



Patriarchate of Constantinople in the Byzantine period

Summary :

The patriarchate of Constantinople developed closely along with the city itself; thus, the bishop of New Rome gradually developed to the ecumenical patriarch. Ideally, the patriarch worked with the emperor under the principle of *symphonia*, close and peaceful cooperation. Although individual patriarchs sometimes found themselves completely pushed over by forceful emperors or struggling in confrontation with imperial will, for most of its history the patriarchate cooperated closely with the imperial government and played a major role in the imperial administration both within the empire and with relations with external churches, powers, and peoples.

Date

381-1453

Geographical Location

Constantinople

1. Introduction

The patriarchate of Constantinople developed closely with the city itself; thus, the bishop of New Rome gradually developed to the ecumenical patriarch. Throughout its history, the patriarch worked closely with the imperial administration, ideally under the principle of *symphonia*, close and peaceful cooperation. However, individual patriarchs sometimes found themselves completely pushed over by forceful emperors or struggling in confrontation with imperial will. Although the emperor was supposed to respect the church's own choice of patriarchate, more often than not emperors ensured that their own candidate became patriarch. Still, for most of its history the patriarchate cooperated closely with the imperial government and played a major role in the imperial administration both within the empire and with relations with external churches, powers, and peoples.

2. History

2.1. Early Period

According to legend, the see of Byzantium was founded by the apostle Andrew, although this late legend has little historical basis and is a fabrication to counter the apostolic claims of the see of Rome. The patriarchate of Constantinople has always been closely connected to the status of the city. There was a bishop of Byzantium before the re-founding of the city as [New Rome](#) by [Constantine I](#) in 330. Shortly after the foundation of the new city, the bishop of Byzantium was elevated to the status of archbishop.

In the early stages of the archbishopric of Constantinople, however, the role of the archbishop was not significant outside of the city of Constantinople. Early bishops, like [John Chrysostom](#) (bishop 26 Feb. 398 - 20 June 404) were brought to the city on account of fame or imperial favor. John was known as an orator, and while he became involved in the court, he was not burdened with significant administrative duties outside the city. John fell victim to court intrigue and was deposed, like his predecessor [Gregory of Nazianzos](#) (bishop 27 November 380-81). At this stage, the archbishop functioned much like a member of the imperial court, and the archbishop served at the emperor's will. Emperors preferred archbishops who agreed with them doctrinally and who served almost as a court chaplain or official preacher for the imperial household. When [Theodosios I](#) (r. 379 - 395) made Christianity the official religion of



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the empire, the patriarch's role became even more important, since Christianity was now an official department of the imperial administration.

The Christological controversies, as a side effect, led to a greater role for the archbishop of Constantinople and to conflict with other sees. The bishop of Constantinople did not play a significant role in the [Arian controversy](#) or in the [council of Nicaea](#) (325), the first council deemed ecumenical.¹ The [first council of Constantinople](#), called by Theodosios I in 381, gave Constantinople precedence of honor over all sees except old Rome, but Meletios, bishop of Antioch, was president of the council. Later, [Nestorios](#) (bishop of Constantinople, 10 Apr. 428 - 22 June 431), ignited theological controversy by denying the title of *theotokos* to the Virgin Mary. The controversy only diminished the prestige of the see of Constantinople, while the see of Alexandria under Cyril (patriarch of Alexandria, 18 Oct. 412 - 27 June 444) and Dioscorus (patriarch 444-51) became seen by many as the champions of Orthodoxy. The theology of Cyril triumphed at the [Council of Ephesus](#) (431) and Nestorios was deposed. On the other hand, and in spite of imperial backing, the "Robber" Council of Ephesus (449) was not accepted and Dioscorus was finally deposed too. The council of Chalcedon increased the prestige of Pope Leo, who was now seen as the defender of Orthodoxy, but the canons of the council elevated the archbishopric of Constantinople to a patriarchate by giving it jurisdiction over the dioceses of Asia, the Pontus, and Thrace and by affirming its place of honor after Rome (canon 28). Constantinople also received the right to hear appeals from regional metropolitans (canons 9, 17). The later Christological controversies, monotheletism and iconoclasm, and their related councils, did not increase the prestige of the ecumenical patriarchs, because the patriarchate showed itself pliable to imperial will.

