



## Summary :

The Bourtzes lineage from Asia Minor, which was of Armenian or Arab origin, emerged in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, when members of the family appear as high-ranking military officials. Marital alliance with the Melissenos lineage was also important to the ascent of the Bourtzes family. The lineage gradually declines towards the late 11<sup>th</sup> century, and by the 13<sup>th</sup> century they had lost their power and significance.

## Main Role

military officials

## 1. General

The Bourtzes lineage from Asia Minor was either of Armenian or of Arab origin and entered the limelight in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, when the Byzantine Empire was at the peak of its power and was expanding to the East. The members of the family distinguished themselves in their military careers. Of great importance to their ascent was their marital alliance with the [Melissenos](#) lineage; this allowed the Bourtzes family to settle in European territories of the Empire after the disastrous outcome of the [battle of Mantzikert in 1071](#), and thus to survive the conquest of Asia Minor by the [Seljuk Turks](#) inaugurated by their victory at Matzikert. The prestige and the power of the Bourtzes lineage gradually declines from the late 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

## 2. Origins and history of the family

Members of the Bourtzes family distinguished themselves through military posts in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, when the Byzantine Empire was expanding to the East and a large number of soldiers came were drawn into Byzantine territories and joined the imperial army. However, the sources are not clear on the origins of the family. They were presumably Armenians<sup>1</sup> or Arabs,<sup>2</sup> who settled in imperial territory after they entered the service of the Byzantine emperor. We know that the lineage had ties with two regions, where they had landed property: the [theme of Anatolikon](#), where the family's presence is attested until the late 11<sup>th</sup> century, and the wider area of [Antioch on the Orontes](#), where their presence is attested until the seventh decade of the 11th century.

Evidence on the first known members of the Bourtzes family suggest that their way up to the upper levels of the Byzantine society was open from early on. Although they ascended rapidly, mainly thanks to their military careers, the family would not have climbed up to the upper levels of the Byzantine aristocracy, had it been only for its members military accomplishments in the battlefield. From the late 10<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 11th c., members of the Bourtzes family found themselves in more significant positions than their kinsmen mentioned in subsequent periods, when social position was defined by the degree of relation to the Emperor.

## 3. The Bourtzes family in the second half of the 10th c. and the early 11th c.

One of the most distinguished members of the family, the military official [Michael Bourtzes](#), is actually considered as the founder of the family. His ascent to the military hierarchy took place in the years of [Nikephoros II Phokas](#) (963-969), [John I Tzimiskes](#) (969-976) and [Basil II](#) (976-1025). He must have been a high-ranking official from quite early, since he had been awarded the title of [patrikos](#) already from the years of Nikephoros II. The name of Michael Bourtzes is associated with the capture of Antioch in 969, when he was among the commanders of the expedition.

Michael Bourtzes participated in the overthrowing of Nikephoros II (963-969), which probably earned the favor of John I Tzimiskes (969-976), under whose reign he allegedly served as [dux of Antioch](#). His exceptional military successes helped his further ascent in the years of Basil II (976-1025), although he temporarily supported the usurper [Bardas Skleros](#). Basil II honoured him with the title of [magistros](#) and entrusted him with the command of Antioch. Therefore, the first known Bourtzes held this office twice.<sup>3</sup>

Basil II counted on other members of the Bourtzes lineage as well. Patrikos Constantine Bourtzes, who probably was one of Basil II's closest associates, is mentioned in the sources. Constantine was blinded by Constantine IX Monomachos (1025-1028) at the beginning of the latter's reign.<sup>4</sup>

