



Summary :

An official whose personality dominated politics for the greater part of the eleventh century. He was the only brother of emperor Constantine X Doukas (1059-1067) and in 1057 he supported the coup that overthrew Michael VI (1056-1057) and elevated Isaakios I Komnenos (1057-1059) to the imperial throne. During the reign of Constantine X Doukas he was honored with the title of *caesar*. In 1067 he supported the rise of Romanos IV Diogenes to the throne, while in 1071 he instigated another coup that proclaimed Michael VII Doukas emperor. In 1073, commanding an army, he unsuccessfully faced the Frankish rebel Ursel de Bailleul near Dorylaion, while in 1081 he contributed to the rise of Alexios I Komnenos to the throne.

Date and Place of Birth

first quarter of eleventh c., place unknown

Date and Place of Death

ca. 1088, probably Constantinople

Main Role

Official

1. Family

The **caesar** John Doukas was one of the most important members of the family of [Doukai](#) and his personality dominates the greater part of the eleventh century. John was the only brother of the emperor [Constantine X Doukas](#) (1059-1067) and therefore a son, possibly the younger, of [Andronikos Doukas](#).

The first years of John's life are a complete blank, since all available information dates from the period after 1057. John played a curious and suspicious part during the troubled and unstable period between 1057 and 1081, influencing state politics until the end of his life in the first years of the reign of [Alexios I Komnenos](#) (1081-1118). Furthermore, like all members of his family he was quite wealthy, possessing vast tracts of land in Thrace and [Bithynia](#). Finally, it is noteworthy that he had an intimate friendship with one of the foremost scholars of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, [Michael Psellos](#), of whom indeed it is possible that he was a financial backer.¹

2. Career

There is sufficient evidence to indicate that John had followed a career in the army, although because of his close ties to the palace he seems never to have undertaken any significant military expeditions. In any case, however, his military career continued into the reign of his brother Constantine, but there is no evidence to show that it was particularly brilliant. At any rate, in 1057 John was among the leading [military officials](#) from Asia Minor who unsuccessfully petitioned the emperor Michael VI (1056-1057) for further honors and privileges. The same [military elite](#) supported the coup of [Isaac Komnenos](#) (1057-1059), which proclaimed the new emperor.² Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that at the time John was holding a position of authority on the eastern frontier. His career evolved rapidly when his brother ascended the throne and appointed him as his trusted counselor during the period 1059-1067. Indeed, John's position in the palace was such that it was he who was responsible for discovering the conspiracy against his brother in 1061.³ As a token of gratitude, but also of the special partiality of Constantine towards his brother, he honored him with the rank of *caesar*, a title by which John is constantly referred to in the work of Byzantine historians; also, in the administrative sector Constantine, during the first years of his reign, entrusted John with a position in [Antioch](#).

But the caesar's personality came to the fore after the death of his brother in 1067. It was then that John took on the responsibility for the empire's affairs, in fact after the exhortations of his dying brother. However, it is peculiar that, although the caesar agreed to swear an oath to his brother that he would protect the latter's legitimate heirs, nevertheless in 1067 he acquiesced to [Romanos IV Diogenes](#) ascending the throne. A possible explanation is that John was deceived or surprised by the empress Eudokia



Makrembolitissa and, in order not to be left out of the decision-making process, chose to accept the usurper Diogenes.

However, John Doukas never disguised his enmity towards the new emperor, whom he considered dangerous both to the dynasty and to himself. A rift soon appeared between the two men, resulting in John finding himself in virtual exile to his estates in Bithynia. He remained there until the [Mantzikert debacle \(1071\)](#), of which he was informed by his elder son, Andronikos, commander of the Byzantine army's rearguard, which had left the battlefield at the most critical juncture, abandoning Romanos to his fate.

After the disaster and the confusion that engulfed the capital, Eudokia recalled John to Constantinople where, in conjunction with Psellos, he went ahead with a palace coup that forced the empress to retire to a monastery and proclaimed his nephew Michael VII Doukas (1071-1078) emperor.⁴ The situation was under the complete control of the party of the Doukai, who, upon receiving information that Diogenes had been released by the sultan and was marching against the capital, reacted with lightning speed. John sent a field army under his younger son, Constantine, who defeated Romanos, but failed to capture him. A new army set out from the capital, this time led by Andronikos, the *caesar* John's eldest son. A battle took place near [Tarsus](#) in [Cilicia](#), where Diogenes was defeated once more and forced to surrender after a siege. On the return march to Constantinople, an order from the *caesar* arrived for the blinding of Romanos. After the complete elimination of Diogenes, *caesar* John Doukas seemed to be in full control, but that was an illusion. Events would prove how insignificant the power of the government in Constantinople was.⁵