While ecumenical councils formally lifted the status and increased the role of the ecumenical patriarchate, from the Byzantine point of view, it was the emperor who called and sponsored an ecumenical council, as became a point of controversy at the later union council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-39). By the council of Chalcedon (451), the patriarchate had achieved its full status and the pentarchy of five patriarchal sees of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem was recognized. Prior to Chalcedon, the patriarch of Constantinople was an archbishop with little canonical authority and in a continuous struggle with the see of Alexandria for honor and primacy in the eastern half of the empire. By the 6th century, ecumenical patriarch had become a courtesy title for the archbishop of Constantinople, a symbol of his role as the superior orthodox patriarch of the ecumenical empire whose see was the imperial capital. However, when John IV Neseutes (r. 12 April 582 - 2 September 595) called himself ecumenical patriarch, it scandalized Pope Pelagius II and Gregory I.² Michael I Keroularios (r. 25 March 1043 - 2 November 1058), a very ambitious patriarch,³ used the title on his lead seals after he and the papal legate Humbert had mutually anathematized one another (16 July 1054). Use of the title, however, was never a major point of contention between Rome and Constantinople. After the seventh century, the patriarchates of Antioch and Alexandria became politically insignificant, and the patriarchate of Constantinople found itself locked in a continuous struggle with the pope in Rome over a variety of issues.

2.2. Middle Byzantine Period

The middle Byzantine period was ushered in with the Islamic conquests (battle of Yarmuk, 636) and the iconoclastic controversy (714-843). The conquests actually increased the prestige of the patriarchate, as the patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria became irrelevant and the patriarchate of Constantinople was no longer forced to try to achieve unity with the non-Chalcedonian churches. Iconoclasm made the patriarchate appear weak and pliable to imperial will, but



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ultimately the view of the church triumphed. After iconoclasm, the patriarchate entered a period of development and greater prestige. Emperors no longer tried to force doctrine on the church, although patriarchs sometimes found themselves in conflict with emperors. The period was dominated by the ongoing struggle with the pope and the eventual schism of 1054.⁴

Constantinople was able to assert its authority with the backing of the emperor by acquiring jurisdiction over Illyricum (8th c.) and Bulgaria (9th c.). Throughout the 9th c., Rome tried to intervene in the conflict between Photios and Ignatios, as well as in the dispute over Leo VI's **tetragamy**. Such controversies may make the patriarchate appear weak, since the imperial will succeeded in placing its candidate on the throne and Leo VI was able to marry a fourth time. However, as in iconoclasm, the emperor may get his way in the short-term but could not succeed in changing canon law or doctrine. The alternation between Photios and Ignatios was a matter of imperial politics, as there was no doctrinal disagreement. The fourth marriage of Leo VI was tolerated as a matter of **oikonomia**, but fourth marriages were permanently banned thereafter. It is in the middle period that the idea of **symphonia** develops, with the emperor and patriarch working together as the two hands of God. The emperor was appointed by God, but it was his duty to protect the church and church doctrine, as defined by the church fathers and tradition. Ideally, the patriarch was to cooperate closely with the emperor to ensure the good governance of the church. The patriarch could hear appeals in both ecclesiastical and secular cases. The church defined doctrine, but heresy was a concern for the emperor and he was expected to prosecute it. For example, [Alexios I Komnenos](#) (r. 4 Apr. 1081 - 15 Aug. 1118) personally heard the case of Basil the Bogomil and had him burned at the stake. Certainly the patriarch could wield exceptional moral authority, and even defy the emperor, although rarely with success. [Isaac Komnenos](#) could not arrest and depose the popular patriarch Michael I Keroularios until he left the city. Still, Keroularios was finally arrested. Some patriarchs were utterly subservient while others worked closely with the emperor in a fruitful collaboration.

