sons that reached adulthood: Ioannes Komnenos who died at the battle of Myriokephalon and infamous *protosebastos* Alexios Komnenos, cf. K. ΒΑΡΖΟΣ, *Η γενεαλογία...*, vol. I, p. 378–379.

<sup>92</sup> Vlada Stanković suggests that the emperor's position was contested well into 1150s, due to his lack of heir, cf. V. STANKOVIĆ, *A Generation Gap or Political Enmity Emperor Manuel I Komnenos, Byzantine Intellectuals and the Struggle for Domination in Twelfth Century Byzantium*, 3PBI 44, 2007, p. 221.

<sup>93</sup> CHONIATES, p. 60.

<sup>94</sup> M. ANGOLD, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni, 1081–1261*, Cambridge 1995, p. 105–108; P. MAGDALINO, *The Empire...*, p. 205.

the only remedy for the potential threat it posed to the ruling dynastic line. It is clearly visible during the first years of the new emperor's rule, when he wasn't really supported by his family. It is also worth noting that Manuel largely gave up the policy of entering alliances with various aristocratic families through marriages. He was much more interested in building relations with Western dynasties in that way<sup>95</sup>. The engagement of his daughter Maria Komnene with Bela (Alexios), and then the marriage with Renier of Montferrat is a departure from the rules of dynastic policy that characterized his predecessors. Manuel managed to reign in relative internal peace. Apart from the uncertain first years and subversive actions of Andronikos Komnenos, during his long rule, there weren't any significant open revolts. Although the situation at the court was fragile and there was a tension between some family lines.

The upward trend among the affine families continued until the end of Manuel's reign. Looking at the disproportion in 1180, it is clear that the privileged position of the main Komnenos line was maintained only by the authority of the old emperor and the special supreme position of the family. A slight increase that is visible in the period between 1160 and 1180 in the "core" line, results from the advent of the eighth generation, but at the same time it should be noted that it was about three times smaller than the seventh generation. Manuel I had only two legal children. This certainly was a factor that diminished his position as a leader among his relatives. Although the Komnenoi of the eighth generation were not a large family anymore, at 1180 they were still one of the largest families within the "clan", with about 28 members, including 14 men. At the same time, the Angelos family, counted about 17 adult known members<sup>96</sup>.

The short period between 1180 and 1185 constitute a very important turning point in the history of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine Empire. This is the beginning of the total decomposition of the Komnenos "clan"<sup>97</sup>. During that process, the central family lost its position and fell into obscurity. With their decline disappeared the sole element, that held the "clan" as more or less one faction. Individual families started to lose the sense of solidarity towards each other, which until the death of Manuel I was either natural or forced by the emperor's policy. It is immediately apparent just after the succession. The tensions usually suppressed by the ruler, now were brought into light. The process of decomposition can be structured into three steps. The first phase, during which there was an ongoing internal conflict

<sup>95</sup> P. MAGDALINO, *The Empire...*, p. 209; C. BRAND, *Byzantium Confronts...*, p. 20–21. Not everyone in the court was fond of such policy. The extraordinary marriage between Maria Komnene and Bela (Alexios) was criticized by Andronikos Komnenos and some aristocrats, cf. CHONIATES, p. 137.

<sup>96</sup> Children and grandchildren of Konstantinos Angelos and Theodora Komnene of whom 17 adults are known in 1180.

<sup>97</sup> Alexander Kazhdan proved through his analysis that after Manuel's reign, the Komnenos "clan" began to recede from the highest offices in the state, giving way for other families, cf. А.П. КАЖДАН, *Социальный...*, p. 263.

regarding the regency over the young Alexios II, was concentrated around the closest family of deceased Manuel. The second phase that started with the rebellion of Andronikos widened the internal dispute. Now the struggle for power was including also other Komnenos family lines. But the conflict was still mostly confined to the "core". Other families were only supporting one or the other side, and weren't introducing their own candidates yet<sup>98</sup>. With the usurpation of Andronikos, the third phase began as a result of the loss of trust and loyalty towards the current dynasty. This marks the end of the supreme position of the "core". The Angeloi did not replaced the former dynasty as a new supreme group of rulers. Isaakios II certainly tried to achieve that, but he did not succeed<sup>99</sup>. The question: "which of the noble families should take over the baton after the Komnenoi?" remained open up to the Fourth Crusade.