## 4. Participation in the rebellions against imperial power in the 11th century

Some members of the Bourtzes family participated actively in the movements against the imperial power. However, it should be noted that during those movements (conspiracies and revolts) the Bourtzes lineage never laid claims to the throne, but supported the usurpers, who were indisputably more distinguished [aristocrats](#) than them. In 977, Michael Bourtzes provided personal support to Bardas Skleros, while in 1029 three members of the third generation of the family, Michael, Theognostos and Samuel, participated in the unsuccessful conspiracy of [Constantine Diogenes](#) against Romanos III [Argyros](#) (1028-1034). Although the titles and offices held before 1029 by the grandsons of the founder, Michael Bourtzes, are not known, it may be assumed that they were military officials.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, in 1057, the [vestarches](#) Michael Bourtzes, one of the «[archontes](#)» of the [theme](#) of Anatolikon, participated together with the Komnenos, [Doukas](#), [Argyros](#), [Skleros](#), [Botaneiates](#) and other families of the military aristocracy in the [revolt](#) staged by the supporters of the subsequent Emperor [Isaac I Komnenos](#) (1057-1059).<sup>6</sup>

## 5. The alliance with the Melissenos family

The Bourtzes Family managed to be admitted to the upper levels of the Byzantine aristocracy and maintained this position for a long time thanks to their alliance with the Melissenos family. The father of [caesar Nikephoros Melissenos](#), the brother-in-law of [Alexios I Komnenos](#) (1081-1118), was a member of the Bourtzes family.<sup>7</sup> The fact that Nikephoros Bourtzes kept his mother's surname, Melissenos, clearly shows the decline of the status and the prestige of the Bourtzes lineage.

The alliance with the Melissenos family, one of the oldest Byzantine families, possibly offered the Bourtzes lineage the opportunity to survive after the Muslim expansion in Asia Minor. In the years of Alexios I Komnenos, a branch of the family migrated to the European territories of the Empire. When Nikephoros Melissenos abandoned his landed property in Asia Minor, he was offered estates in the area of Thessaloniki. He soon granted part of this estates to his relatives, the Bourtzes family.<sup>8</sup> The fact that their lost domains were replaced thanks to the Melissenoi possibly suggests the establishment of accordingly hierarchical relations between the Bourtzes and the notable Melissenos families, and it may have marked a loss of prestige for the Bourtzes lineage.

## 6. The decline of the family in the late 11th century

The decline of the family must have begun towards the late 11<sup>th</sup> century, when they survived thanks to the Melissenos family, given that their founder was once in the same hierarchical position as the members of the Melissenos lineage in his days, and also that another Bourtzes had participated in the struggle for imperial power and was a distinguished figure in the Byzantine society in 1057.

The Bourtzes family lost prestige mainly due to two reasons. First, the family were not directly related to the Komnenian dynasty. Therefore, the highest-ranking administrative offices were not easily accessible to them, because they had been exclusively held by relatives of the imperial family, according to the imperial policy pursued already from the years of Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118). Secondly, in the course of time the Bourtzes family gradually withdrew from the high-ranking military posts that had allowed them to ascend the social hierarchy back in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

## 7. The family in the 12th and 13th centuries

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century the Bourtzes lineage were losing its power. However, some of its members were important dignitaries in that period. Most important among them were George Bourtzes, who became metropolitan of Athens in 1153 (d. 1160), and his brother Helias/Ilias, commander of the guard at the imperial treasury.<sup>9</sup> Helias/Ilias Bourtzes was married to a scion of the Skleros family.



The early 13<sup>th</sup>-century sources mention individuals under the family name Bourtzes, but it is difficult to determine their relation to the lineage. In subsequent periods, the Bourtzes family appeared very rarely in the sources. These are occasional references, implying that the family had already lost its prestige.<sup>10</sup>

