



Summary :

The brothers Andronikos and Isaac Nestongos, first cousins of the second emperor of Nicaea, John III Doukas Vatatzes, staged a rebellion in 1225 to overthrow him. While in Lampsakos, the emperor ordered his troops to march to Achyraous and managed to arrest the rebels. The instigator of the rebellion, Andronikos Nestongos, was treated particularly mildly by the emperor.

Date

1225

Geographical Location

Nicaea, Bithynia (modern Iznik)

1. Historical Framework

The [Nestongos family](#) migrated to the province of [Bithynia](#) along with other eminent Byzantine families after Constantinople was captured by the forces of the [fourth Crusade](#) in April 1204. They gradually managed to hold senior posts in the administration of the [Byzantine Empire of Nicaea](#).¹

2. The Rebellion

The brothers [Andronikos](#) and Isaac Nestongos, first cousins of the second emperor of Nicaea, [John III Doukas Vatatzes](#), attempted to overthrow him around 1225, while he was away from the capital Nicaea trying to confront the simultaneous attacks of the Latin Empire of Constantinople against Thrace, northwestern Asia Minor and the Aegean. It has been suggested that during the rebellion of the Nestongos Family the latter were morally supported by the brothers Alexios and Isaac Laskaris, who held the title of [sebastokrator](#) and a little earlier (1224-1225) had been the prime movers of a [rebellion](#) against John III in collaboration with the Latin emperor Robert de Courtenay (1221-1228). It seems that the information provided by the sources is not explicit and, therefore, any connection would be ungrounded. The Laskaris brothers, already punished by blinding because of their betrayal of the emperor, were possibly unable to provide sufficient, even moral, support. However, their involvement, yet in their absence, in the ideological consolidation of the Nestongos rebellion should not be excluded. The main inciters of the rebellion, according to the sources, were the [megas heteriearches](#) Flamoulis (or Flamoulios), a member of the [Tarchaneiotes family](#), a member of the [Synadenos family](#) and Makrenos, the [doukas](#) of the [theme of Thrakesion](#).

When the rebellion broke out in Nicaea, the imperial troops were in [Lampsakos](#) and, therefore, John III was informed late about the event. However, when he became aware of what was happening, he acted swiftly and effectively. At first, he ordered that the ships at the harbour of Lampsakos be set to fire so that they would not be captured by the Latins, who could use them against Nicaea. As John III's next priority was to effectively deal with the internal political danger of the Nestongos rebellion, which was threatening the imperial power of Nicaea, he ordered the immediate departure of his army from Lampsakos and marched to [Achyraous](#). On arriving there, he formed an informal council aiming to rally everybody around him and fully deal with the matter. It is possible that the supporters of the Nestongos rebellion did not manage to attract a considerable number of supporters and, as a result, their venture did not receive any substantial military help and when the forces of the Empire of Nicaea under John III turned against the rebels and arrested them there was no serious resistance. According to the sources (mainly [George Akropolites](#) and Theodore Skoutariotes), there was no battle given before the rebels were arrested. Therefore, it may be inferred that either the rebels never fought against the imperial forces or the alleged clash is not worth mentioning. After all, the military suppression of the rebellion of the Nestongos brothers must have been an easy target for John III.²



3. Consequences

After the rebellion was suppressed the participants were arrested and tried according to the norms. All the accused were found guilty of high treason, an offence attracting the death penalty. But Emperor John III was merciful to them and ordered that the rebels be punished with minor penalties. As a result, Isaac Nestongos was sentenced to blinding and mutilation of his one hand, as it happened with Makrenos, who was accused of having attempted to maliciously harm the emperor. The rest of the rebels were punished with even milder penalties and were imprisoned for a short period.

Although he was the prime mover of the rebellion, according to all sources, Andronikos Nestongos was treated particularly and rather inexplicably mildly by the emperor. Andronikos was only imprisoned at the castle of Magnesia, to the northeast of Smyrna. However, it seems that he was not strictly guarded there. Within a little time the imprisoned rebel escaped and sought shelter in the [Seljuk Sultanate of Rûm](#), where he remained until his death. As for this escape, it is clearly reported that it was made with the tacit consent of the emperor of Nicaea, who had a great liking for Andronikos.³ Contemporary bibliography also refers to this liking, suggesting a psychological reason for the extremely lenient attitude of John III towards the instigator of a rebellion that had put the imperial power in danger.