3. The fall of John Doukas

Keeping the emperor Michael VII under his complete influence, John Doukas assumed that he was the absolute master of the power play and developments in the capital. Events, however, belied his expectations. It was he who made the first mistake, when he brought to the palace the eunuch Nikephoros, known as [Nikephoritzes](#). The latter travelled rapidly up the hierarchy to receive the post of [logothetes tou dromou](#), while soon he placed the emperor himself under his influence. Indeed, the sway of Nikephoritzes over Michael was such that the latter did not hesitate to sacrifice his uncle, the *caesar* John, Psellos and John, bishop of [Side](#), to the demands of the eunuch.

The *caesar* tried to react and rid himself of Nikephoritzes, but to no avail, the result being that for a second time he retired to his estates in Bithynia. From there he will be recalled by the emperor himself in 1073, on the advice of Nikephoritzes, in order to face, in command of an army, the Frankish rebel [Russel de Bailleul](#). John had no choice but to obey. So he traversed [Asia Minor](#) with his army, crossed the Bithynian mountain range and came across the rebels' camp in the vicinity of the sources of the river Sangarios near [Dorylaeum](#). In the battle that followed, Ursel de Bailleul was victorious thanks to the treachery of a Frankish detachment that had been sent along with the Byzantine army, as well as because of the unexpected withdrawal of the army's rearguard, under the command of [Nikephoros Botaneiates](#), from the field of battle.⁶

The *caesar* John fell into the hands of the rebels. The whole of northern Asia Minor was now under the control of Ursel de Bailleul. The latter advanced towards Constantinople in order to obtain recognition of his possessions by emperor Michael VII Doukas. The emperor refused his terms and so Ursel de Bailleul proclaimed the captive *caesar* John Doukas emperor. This was a challenge to imperial dignity. However, since the government lacked any more troops, they charged the Seljuks with facing the rebellious Norman. The Seljuks defeated the Franks and captured both Ursel de Bailleul and John Doukas.⁷

The emperor immediately ransomed the latter, because he feared that perhaps John might come to terms with the Seljuks and question Michael's authority anew. Taking certain precautions, John was tonsured a monk and returned to Constantinople in order to retire from there to his estates in Thrace. He will step into the limelight once more when he will help Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118) succeed in his coup in 1081 and unite under the new administration the two families of Doukai and Komnenoi.⁸

Thus came to an end the course of the *caesar* John Doukas, a person that exemplified in the most poignant fashion the troubled era from the death of Basil II to the rise of the Komnenoi to the throne. A personality that was active in the second half of the eleventh century, undermined the efforts of Romanos IV Diogenes, elbowed out the empress Eudokia, encouraged the marriage of Botaneiates to Maria of Alania and, finally, opened the gates of the capital to the Komnenoi, essentially founding a new dynasty.⁹



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2. Ιωάννης Ζωναράς, *Επιτομή Ιστοριών*, Büttner-Wobst, Th. (ed.), *Ioannis Zonarae Epitomae Historiarum* (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1841-1897), pp. 679-680.
3. Μιχαήλ Ατταλειάτης, *Ιστορία α*, Bekker, I. (ed.), *Michaelis Attaliothae Historia* (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1853), pp. 72-75.
4. Μιχαήλ Ψελλός, *Χρονογραφία*, trans. Σιδέρη, Α. (Athens 1997), p. 396; Μιχαήλ Ατταλειάτης, *Ιστορία*, Bekker, I. (ed.), *Michaelis Attaliothae Historia* (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1853), pp. 168-170; Polemis, D. I., *The Doukai: A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (University of London Historical Studies 22, London 1968), pp. 36-37.
5. Angold, M., *The Byzantine Empire 1025-1204. A Political History* (London 1997), pp. 194-195.
6. Μιχαήλ Ατταλειάτης, *Ιστορία α*, Bekker, I. (ed.), *Michaelis Attaliothae Historia* (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1853), pp. 187-189. Angold, M., *The Byzantine Empire 1025-1204. A Political History* (London 1997), p. 195. Polemis, D. I., *The Doukai: A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (University of London Historical Studies 22, London 1968), p. 38.
7. Angold, M., *The Byzantine Empire 1025-1204. A Political History* (London 1997), p. 196.
8. Polemis, D. I., *The Doukai: A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (University of London Historical Studies 22, London 1968), pp. 39-41.
9. Leib, B., "Jean Doukas, César et moine son jeu politique à Byzance de 1067 à 1081", *Analecta Bollandiana* 68 (1950), pp. 178-179.