1. See Charanis, P., *The Armenians in the Byzantine Empire* (Lisboa 1963), p. 45. The assumptions about the Armenia origins of the Bourtzes family are less easily accepted by Adontz, N., *Études arméno-byzantines* (Lisbonne 1965), p. 176, and Každan, A., *Armjane v sostave gospodstvujúščego klassa vizantijskoj imperii XI-XII vv.* (Erevan 1975), p. 85.
2. See Laurent, V., "La chronologie des gouverneurs d' Antioche sous la seconde domination byzantine", *Mélanges de l' Université Saint-Joseph* 38 (1962), p. 230 n. 4; see also Cheynet, J.-C., "La famille Bourtzes", in Cheynet, J.-C. – Vannier, J.F., *Études prosopographiques* (Byzantina Sorbonensia 5, Paris 1986), p. 16, who stresses that the sources do not help in the direction of a permanent answer to this question.
3. Cheynet, J.-C., *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance 963-1210* (Paris 1990), p. 225.
4. Thurn, I. (ed.), *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum* (CFHB 5, Berlin – New York 1973), p. 371.
5. According to Cheynet, J.-C., "La famille Bourtzes", in Cheynet, J.-C. – Vannier, J.F., *Études prosopographiques* (Byzantina Sorbonensia 5, Paris 1986), pp. 32-33, 34-35, the seals of Michael Bourtzes indicated that he was a *strategos* and a *magister militum*. The same writer identifies Samuel Bourtzes with the *patrikios* who commanded the infantry during the battle against the Pechenegs in 1050, in the years of Constantine IX Monomachos (1042-1055).
6. Thurn, I. (ed.), *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum* (CFHB 5, Berlin – New York 1973), p. 488. Cheynet identifies the bestarches Michael Bourtzes of 1057 with the follower of Constantine Diogenes of 1029; see Cheynet, J.-C., "La famille Bourtzes", in Cheynet, J.-C. – Vannier, J.F., *Études prosopographiques* (Byzantina Sorbonensia 5, Paris 1986), p. 33, n. 43. Každan, A., *Armjane v sostave gospodstvujúščego klassa vizantijskoj imperii XI-XII vv.* (Erevan 1975), p. 86, believes they were two different people.
7. Gautier, P. (ed.), *Nicéphori Bryennii historiarum libri quattuor* (CFHB 9, Series Bruxellensis, Bruxelles 1975), 85, 239.
8. The estates granted by caesar Nikephoros Melissenos to his relative Samuel Bourtzes and later inherited by his descendants are reported in a 1117 document kept at the archives of the Docheiariou Monastery on Mount Athos; see Archives de l' Athos XIII, *Actes de Docheiariou*, Oikonomides, N. (ed.) (Paris 1984), acte no 4. The presence of the Bourtzes family in Thessaloniki is attested in a document of the Iberon Monastery dated 1104; see Archives de l' Athos XVI, *Actes d' Iviron II, du milieu du XIe siècle à 1204*, Lefort, J. et al. (eds) (Paris 1990), acte no 52. It is likely that the Bourtzes family acquired estates in the said western parts of the Empire before 1101, in the years of Alexios I Komnenos.
9. See Cheynet, J.-C., "La famille Bourtzes", in Cheynet, J.-C. – Vannier, J.F., *Études prosopographiques* (Byzantina Sorbonensia 5, Paris 1986), pp. 52-53.
10. *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit*, fasz. 2, Trapp, E. et al. (eds) (Wien 1977), no. 3110-3111.

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Webiography :

	Basil II and the Governance of ... - Google Αναζήτηση Βιβλίων <a href="http://books.google.com/books?id=0rIFldMSRkC&amp;pg=PA338&amp;pg=PA338&amp;dq=Bourtzes&amp;source=web&amp;ots=txmxyq8h2x&amp;sig=eHR2aRC_ur6EldJrTOscYq6dA&amp;hl=el&amp;sa=X&amp;oi=book_result&amp;resnum=4&amp;ct=result#PPA337,M1">http://books.google.com/books?id=0rIFldMSRkC&amp;pg=PA338&amp;pg=PA338&amp;dq=Bourtzes&amp;source=web&amp;ots=txmxyq8h2x&amp;sig=eHR2aRC_ur6EldJrTOscYq6dA&amp;hl=el&amp;sa=X&amp;oi=book_result&amp;resnum=4&amp;ct=result#PPA337,M1</a>
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Glossary :