Each of these conflicts caused further divisions in the internal structure of the "clan" and contributed to its disruption. Eventually it led to the division of the empire between three related family lines after the Latin conquest<sup>100</sup>. The period of regency and reign of Andronikos I Komnenos as it seems is crucial. His self-destructive actions and the bloody end of rule caused the death of many members of the "core" Komnenoi aristocrats, and what's also important, completely discredited this family and removed it from power. Some member of the family went beyond the Byzantine borders and completely vanished from the political scene of Constantinople<sup>101</sup>. Those who were lucky enough to survive, lost their importance and fell into obscurity, with the only exception to the grandsons of Andronikos – Alexios and David who were the progenitors of the Trebizondian Megas Komnenos dynasty<sup>102</sup>.

The actions of Andronikos I Komnenos had also a great impact on the affine aristocracy as it is visible in the results. The graphs shows a significant decrease at that time. Most of the victims of the tyrant were men, which is understandable. The purge was targeted mostly at potential pretenders. Eustathios of Thessalonika

<sup>98</sup> The rebellions between 1180 and 1183 were generally supporting the rights of Alexios II either against *protosebastos* Alexios (Maria Komnene) or Andronikos Komnenos (Ioannes Vatatzes Komnenos). No alternative candidate to the throne from outside of the Komnenoi appeared during that time, cf. J.-C. CHEYNET, *Pouvoir...*, p. 110–116.

<sup>99</sup> The Angeloi were rather unpopular outside of the aristocratic elites. It is clearly visible during the Alexios Branas rebellion when virtually all provinces pledged their loyalty towards the general. Later provincial secessionism proves that even after the victory over Branas, neither Isaakios nor Alexios were commonly accepted as a rulers outside of the capital, cf. CHONIATES, p. 383; C. BRAND, *Byzantium Confronts...*, p. 82.

<sup>100</sup> Theodoros I Laskaris was connected with the Angeloi through marriage, Michael Komnenos Doukas of Epiros was the illegitimate son of *sebastokrator* Ioannes Doukas paternal uncle of Isaakios II Angelos and Alexios I Megas Komnenos was a grandson of Andronikos I Komnenos, cf. K. ΒΑΡΖΟΣ, *Η γενεαλογία...*, vol. II, p. 669, 743, 526.

<sup>101</sup> EUSTATHIOS, p. 56–58.

<sup>102</sup> K. JACKSON WILLIAMS, *A Genealogy of the Grand Komnenoi of Trebizond*, Fou 2.3, 2006, p. 172–173.

and Niketas Choniates after him testify that among the victims were also many noble families, but they provide no specific information on this issue<sup>103</sup>. The lack of detailed source data regarding the composition of the aristocracy at that time is a problem that limits the examination of the exact scope of Andronikos destructive actions. With the exception of specifically described cases of blinded and sentenced to death aristocrats, the information is limited to general statements about the large number of victims. Nevertheless, even available data show that this short and bloody reign affected the “clan”. From its families it is known that the Angeloi suffered much during that time. As a result of their rebellious actions in Anatolia, four sons of Andronikos Angelos Doukas were blinded, leaving only Alexios and Isaakios – the future emperors – in full health<sup>104</sup>. As a result of this turn of events, Isaakios II Angelos while seeking support for his power among his family, had no choice but to rely on his mutilated brothers<sup>105</sup>.

The last 15 years of the 12<sup>th</sup> century is a time of progressive decomposition of the Komnenos “clan”, and further shrinking of its “core” line. After their removal from power, they clearly lost their importance. The only paterilinear descendants of the emperors fully confirmed in the sources are Alexios and David. It is unknown what was their situation before 1200. It is possible that they found asylum at the court of the Georgian monarchs, given their later support from queen Tamar<sup>106</sup>. The Komnenoi from that point on never played an important role at the Constantinopolitan court, but their fame still remained in the memory of people, especially in the provinces. The Angelos dynasty found little to no support outside of the capital. In the constantly endangered valleys of Anatolia, the sentiment towards the former rulers was apparently very strong. Rebellions of “miraculously saved” pseudo Alexios II that originated there are proof of that<sup>107</sup>.