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Glossary :

	caesar
In the Roman Empire the title of Caesar was given to the Emperor. From the reign of Diocletian (284-305) on this title was conferred on the young co-emperor. This was also the highest title on the hierarchy of the Byzantine court. In the 8th c. the title of Caesar was usually given to the successor of the throne. In the late 11th c. this office was downgraded and from the 14th c. on it was mainly conferred on foreign princes.	
	logothetes tou dromou
Administrative Byzantine title. Initially official in charge of the public post. From the 7th C he acquired a new role and his responsibilities included ceremonial duties, protection of emperor, general supervision of diplomatic relations and collection of political information.	

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Quotations

An flattering portrait of John Doukas by Michael Psellos:

Τί ἂν τις εἶποι περὶ τοῦ ἀνδρός τούτου, ὥστε ἐξιῶσαι τοὺς λόγους ταῖς τῶν ἡθῶν ἀγλαΐαις καὶ ταῖς τῆς ψυχῆς ἀρεταῖς; παντοδαπὸν γὰρ οὗτος χρῆμα καὶ οἷον κάλλιστον τῷ βίῳ ἀνάθημα, καὶ τεθέαμαι, οὕτω προσητάτην ἐνδείκνυται τὴν ψυχὴν, ὡς εἰκάζεσθαι θρέμματι ἐλαίου ἀψοφητὶ θρέοντος. Τὰ μὲν οὖν ἐς στρατηγίαν κατὰ τοὺς ἀρχαίους ἐκείνους καὶ πολυῦμνήτους Καίσαρας, καὶ ὅποσα τετολμήκασιν ἅδη καὶ κατορθώκασιν Ἀδριανοὶ καὶ Τραϊανοὶ καὶ ὁ τῆς αὐτῆς ζυμμορίας, ἐκείνοις <συν>ελήλυθε πρὸς τὴν τοιαύτην ἐπιστήμην, οὐκ ἀπὸ ταυτομάτου, οὐδὲ τυχαίως, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ τῶν τακτικῶν βιβλίων καὶ στρατηγικῶν καὶ πολιορκητικῶν καὶ περὶ ὄσων οἱ περὶ Αἰλιανὸν καὶ Ἀπολλόδωρον συγγεγράφασιν· ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν περὶ τὴν στρατηγίαν τοιοῦτος, ἐλάττων δὲ τὰ πολιτικά καὶ ὅσα ἐς δίκας φέρει καὶ τὰ δημόσια; πολλοῦ γε καὶ δεῖ· ξυρὸς γὰρ εἰς ἀκόνην πρὸς πάντα τὰ κάλλιστα, τοῦτο δὴ τὸ παρομιῶδες· ἀλλ' ἐς ὀργὴν πρόχειρος; οὐ μὲν οὖν, εἰ μὴ ὅσον ἐνδείξασθαι· ἀλλὰ μνησικακῆσαι δεινός; ἀλλὰ τοῦτο δὴ τὸ μέρος καὶ μᾶλλον θαυμάσιος καὶ οἷος οὐκ ἄλλος· ἀλλὰ τὴν γλῶτταν πρόχειρος, ἢ πρὸς



τὸν ἀδελφὸν πρότερον καὶ τὸν ἀνεψιὸν ὕστερον τόλμαν ἔχων ἢ παρρησίαν; οὐ μὲν οὖν· ὡς γε δὴ καὶ παράδειγμα τοῖς πολλοῖς ἡμῖν εὐλαβείας καθίσταται, ἀπανταχοῦ δὲ μετριάζων καὶ σπουδῆν παιδιᾶ κινῶν, ἐν τούτῳ μόνον οὐ καθεκτός, οὐδὲ σύμμετρος. Τα παντοδαπὰ κυνηγᾶται περιεργάζεται οὖν πτερόν ὄρνιθος καὶ θηρίων ὄρμας, ἐπιθωῦζει τα κυσὶ καὶ καταδιώκει βαλιὰν ἔλαφον, μαίνεται τε περὶ ἄρκτους, ὃ δὴ πολλάκις αὐτῷ προσωνείδισα, ἀλλ' ἔστιν αὐτῷ ἢ θήρα ἀμετάθετα παιδικὰ δυοῖν γὰρ τούτοις μερίζει τὸν βίον, βιβλίους καὶ κυνηγεσίους, μᾶλλον δὲ σχολάζοντι μὲν φίλα ταῦτα καὶ μελετώμενα, σπουδάζοντι δὲ οἰκεῖα ὅσα καὶ ὅσα πρὸς τοὺς καιροὺς·

Μιχαήλ Ψελλός, *Χρονογραφία*, trans. Σιδέρη, Α. (Athens 1997), pp 396.