



Summary :

An aristocratic family of Pontos. The activity of the Kabasitai is closely associated with the civil disputes taking place in the Empire of Trebizond during the 1340's and lasting until the first years of the reign of Alexios III Komnenos (1349-1390). The Kabasitai remained the protagonists in the political foreground until the fall of the empire to the Ottomans in 1461.

Other Names

Kabazitai, Kabasitedes

Date and Place of Birth

emerg. prior to 1204, Mesochaldia of eastern Pontos

Main Role

aristocratic lineage

1. The Kabasitai family in the 13th century

The aristocratic house of the Kabasitai, descending from the region of [Mesochaldia](#), emerges in 1204, the time of the establishment of the Empire of Trebizond. The Kabasitai family is one of the native families of Pontos¹ which helped the [Grand Komnenoi](#) in their attempt to consolidate their power by providing them with material and personal support. There is no evidence about the members of the family during that period.

2. The Kabasitai in the 14th and 15th century

2.1. Pinnacle of the house

The Kabasitai family reached its pinnacle in the 14th century as one of the wealthiest landowning families. Its members owned estates in Mesochaldia,² the region they descended from, and climbed the ladder of hierarchy in the imperial court holding offices such as [protovestiarios](#), [grand logariastes](#) and [grand doux](#). During that same period, prominent members of the family were involved in politics, while other members of the Kabasitai family sponsored churches and monasteries.

Following the fall of [Trebizond](#) to the Ottomans in 1461, the Kabasitai family, along with members of the imperial family and other members of the aristocracy, were initially transported to [Constantinople](#) by an ottoman ship and finally to a region near Serres, where the Ottoman sultan [Mehmed II](#) (1444-1481) granted them land. The name of the family remained alive in the memories of the people of Pontos for many years after the establishment of the ottoman rule.³

2.2. Political activity

The role that the members of the house of the Kabasitai played in politics was important, since they actively took part in the civil disputes of the 1340's. The aristocratic families of that period were the core of rebellions which often transformed to civil wars due to the differences between the families. The Kabasitai family played an active role in those civil conflicts and joined forces with other aristocratic families of Trebizond, such as the [Scholarios](#), the [Doranitai](#), the Kamachenos and the Tzanichitai families, in order to acquire greater political power and to promote their sociopolitical interests.

2.3. Contribution to the defense of the empire

The Kabasitai, although they often turned against the imperial power, were among the basic defenders of the empire against its Turkmen neighbors and other external enemies. The doux of Chaldia John Kabasites comprises the most characteristic example. In August 1355, he liberated the region of Cheriana from the [Turkmen](#).⁴ Another John Kabasites, a grand doux and a former grand logariastes, was killed, along with Michael Tzanichites, in a naval battle against the [Genoese](#) outside [Kaffa](#) at the time of [Michael Grand Komnenos](#) (1341, 1344-1349).

3. Civil wars – dynastic disputes. The role of the Kabasitai

3.1. At the time of Eirene Palaiologina

The political activity of the Kabasitai family reached its pinnacle during the civil disputes which took place in the Empire of Trebizond at the time of [Eirene Palaiologina](#) (1340-1341) and lasted until the first years of the reign of [Alexios III Komnenos](#) (1349-1390). The aristocracy of Trebizond, divided between two groups, the Scholarios family from Constantinople and the native [Amytzantarios family](#), tried to take advantage of the power vacuum following the



death of [Basil Grand Komnenos](#) (1332-1340). His legitimate wife Eirene Palaiologina was not able to rule and her marriage to the emperor had not produced an heir.⁵ The Kabasitai family stood along the Scholarios family and joined forces with them in many occasions. In 1340, the Kabasitai family, along with the Doranites, the Meizomatai and the Kamachenos families, supported the Scholarios family in their struggle against Eirene Palaiologina and fortified themselves in the [monastery of St. Eugenios](#), which constituted the centre of operations. The sources mention the name of Leo Kabasites and the grand doux John Kabasites. However, their role in the events and their later fate is not known.⁶