The period of the Angelos dynasty among the affine families of already decomposing “clan”, is a time when many branches break off and disappear from the pages of history. Such is the case with the Axouchoi, who appear for the last time during the rebellion of Ioannes “the fat” Axouch Komnenos<sup>108</sup>. Similarly with Dalassenoi, who suffered during Andronikos rule<sup>109</sup>. All this means that the number of aristocrats from affine families in 1200 is most likely very underestimated. There are no reasons for such a slowdown in demographic growth among the aristocracy of that time. Two explanations seem plausible. First, with the assumption of power by the Angelos dynasty, the centre of the “clan” shifted from the former dynastic line to the new one. As a result of that, some families might have lost its current

<sup>103</sup> EUSTATHIOS, p. 56; CHONIATES, p. 345.

<sup>104</sup> CHONIATES, p. 498.

<sup>105</sup> C. BRAND, *Byzantium Confronts...*, p. 79.

<sup>106</sup> A. VASILIEV, *The Foundation of the Empire of Trebizond (1204–1222)*, S 11.1, 1936, p. 9–12.

<sup>107</sup> CHONIATES, p. 421, 462.

<sup>108</sup> CHONIATES, p. 526.

<sup>109</sup> EUSTATHIOS, p. 56.

position while others, favoured by the new emperors, gained power. The text of *Partitio Romaniae* which included the description of lands owned by the largest families during the Fourth Crusade and the corresponding passage of Niketas Choniates, who lists the families that supported Alexios III, could be a hint that the composition of the aristocratic elites changed in comparison with the previous period<sup>110</sup>. Second, the reign of the Angelos dynasty and the period preceding the Latin conquest, has fewer sources that would allow the reconstruction of the genealogy of aristocratic families of that period. The eighth generation that dominates at this time is definitely more sparsely documented. There is no equivalent of Theodoros Prodromos, with his lengthy praises of one's noble ancestors. There are also no synodal precedence lists, similar to those of the days of Alexios I and Manuel I. As a result, when Niketas Choniates introduces, for example, Alexios Kontostephanos or Alexios V Doukas, their origin is impossible to identify<sup>111</sup>. They certainly belonged to the aristocratic elite having their roots in the Komnenos "clan" as evidenced by their names, but no details about their position in the genealogy of the descendants of Alexios I can be determined. Yet the disproportion between 12 and 68 persons in year 1200 is too big to be a coincidence. It is the evidence of the unforeseen consequences caused by earlier dynastic policy.

To conclude, it should be stressed out that combining genealogy, prosopography and statistics can, at least to some extent, provide some insight into the internal composition of the Komnenos "clan". This approach is certainly risky and has to be used very cautiously. It cannot provide precise results regarding the composition of individual family branches within the consanguineous group of the Komnenoi. Too far reaching inquiries are likely to fail, because of the lack of complete data. But through using available information as a representative sample in a specific context, it is possible to outline general trends inside the group in question. It is evident from the data that the results can shed some new light on the crisis of the last twenty years of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Alexios I could not predict obviously how will his policy eventually end. The exponential growth of affine aristocratic families along with the marginalization the "core" Komnenos line, that are visible in the results, contributed to the decline of imperial authority. When the dynasty was discredited and nearly destroyed by Andronikos I Komnenos, one of its lesser branches – the Angeloi – came to power. Unlike the previous rulers they never managed to dominate aristocratic elites. Isaakios II Angelos believed that the title of emperor was given to him by the grace of God. But his weak reign, as Choniates points out, encouraged many to follow the same path that he paved, riding to Hagia Sophia after he killed Stephanos Hagiochristophorites and being spontaneously

<sup>110</sup> Some new families of Norman origin like Petraliphas or Raoul appear as supporters of Alexios III, while some older like Melissenoi, Euphrobenoi or Dalassenoi apparently disappear from the narratives. CHONIATES, p. 451; A. CARILE, *Partitio terrarum imperii Romaniae*, SV 7, 1965, p. 218–219.

<sup>111</sup> CHONIATES, p. 455–456; D. POLEMIS, *The Doukai...*, p. 145–146.

chosen as the new ruler<sup>112</sup>. The adoption by Alexios III of the surname Komnenos did not change the situation. This surname, to which every aristocrat from the former unified “clan” had the right for, did not significantly raise his authority as evidenced from rebellions during his reign. In the end it was the Fourth Crusade that coincidentally, disintegrated the empire, between three related family lines, derived from the same root. Unpredictable processes, like the diminishing of the Komnenos family together with catastrophic events after the death of Manuel I, that both have their imprint in the presented results, are major internal factors of the political crisis of the Byzantine Empire at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Lists of all counted aristocrats**

Two lists annexed below contain all persons that were counted in this study. Since almost all of them are described in Konstantinos Varzos work, they follow the same generational and personal numeration for easier identification. Dates of birth preceded by dash or dates of death followed by it indicate estimation.