Patriarchs were actively involved in missions and diplomacy, which were inseparable from the Byzantine view. Patriarch Nicholas I Mystikos (patriarch 1 Mar. 901 - 1 Feb. 907 and May 912 - May 925) actively corresponded with leaders in southern Italy, Bulgaria, and the Caucasus. Missions were sent to the Slavs and Rus, the most famous being that of Cyril and Methodius (893). At the height of its splendor in the 11th c., the patriarchate of Constantinople had a very large staff, centered around the **Great Church**, [Hagia Sophia](#). The patriarch relied on five or six principal officials: **megas oikonomos**, the head of the **sakellion**, **megas sakellarios**, **megas skeuophylax**, **chartophylax**, and the **protekdikos**. These officials often had roles far exceeding their titles. The patriarchate called the metropolitans regularly to meet for certain matters in a council or **endemousa synodos**. In 1107 Alexios I founded the Patriarchal School, although a patriarchal school may have existed earlier. The church and patriarchate were actively involved in the cultural renaissance of this period.

2.3. Late Byzantine Period

After the [Fourth Crusade](#) in 1204, as the Empire declined, the prestige of the church and patriarchate increased, even though its former splendor was gone just as the city itself was a shadow of its former glory. Still, the patriarchal throne was occupied with men of talent and ability, like the scholar [Gregory II of Cyprus](#) (patriarch 28 Mar. 1283 - June 1289).⁵ Patriarchs, as in previous years, were expected to cooperate with imperial policy, although there were men who were more independent in their approach. The ascetic Athanasios I (patriarch Oct. 1289 - Oct. 1293; June 1303-Sept. 1309) sought to enforce canon law and was deposed for his unpopular insistence on strict monastic discipline.⁶ He



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never yielded to imperial will but was deposed by [Andronikos II](#) who installed him. The biggest issue for the patriarch became the union with the West favored by emperors in hopes of securing military aid from the west. Emperors saw union as a matter of political necessity for the sake of military aid. At the council of Lyons (7 May - 17 July 1274) Emperor [Michael VIII Palaiologos](#) sent three representatives and promised submission of the Byzantine church, although no formal delegation sent by the church was present.⁷ At the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-39), the patriarch Joseph II (patriarch 21 May 1416 - 10 June 1439) cooperated closely with the Emperor John VIII Palaiologos to seek military aid from the West.⁸ However, patriarch and emperor were unsuccessful in persuading the Byzantine populous and monks in accepting [a union with the West](#) which was hated and resented since the Fourth Crusade (1204).

The patriarch during the period also had to navigate the new political realities of a shrinking empire. The late Byzantine period began with an internal schism, the [Arsenite schism](#). Patriarch [Arsenius](#) (patriarch 1255-1259; 1261-1264) excommunicated the new emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos after he blinded and deposed the last Laskarid, [John IV](#). In turn, Arsenios was deposed. The familiar pattern continued: emperors achieved their immediate will but the church ultimately triumphed. In this case the schism was not healed until 1310.⁹ Likewise efforts at union followed this pattern. Emperors were able to promise union to the West, but the church remained uncommitted.

In spite of shrinking resources and the reality of a diminishing empire, the patriarchate was able to increase its prestige in some areas. The jurisdiction of Mt. Athos was transferred from the emperor to the patriarch in 1312. The prestige and authority of the patriarch was recognized in areas where the emperor no longer or never had political power, like Russia and even as far as Lithuania, although many of these places sought to assert their ecclesiastical independence while honoring the patriarch. Monasticism and scholarship continued to flourish with both supported by the patriarchate. While the Slavs would eventually assert ecclesiastical independence from the patriarchate of Constantinople, the patriarchate survived the fall of the empire in 1453.