3.2. At the time of Michael

No possible involvement of the Kabasitai family in the attempts of the aristocrats to overthrow [Anna Anachoutlou](#) (1341-1342) is clearly mentioned, although they are later mentioned as supporters of her adversary, Michael Grand Komnenos. Following the failure of the uprising in the monastery of St. Eugenios, the name of the family appears once again in the political foreground of the empire at the time of Michael Grand Komnenos (1344-1349). It seems that they had turned against his predecessor, [John III Grand Komnenos](#) (1342-1344). When Michael ascended to the throne, he honored the Kabasitai family, along with other members of the aristocracy, with high offices in order to thank them for their support in his attempt to return from his exile in Constantinople and become the emperor in Trebizond. Thus, Leo Kabasites assumed the office of [megas domestikos](#), while grand doux John Kabasites also assumed the office of grand logariastes. In November 1345, however, Leo Kabasites was arrested, along with other members of the aristocracy, such as [Niketas Scholares](#), because the emperor suspected that they organized new conspiracies against him.

3.3. At the time of Alexios III

At the time of Alexios III Grand Komnenos (1349-1390), the Kabasitai family continued to play a protagonist role in the politics of the empire. In January 1341, Alexios faced a new conspiracy organized by protovestiarios Leo Kabasites. The emperor ordered the arrest of Kabasites and appointed the [grand stratopedarches](#), [Theodore Doranites](#) (Pileles), in his place. Another characteristic example of the tension between Alexios III Grand Komnenos and the Kabasitai family is the attempt to assassinate the emperor on October 27th, 1363⁷ in Katabatos, on the bank of the St. Gregory river, organized by the Kabasitai⁸ and [George Scholares](#). The Kabasitai were arrested, Scholarios fled to [Amisos](#) and metropolitan Nefon [of Trebizond](#) was put under custody in [Soumela monastery](#) as an accomplice to the conspiracy.

3.4. At the time of Alexios IV and John IV

In the 15th century, at the time of [Alexios IV Grand Komnenos](#) (1417-1429), the houses of Kabasitai and Scholarios were responsible for the assassination of the emperor himself. When his son John, the later [John IV Grand Komnenos](#) (1429-1460), attempted to ascend to the throne for the second time by organizing a campaign against his father in order to overthrow him, the Kabasitai and the Scholarios families stood along him for reasons unknown. John IV had planned to arrest the emperor. The [archontes](#), however, broke his orders and assassinated Alexios IV in Achanti, near Trebizond, where Alexios IV prepared to face the military forces of his son. John, following his coronation as emperor, punished in an exemplary manner the people responsible for the assassination of his father. It is not known which members of the Kabasitai family took part in the attack against Alexios IV or how they were punished.

3.5. At the time of David

Following the death of emperor John IV in 1458, the Kabasitai family supported the new emperor David Grand Komnenos (1460-1461) in his attempt to ascend to the throne and during his reign. David successfully argued against the four-year-old legitimate heir to the throne Alexios V (1458),⁹ a nephew of the deceased John from his brother Alexander Grand Komnenos (Skantarios), and managed to gain the support of the Kabasitai and assume power. The good relations between emperor David and the Kabasitai family continued until the [fall of the empire](#) to the Ottomans in 1461.

1. The Grand Komnenoi established their rule in Pontos gaining the support of the Tzanichitai, the Kabasitai and the Kamachenos family. See Χρυσανθος, μητροπολίτης Τραπεζούντος, "Η Εκκλησία Τραπεζούντος", *Αρχαίον Πόντου* 4-5 (1933), pp. 56, 234, and Janssens, E., *Trebizonde en Colchide* (Brussels 1969), p. 67.

2. Leo Kabasites must have owned lands in "Μεσοχάλδιο", that is in Mesochaldia, and commanded many fortresses along with the fortress of Doryle, defending the region from the Tsernedes. See Γεωργιάδης, Θ. (ed.), *Εγκυκλοπαίδεια του Ποντιακού Ελληνισμού. Ο Πόντος. Ιστορία, Λαογραφία και Πολιτισμός* 1 (Thessaloniki 1991), p. 171.

3. On the fate of the family following the fall of Trebizond see Beldiceanu, N., "Les Qavazid? Kabazites à la lumière d'un Registre Ottoman de Trebizond", in *Studia Turcologica Memoriae Alexii Bombaci dicata* (Naples 1982), pp. 41-54.