	archon
	Term that designates a governor in general. When it is not used in a technical sense, it denotes members of the aristocracy, high officers of the byzantine empire and it is even used for independent princes.
	caesar
	In the Roman Empire the title of Caesar was given to the Emperor. From the reign of Diocletian (284-305) on this title was conferred on the young co-emperor. This was also the highest title on the hierarchy of the Byzantine court. In the 8th c. the title of Caesar was usually given to the successor of the throne. In the late 11th c. this office was downgraded and from the 14th c. on it was mainly conferred on foreign princes.
	doukas (lat. dux)
	Antiquity: Roman military commander who, in some provinces, combined military and civil functions. Byzantium: a higher military officer. From the second half of the 10th c. the title indicates the military commander of a larger district. After the 12th c., doukes were called the governors of small themes.
	magistros
	Higher office that Philotheos in his Kletorologion places above the anhypatos. This title lost its importance from the 10th century and gradually disappeared - most probably in the middle of the 12th century.



#### patrikios

(from lat. *patricius*) Higher title of honour, placed, according to the "*Tactika*" of the 9th and the 10th centuries, between *anthypatos* and *protospatharios*. It was given to the most important governors and generals. Gradually, however, it fell into disuse and from the 12th century did not exist any more.

#### vestarches

Byzantine honorary title, which is first mentioned in the 10<sup>th</sup> c. *Taktikon of Escorial*. Originally the title was exclusively bestowed upon eunuchs, but from the fifth decade of the 11<sup>th</sup> c. it was granted to non-eunuchs as well. During the 11<sup>th</sup> c. the title was conferred to various distinguished generals. After the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> c. the title seems to have disappeared.

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#### Chronological Table

10<sup>th</sup> c.: Emergence of the Bourtzes Family

969: Antioch on the Orontes comes again under the Byzantine rule. The first known member of the Bourtzes family, Michael, was one of the military commanders in that expedition

977: The usurper Bardas Skleros joins Michael Bourtzes

1029: Unsuccessful rebellion of Constantine Diogenes against Romanos III Argyros. Among his partners were the grandsons of Michael Bourtzes, Michael, Theognostes and Samuel Bourtzes

1057: Isaac Komnenos rebels. Among his followers is the *vestarches* Michael Bourtzes

first half of 11<sup>th</sup> c.: Marital alliance between the Bourtzes and the Melissenos families

1071: Battle of Manzikert; the Seljuks capture Asia Minor

late 11<sup>th</sup> or early 12<sup>th</sup> c.: A branch of the Bourtzes family emigrates from the eastern part of the empire to the area of Thessaloniki, in estates granted by caesar Nikephoros Melissenos

1153-1160: George Bourtzes becomes metropolitan of Athens

12<sup>th</sup> c.: The Bourtzes lineage gradually decline

after the 13<sup>th</sup> c.: The Bourtzes family has lost its prestige

#### Auxiliary Catalogs

##### Prominent members of the Bourtzes family

Michael Bourtzes: The founder, born ca. 930/935, died after 996.

Constantine Bourtzes: Probably active during the years of Basil II Bulgaroctonus (976-1025) and died after 1026.

Michael Bourtzes: Grandson of Michael, the founder of the family. He was probably active in the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

Theognostes Bourtzes: Grandson of Michael, the founder of the family. He was probably active in the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

Samuel Bourtzes: Grandson of Michael, the founder of the family. He was probably active in the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

(anonymous) Bourtzes: He was probably active in the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century; his son was caesar Nikephoros Melissenos.

Samuel Bourtzes: He was probably active in the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. He was granted landed property in Macedonia by caesar Nikephoros Melissenos and died before 1117.

George Bourtzes: He was active in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Metropolitan of Athens, died in 1160.

Helias/Ilias Bourtzes: He was active in the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century.