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<sup>112</sup> CHONIATES, p. 423.

**"Core" Komnenos descendants of Ioannes Komnenos and Anna Dalassene (1080–1200)**

**Generation 4 (7 persons)**

Maria Komnene 11 (-1047–1136-)  
Isaakios Komnenos 12 (-1050–1102/4)  
Eudokia Komnene 13 (-1052–1136-)  
Teodora Komnene 14 (-1054–1136-)  
Alexios I Komnenos 15 (-1057–1118)  
Adrianos Komnenos 16 (-1060–1105)  
Nikephoros Komnenos 17 (-1062–1136-)

**Generation 5 (23 persons)**

Anna Komnene 19 (-1069–1119-)  
Ioannes Komnenos 23 (1073–1123-)  
Anna Komnene 24 (-1075–1125-)  
Alexios Komnenos 25 (-1077–1127-)  
Maria Komnene 26 (-1080–1130-)  
Konstantinos Komnenos 27 (-1085–1147-)  
Adrianos Komnenos 28 (-1088–1157/64)  
Sophia Komnene 29 (-1094–1130-)  
Eudokia Komnene 30 (-1096–1150-)  
Anna Komnene 32 (1083–1148/55)  
Maria Komnene 33 (1085–1136-)  
Ioannes II Komnenos 34 (1087–1143)  
Andronikos Komnenos 35 (1091–1130/31)  
Isaakios Komnenos 36 (1093–1152-)  
Eudokia Komnene 37 (1094–1129-)  
Teodora Komnene 38 (1096–1136-)  
Manuel Komnenos 39 (1097–1097)  
Zoe Komnene 40 (1098–1098)  
Alexios Komnenos 41 (-1085–1135-)  
Anna Komnene 42 (-1087–1137-)  
Anonyma Komnene 43 (-1089–1105-)  
Anna Komnene 44 (-1085–1135-)  
Alexios Komnenos 45 (-1087–1137-)

**Generation 6 (27 persons)**

Isaakios Komnenos 49 (-1095–1136-)  
Andronikos Komnenos 50 (-1100–1136-)  
Anonym Komnenos 51 (-1105–1136-)  
Anonym Komnenos 52 (-1110–1136-)  
Alexios Komnenos 53 (-1115–1136-)

Ioannes Komnenos 55 (-1096–1120/22)  
Maria Komnene (-1100–1150-)<sup>113</sup>  
Isaakios Komnenos 56 (-1117–1167-)  
Stephanos Komnenos 57 (1127/31–1181-)  
Teodora Komnene 58 (-1110–1160-)  
Anonyma Komnene 59 (-1115–1165-)  
Alexios Komnenos 74 (1106/7–1142)  
Maria Komnene 75 (1106/7–1144/5)  
Andronikos Komnenos 76 (1108/9–1142)  
Anna Komnene 77 (-1110–1160-)  
Isaakios Komnenos 78 (-1113–1154-)  
Teodora Komnene 79 (-1115–1157-)  
Eudokia Komnene 80 (-1116–1166-)  
Manuel I Komnenos 81 (1118–1180)  
Alexios Komnenos 82 (-1117–1123/4)  
Ioannes Doukas 83 (-1119–1166-)  
Maria Komnene (1091–1100-)<sup>114</sup>  
Ioannes Komnenos 84 (-1112–1162-)<sup>115</sup>  
Maria Komnene 85 (-1114–1164-)  
Anna Komnene 86 (-1116–1166-)  
Andronikos I Komnenos 87 (-1118–1185)  
Anonyma Komnene Doukas 97 (-1108–1158-)

**Generation 7 (30 persons)**

Irene Komnene (-1125–1175-)<sup>116</sup>  
Anonyma Komnene 100 (-1118/20–1170-)  
Konstantinos Komnenos 101 (-1155–1205-)  
Anonym Komnenos 102 (-1157–1207-)  
Anonyma Komnenos 103 (-1160–1210-)<sup>117</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Mother of Alexios Branas, cf. K. ΒΑΡΖΟΣ, *Η γενεαλογία...*, vol. II, p. 396.