4. In the following November he took part in the emperor's campaign in the same region and got arrested. He lost the office of doux of Chaldia when attacked by the Turkmen emir hoca Latif in April 1360. See Λυμπερόπουλος, Β., *Ο Βυζαντινός Πόντος. Η αυτοκρατορία της Τραπεζούντας* (Athens 1999), p. 163.

5. See Λυμπερόπουλος, Β., *Ο Βυζαντινός Πόντος. Η αυτοκρατορία της Τραπεζούντας* (Athens 1999), p. 138.



6. Following their defeat from the imperial armies, they were presumably arrested and led to the fortress of Limnia, along with the other rebels. Their fortress, the monastery of St. Eugenios, was set on fire. The rebellion ended when grand doux John arrived at Trebizond from Constantinople in order to reinforce the emperor. See Bredenkamp, F., "The Doranites family of the 14th century Byzantine Empire of Trebizond" *Βυζαντιακά* 19 (1999), pp. 239-265, *ibid* p. 245.

7. A. Bryer dates the assassination attempt of the emperor on October 26th, 1363; see Bryer, A. – Winfield, D., *The Byzantine Monuments and Topography of the Pontos I* (Dumbarton Oaks Studies 20, Washington D.C. 1985), p. 327.

8. The authors of *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit* mention Leo Kabasites as a participant in the assassination attempt of emperor Alexios III Grand Komnenos. See Trapp, E. – Beyer, H. – Leontiades, I. (eds), *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit* 5 (Vienna 1981), s.v. "Καβαζίτης Λέων", p. 2, nr. 10011.

9. Emperor John IV appointed Alexios V, the son of his brother Alexander Komnenos, his successor to the throne just before he died. See Βαρζός, Κ., "Η μοίρα των τελευταίων Μεγάλων Κομνηνών της Τραπεζούντας", *Βυζαντινά* 12 (1983), pp. 269-289, *ibid* p. 271, footnote 19.

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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.
	doukas (lat. dux) Antiquity: Roman military commander who, in some provinces, combined military and civil functions. Buzantium: a higher military officer. From the second half of the 10th c. the title indicates the military comander of a larger district. After the 12th c., doukes were called the governors of small themes.



grand logariastes

A higher imperial official. the office was introduced by Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118). The grand logariastes functioned as primary co-ordinator and controller of all fiscal services.

megas domestikos

Supreme military commander of the imperial army. High-ranking title which was generally given to close relatives of the emperor.

megas stratopedarches

Superior officer responsible for the provision of equipment and supplies for the military forces of the byzantine empire of Nicaea.

protovestiaris

(and protovestiarites) Honorific title given to high-ranking officials and future emperors during this period. The protovestiaris was originally responsible for the imperial wardrobe, but in the 9th-11th centuries the holders of the title could command an army or conduct negotiations with foreign states.

Sources

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Auxiliary Catalogs

1. A list of prominent members of the house of the Kabasitai

Kabasites, first name unknown, at the time of Alexios I Grand Komnenos (1204-1222)

Kabasites John, *grand doux* and *grand logariastes* at the time of Michael Grand Komnenos (1341, 1344-1349)

Kabasites Leo, *grand domestikos* at the time of Michael Grand Komnenos (1344-1349), *protovestiaris* at the time of Alexios III Grand Komnenos (1349-1390)

Kabasites John (a different one?), *grand doux* at the time of Alexios III Grand Komnenos (1349-1390)

Kabasites John, *doux* of Chaldia at the time of Alexios III Grand Komnenos (1349-1390)

2. A list of the emperors of Trebizond

Alexios I (1204-1222)

Andronikos I/Gidon (1222-1235)

John I /Axuch (1235-1238)

Manuel I (1238-1263)

Andronikos II (1263-1266)

George /Planos (1266-1280)

John II (1280-1285, 1285-1297)

Theodora (1285)

Alexios II (1297-1330)

Andronikos III (1330-1332)

Manuel II (1332)

Basil (1332-1340)

Eirene Palaiologina (1340-1341)



Anna Grand /Anachoutlou (1341, 1341-1342)

Michael (1341)

John III (1342-1344)

Michael (1344-1349)

Alexios III (1349-1390)

Manuel III (1390-1417)

Alexios IV (1417-1429)

John IV (1429-1458)

David (1458-1461 or 1463)