The unsuccessful rebellion of the Nestongos brothers in 1225 did not have any direct impact on the political, social and economic life of the Empire of Nicaea. However, in the following period the safety measures for the protection of the emperor became stronger, as he seemed to be in obvious danger. The policy adopted by John III during the next years gave the empire an unchallenged supremacy over its rivals. The victories mainly against the forces of the Latin Empire of Constantinople and the Seljuk Sultanate of Rûm as well as the diplomatic successes against Bulgaria and the state of Epirus sparked a wave of euphoria across the empire. The rebellion of the Nestongos brothers was the last defiance to John III's authority until his death in 1254.

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1. E. Trapp - A. Kazhdan, entry "Nestongos", *The Oxford History of Byzantium* 2, p. 1459.
 2. Σαββίδης Α., *Βυζαντινά στασιαστικά και αυτονομιστικά κινήματα...* (Athens 1987), pp. 232-45.
 3. Heisenberg, A. (corr. P. Wirth) (ed.), *Georgii Acropolitae Opera* I (Stuttgart 1978), p. 23.
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	(αναθ. P. Wirth), Stuttgart 1978
	Σαββίδης Α. , <i>Βυζαντινά στασιαστικά και αυτονομιστικά κινήματα στα Δωδεκάνησα και στη Μικρά Ασία, 1189-σ. 1240 μ.Χ. Συμβολή στη μελέτη της υστεροβυζαντινής προσωπογραφίας και τοπογραφίας την εποχή των Αγγέλων, των Λασκαρίδων της Νίκαιας και των Μεγαλοκομνηνών του Πόντου</i> , Αθήνα 1987
	Βρυώνης Σ. , <i>Η παρακμή του μεσαιωνικού ελληνισμού στη Μικρά Ασία και η διαδικασία του εξισλαμισμού</i> , MIET, Αθήνα 1996, Γαλαταριώτου, Κ. (μτφρ.)
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Glossary :

	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 commander of a larger district. After the 12th c., doukes were called the governors of small themes.
	megas hetaireiarches
	Head of the Hetaireia, a military officer (10th-11thC), in charge of the security of the imperial palace.
	sebastokrator
	Honorary title of the Byzantine court. The office was established in 1081 by Alexios I Komnenos for his elder brother Isaac, equivalent to the one of regent

Sources

George Akropolites, *Annales*, Heisenberg, A. (ed.), *Georgii Acropolitae opera*, vol. 1. (repr. 1978, corr. P. Wirth).

Theodore Skoutariotes, *Synopsis Chronike*, Sathas, K. (ed.), *Bibliotheca Medii Aevi 7* (Athens - Venice - Paris 1894).

Quotations

The participants in the rebellion, according to George Akropolites

Ἐν τούτοις δὲ ὄντος τοῦ βασιλέως Ἰωάννου καὶ ἀκρατῶς μαχομένου τοῖς Ἰταλοῖς κατὰ τε χέρσον καὶ θάλατταν, σκευωρεῖται τούτῳ ἐπιβουλῇ. ὁ δὲ ταύτην συστησάμενος πρωτεξάδελφος ἦν τοῦ βασιλέως ὁ Νεστόγγος Ἀνδρόνικος. οὗτοι δὲ καὶ τὴν τῆς συγγενείας σχέσιν παρ' οὐδὲν θέμενος καὶ τὸν τῆς φιλίας ἀπορρήξας δεσμὸν ἀνατρεψίαν κατὰ τοῦ πρωτεξαδέλφου βασιλέως βεβούληται, ἔχων τε συνεργὸν εἰς τούτῳ τὸν ἀδελφὸν Ἰσαάκιον καὶ ἑτέρους τῶν ἐπιφανῶν οὐκ ὀλίγους, τὸν τε Φλαμούλην, ὃν μέγαν ἑταιρειάρχην ὁ βασιλεὺς τετίμηκε, τὸν Ταρχανειώτην, τὸν Συναδηνόν, τὸν ἐπ' ἀδελφῆ τούτου γαμβρὸν Στασηνόν, τὸν Μακρονηνόν καὶ ἄλλους εἰς πλῆθος τὸν ἀριθμὸν.

Heisenberg, A. (corr. P. Wirth) (ed.), *Georgii Acropolitae Opera I* (Stuttgart 1978), p. 23.

Chronological Table

1224-1225: Rebellion of the Laskaris brothers

1225: Rebellion of Andronikos and Isaac Nestongos