<sup>114</sup> Daughter of Andronikos Komnenos 35, probably died at infancy, cf. M. ΚΟΥΡΟΥΠΟΥ, J.-F. VANNIER, *Commémoraisons des Comnènes dans le typikon liturgique du monastère du Christ Philanthrope (ms. Panaghia Kamariotissa 29)*, REB 63, 2005, p. 55.

<sup>115</sup> Ioannes Komnenos 84 and his son Suleiman Komnenos are not counted as they were Muslims and lived in the Sultanate of Rum.

<sup>116</sup> Great-granddaughter of *sebastokrator* Isaakios Komnenos 12, cf. K. ΒΑΡΖΟΣ, *Η γενεαλογία...*, vol. II, p. 436.

<sup>117</sup> Both anonymous 102 and 103 are of unknown gender. I assumed that one was male and other was female.

Maria Komnene 123 (-1125–1167)  
 Ioannes Komnenos 128 (1126–1176)  
 Maria Komnene 129 (1127–1177-)  
 Eudokia Komnene 130 (-1129–1179-)  
 Teodora Komnene 131 (-1132–1183)  
 Alexios Komnenos 132 (-1135–1182-)  
 Alexios Komnenos 137 (-1132–1136)  
 Irene Komnene 138 (-1133–1183-)  
 Ioannes Komnenos 139 (-1134–1136-)  
 Anna Komnene 140 (-1137–1187-)  
 Maria Komnene 141 (-1140–1190-)  
 Teodora Komnene 142 (1145–1185-)  
 Eudokia Komnene 143 (1160/4–1202/4)  
 Maria Komnene 153 (1152–1182)  
 Anna Komnene 154 (1156–1160)  
 Alexios II Komnenos 155 (1168–1183)  
 Alexios Komnenos 156 (-1160–1200-)<sup>118</sup>  
 Alexios Komnenos (-1160–1185-)<sup>119</sup>  
 Anonyma Komnene 157 (-1150–1200-)  
 Anonyma Komnene 157a (-1155–1205-)  
 Manuel Komnenos 161 (1145–1185-)  
 Ioannes Komnenos 162 (1159–1185)  
 Maria Komnene 163 (-1166–1216-)  
 Alexios Komnenos 164 (1170–1199-)  
 Irene Komnene 165 (1171–1221-)

### Generation 8 (9 persons)

Maria Komnene 211 (-1150–1200-)  
 Teodora Komnene 212 (-1150–1200-)  
 Manuel Komnenos 213 (-1150–1200-)  
 Andronikos Komnenos 219 (-1150–1200-)  
 Irene Komnene 220 (-1150–1200-)  
 Anonym Komnenos 221 (-1150–1200-)  
 Anonyma Komnene 222 (-1150–1200-)  
 Alexios I Megas Komnenos 243 (-1182–1222)  
 David Megas Komnenos 244 (-1184–1212)

<sup>118</sup> Illegitimate son of Manuel I Komnenos, recognized as the emperor's son, blinded by Andronikos I.

<sup>119</sup> Illegitimate son of Manuel I Komnenos known as Alexios "the cupbearer". Not counted after 1185.

### Materlinear descendants of Ioannes Komneneos and Anna Dalassene (1080–1200)

#### Generation 5 (11 persons)

Anna Taronitissa Komnene 20 (1063/4–1114-)  
 Ioannes Taronites 21 (-1060–1110-)  
 Gregorios Taronites 22 (1075/80–1130-)  
 Ioannes Komnenos 31 (-1070–1120-)  
 Manuel Botaniates 48 (-1090–1140-)  
 Zoe Doukaina Komnene 54 (-1095–1145-)  
 Isaakios Dokeianos 60 (-1109–1127)  
 Irene Dokeianissa Komnene 61 (-1110–1143)  
 Isaakios Komnenos 62 (-1115–1144)  
 Nikephoros Melissenos Komnenos 63 (-1095–1145-)  
 Alexios Melissenos Komnenos 64 (-1100–1150-)

#### Generation 6 (21 persons)

Alexios Komnenos 65 (-1102–1161/7)  
 Ioannes Doukas 66 (-1103–1173-)  
 Irene Doukaina 67 (-1105–1155-)  
 Maria Bryennissa Komnene 68 (1106/8–1158-)  
 Andronikos Komnenos (-1108–1133-)<sup>120</sup>  
 Konstantinos Komnenos (-1108–1133-)<sup>121</sup>  
 Alexios Komnenos 69 (-1102/5–1155-)  
 Andronikos Komnenos 70 (1105/8–1158-)  
 Irene Eufrobene Doukaina Komnene 71 (1101/9–1159-)  
 Anna Eufrobene Komnene 72 (1103/10–1160-)  
 Eudokia Eufrobene Komnene 73 (1104/12–1162-)  
 Anonym Komnenos 88 (-1111–1161-)  
 Anonyma Komnene 89 (-1113–1163-)<sup>122</sup>

<sup>120</sup> Son of Anna Komnene 32, cf. M. KOUROPOU, J.-F. VANNIER, *Commémoraisons...*, p. 49.

<sup>121</sup> Son of Anna Komnene 32, cf. M. KOUROPOU, J.-F. VANNIER, *Commémoraisons...*, p. 50–51.

<sup>122</sup> Both anonymous 88 and 89 are of unknown gender. I assumed that one was a male and the

Ioannes Doukas 90 (1125/7–1200-)  
 Maria Angelina Komnene 91 (1128/30–1180-)  
 Alexios Angelos Komnenos 92 (-1131–1181-)  
 Andronikos Angelos Doukas 93 (-1133–1180-)  
 Eudokia Angelina Komnene 94 (-1134–1184-)  
 Zoe Angelina Komnene 95 (-1135–1185-)  
 Isaakios Angelos Doukas 96 (-1137–1187-)  
 Nikephoros Pakourianos 98 (-1102–1152-)

### Generation 7 (68 persons)

Ioannes Kontostephanos Komnenos 104 (-1128–1178-)  
 Anonym Kontostephanos Komnenos 105 (-1131–1180-)  
 Alexios Kontostephanos Komnenos 106 (-1131–1156)  
 Anonym/-a Kontostephanos Komnenos 107 (1132/35–1156)  
 Anonym/-a Dokeianos 108 (-1125–1125-)  
 Theophilaktos Melissenos 109 (-1140–1200-)  
 Michael Melissenos 110 (-1130–1180-)  
 Nikolaos Melissenos 111 (-1130–1180-)  
 David Komnenos 112 (-1135–1201-)  
 Andronikos Komnenos 113 (-1137–1201-)  
 Nikephoros Komnenos 114 (-1125–1144-)  
 Nikephoros Komnenos 115 (-1144–1173)  
 Andronikos Komnenos Doukas 116 (-1148–1198-)  
 Alexios Komnenos Doukas 117 (-1150–1200-)  
 Manuel Komnenos 118 (-1160–1210-)  
 Alexios Doukas 119 (-1120–1170-)  
 Nikephoros Eufrobenos Komnenos 120 (-1125–1175-)  
 Maria Eufrobene Komnene 121 (-1128–1178-)  
 Anonyma Komnene 122 (1116/25–1153-)  
 Ioannes Bryennios Komnenos Katakalon 122a (-1127–1147)  
 Anonym Komnenos 122b (1119/30–1180-)  
 Andronikos Komnenos 124 (-1124–1174-)  
 Alexios Komnenos 125 (1127/30–1180-)  
 Anna Komnene 126 (-1132–1182-)  
 Teodora Komnene 127 (-1136–1186-)  
 Ioannes Kontostephanos Komnenos 133 (-1128–1176/82)  
 Alexios Kontostephanos Komnenos 134 (-1130–1176)  
 Andronikos Kontostephanos Komnenos 135 (-1132–1195-)  
 Irene Kontostephanina Komnene 136 (-1135–1185-)  
 Alexios Komnenos 144 (-1131–1155/7)  
 Irene Komnene 145 (-1132–1182-)  
 Maria Komnene 146 (-1133–1183-)  
 Eudokia Komnene 146a (-1142–1192-)  
 Ioannes Vatatzes Komnenos 147 (-1132–1182)  
 Andronikos Vatatzes Komnenos 148 (-1133–1176)  
 Anna Vatatzaina Komnene 149 (-1136–1186-)  
 Teodora Vatatzaina Komnene 150 (-1137–1185-)  
 Isaakios Vatatzes Komnenos 151 (-1139–1189-)  
 Alexios Vatatzes Komnenos 152 (-1140–1190-)  
 Manuel Bryennios Komnenos 159 (-1145–1195-)  
 Isaakios Komnenos 160 (-1140–1190-)  
 Isaakios Angelos 166 (-1155–1203)  
 Alexios Angelos Doukas 167 (-1160–1210-)  
 Theodoros Angelos Komnenos Doukas 168 (1180/5–1253-)  
 Manuel Angelos Komnenos Doukas 169 (1186/8–1241)  
 Konstantinos Komnenos Doukas 170 (-1172–1242-)  
 Anonyma Angelina Komnene Doukaina 171 (-1178–1228-)  
 Anonyma Angelina Komnene Doukaina 172 (1180/8–1238-)

other female. It is possible that one of them was named Alexios, cf. M. KOUROPOU, J.-F. VAN NIER, *Commémoraisons...*, p. 59.

- Anonyma Angelina Komnene Doukaina 173 (-1190–1240-)  
 Michael I (Angelos) Komnenos Doukas 174 (-1170–1215-)  
 Manuel Kamytzes Komnenos Doukas Angelos 175 (-1150–1202-)  
 Anonym/a Kamytzes 176 (1152/5–1205-)  
 Michael Angelos 177 (1150/5–1205-)  
 Konstantinos Angelos Komnenos 178 (-1151–1199-)  
 Ioannes Angelos 179 (-1152–1222-)  
 Alexios III Angelos Komnenos 180 (-1153–1211)  
 Michael Angelos 181 (-1154–1204-)  
 Theodoros Angelos 182 (-1155–1199-)  
 Isaakios II Angelos 183 (1156–1204)  
 Irene Angelina 184 (-1154–1204-)  
 Teodora Angelina 185 (-1160–1210-)  
 Anonym Synadenos Komnenos 186 (-1170–1220-)  
 Anonym/a Synadenos Komnenos 187 (1151/69–1180-)  
 Anonym/a Synadenos Komnenos 188 (1152/68–1218-)  
 Konstantinos Angelos Doukas 189 (-1170–1220-)  
 Manuel Angelos 189a (-1166–1216-)  
 Anonyma Angelina Doukaina 190 (-1168–1218-)  
 Anonyma Angelina Doukaina 190a (-1164–1214-)
- Generation 8 (64 persons)**  
 Georgios Paleologos Doukas Komnenos 191 (-1125–1168-)  
 Konstantinos Paleologos Doukas Komnenos 192 (-1128–1178-)  
 Anonyma Paleologina Doukaina Komnene 193 (-1130–1180-)  
 Gregorios Pakourianos 194 (-1125–1175-)  
 Georgios Pakourianos 195 (-1128–1178-)  
 Konstantinos Botaniates Kalamanos Doukas Komnenos 196 (-1130–1180-)
- Anonym Kontostephanos Komnenos 197 (-1150–1200-)  
 Anonym/-a Kontostephanos Komnenos 198 (-1150–1200-)  
 Anonym/-a Kontostephanos Komnenos 199 (-1150–1200-)  
 Andronikos Kontostephanos Komnenos 200 (-1150–1200-)  
 Anonym/-a Kontostephanos Komnenos 201 (-1150–1200-)  
 Anonym Melissenos Komnenos 202 (-1160–1210-)  
 Alexios Komnenos 203 (-1160–1210-)  
 Ioannes Doukas 204 (-1160–1210-)  
 Anonym Komnenos 205 (-1162–1212-)  
 Anonym Komnenos 206 (-1164–1214-)  
 Anonyma Paleologina Bryennissa Komnene Doukaina 206a (-1135–1185-)  
 Anonyma Paleologina Bryennissa Komnene Doukaina 206b (-1135–1185-)  
 Anonym Axouch Komnenos 207 (-1152–1202-)  
 Ioannes Axouch Komnenos 208 (-1150–1201)  
 Anonym Axouch Komnenos 209 (1154–1204-)  
 Nikephoros Petralifas Komnenos 210 (-1150–1200-)  
 Irene Kantakouzene Komnene 214 (-1150–1200-)  
 Manuel Kantakouzenos Komnenos 215 (-1150–1200-)  
 Manuel Gabras Komnenos 216 (-1165–1215-)  
 Stephanos Kontostephanos Komnenos 223 (-1150–1200-)  
 Ioannes Kontostephanos Komnenos 224 (-1152–1202-)  
 Stephanos Kontostephanos Komnenos 225 (-1150–1200-)  
 Manuel Kontostephanos Komnenos 226 (-1152–1202-)  
 Isaakios Kontostephanos Komnenos 227 (-1152–1202-)

- Alexios Kontostephanos Komnenos 228 (-1152–1202-)<sup>123</sup>
- Isaakios Komnenos Doukas 229 (-1155–1195/6)
- Isaakios Doukas 230 (-1155–1205-)
- Anonym Doukas Komnenos 231 (-1155–1205-)
- Anonym/a Anemas Komnenos Doukas 233 (-1150–1200-)
- Teodora Komnene 234 (-1150–1200-)
- Manuel Styppeiotes Komnenos 234a (-1160–1210-)
- Manuel Komnenos 235 (-1150–1200-)
- Alexios Komnenos 236 (-1150–1200-)
- Alexios Komnenos 237 (-1150–1200-)
- Eudokia Branissa Komnene 238 (-1168–1218-)
- Theodoros Branas Komnenos 239 (-1170–1230-)
- Isaakios Vatatzes Komnenos 240 (-1160–1210-)
- Ioannes Kantakouzenos Angelos Komnenos 250 (-1198–1248-)
- Anonyma Kamytzeina Angelina Komnene Doukas 256 (-1170–1220-)
- Ioannes Kamytzes Angelos Komnenos Doukas 257 (-1170–1220-)
- Andronikos Angelos Komnenos 258 (-1170–1220-)
- Andronikos Angelos Komnenos 259 (-1170–1220-)
- Irene Angelina Komnene 260 (-1173–1223-)
- Anna Angelina Komnene 261 (-1176–1212-)
- Eudokia Angelina Komnene 262 (-1173–1211-)
- Anonym Angelos Komnenos 263 (-1175–1225-)
- Euphrosine Angelina 264 (-1190–1253-)
- Irene Angelina 265 (-1181–1208)
- Alexios IV Angelos 266 (-1182–1204)
- Manuel Angelos 267 (-1195–1212)
- Ioannes Angelos 268 (-1193–1259)
- Anonym Kantakouzenos Angelos 269 (-1185–1235-)
- Anonym Synadenos Tarchaneiotos Komnenos 270 (-1190–1240-)
- Anonyma Synadeina Tarchaneiotissa Komnene 271 (-1190–1240-)
- Isaakios Vatatzes Doukas 272 (-1190–1240-)
- Anonym Vatatzes Doukas 273 (-1190–1240-)
- Ioannes III Doukas Vatatzes 274 (-1191–1252)
- Alexios Paleologos Komnenos 290 (-1170–1220-)

<sup>123</sup> It is unknown whom of the four sons of Andronikos Kontostephanos (numbers 224–228) were blinded by Andronikos I. Only one is counted after 1180.

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**Abstract.** The fall of imperial authority and the decline of the Byzantine state at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century has its cause not only in foreign policy but also, to a large extent, in the family policy of the Komnenoi emperors. The "clan" system introduced during Alexios I' reign and continued by his successors, connected the aristocratic elites with the imperial family by blood ties. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the composition of this group, linked by a complicated marriage network, underwent a significant transformation, which could be one of the most important factors of the later crisis. The purpose of this paper is twofold. First: distinguishing two groups of aristocrats within the Komnenos "clan" i.e. "core" Komnenos family and affine families. Second: determining their approximate number during the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

Relatively large amount of data about aristocratic elites of that period allows for statistical approach. Written sources and sigillography of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Byzantium is rich in information about high ranking persons. In addition, the Komnenos era has been thoroughly described in prosopographical works. This allows for counting the number of aristocrats and thus obtaining reliable results. Such an approach is not free from estimation and probability. However, the amount of information is sufficient enough to show the overall trends visible in the composition of the elites associated with the Komnenoi.

The result of this study is a table that shows the tendency of the weakening of the Komnenos family in face of a constantly growing group of affine aristocratic families. This sheds a new light on the progressive collapse of the imperial authority after the death of Manuel I Komnenos, the key role of destructive actions of Andronikos I, and the weakness of the Angelos dynasty.

**Keywords:** Byzantine aristocracy, Komnenos, genealogy, statistics, prosopography, imperial authority, twelfth century

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