It is easy to see the patriarchate as nothing more than a tool of state. However, there was a certain stability. From Apostle Andrew, according to tradition, to 1204 AD there were more than 120 bishops and patriarchs. The average tenure of a patriarch in this period was nine years. Thirty-five of these patriarchs died after resignation or deposition while five were deposed temporarily. They came from throughout the Empire and from a variety of backgrounds. From 1204 to 1453 there were more than 30 patriarchs, with an average reign of eight years. Fourteen of these were deposed, and seven were reinstated. All were Greek, except Joseph II (1416-1439) who was Bulgarian. Eighty percent of the patriarchs in this period were monks. In the Ottoman period (1453 - ca. 1900) the average reign of a patriarch was three years. In the early Byzantine period, the role of the patriarchate of Constantinople developed but remained completely subordinate to imperial will. In the middle and late period, the patriarchate and emperor strove to work together in *symphonia*. Although the patriarchate occasionally had to capitulate to imperial will, in doctrinal matters the church maintained its independence.

1. On the council of Nicaea and fourth century theological disputes, see Ayres, L., *Nicaea and its Legacy. An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford 2004).

2. Vailhé, S., "Le titre de patriarche oecuménique avant saint Grégoire le Grand," *Échos d'Orient* 11 (1908), pp. 65-69 ; Laurent, V., "Le



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3. Tinnefeld, F., "Michael I. Kerullarios, Patriarch von Konstantinopel (1043-1058). Kritische Überlegungen zu einer Biographie," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 39 (1989), pp. 95-127.
4. See, among others, Runciman, S., *The Eastern Schism. A Study of the Papacy and the Eastern Churches during the XIth and XIIth Centuries* (Oxford 1955).
5. Cf. Papadakis, A., *Crisis in Byzantium: The Filioque Controversy in the Patriarchate of Gregory II of Cyprus (1283-1289)* (New York 1983).
6. Boojamra, J. L., *Church Reform in the Late Byzantine Empire: A Study of the Patriarchate of Athanasius of Constantinople, 1289-1293, 1303-1309* (Brookline, MA 1980); idem, *The Church and Social Reform: The Policies of Patriarch Athanasios of Constantinople* (New York 1993).
7. See Nicol, D.M., "The Greeks and the Union of the Churches: The Preliminaries to the Second Council of Lyons, 1261-1274," in J.A. Watt – J.B. Morrall – F.X. Martin (eds.), *Medieval Studies Presented to Aubrey Gwynn, S.J.* (Dublin 1961), pp. 454-480; idem, "The Byzantine Reaction to the Second Council of Lyons, 1274," *Studies in Church History* 7 (1971), pp. 113-146.
8. For this council and the events prior to its assembly, see Gill, J., *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge 1959); Geanakoplos, D.J., "The Council of Florence (1438-1439) and the Problem of Union between the Greek and Latin Churches," *Church History* 24 (1955), pp. 324-346.
9. Γουναρίδης, Π., *Το κίνημα των Αρσενιατών (1261-1310). Ιδεολογικές διαμάχες την εποχή των πρώτων Παλαιολόγων* (Αθήνα 1999).

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	Maxime de Sardes , <i>Le patriarcat œcuménique dans l'église orthodoxe</i> , Paris 1975
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	Επτά Ημέρες "Οικουμενικό Πατριαρχείο" http://wwk.kathimerini.gr/kath/7days/1999/05/23051999.pdf

Glossary :

	arsenitai Followers and supporters of patriarch Arsenios Autoreianos, who had excommunicated Michael VIII Palaiologos. Michael managed to get rid of Arsenios in 1265; from that time, Arsenios' followers were at odds with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, refusing to recognize Arsenios' successors to the patriarchal throne. Politically they supported the Lascarid dynasty and opposed the dynasty of the Palaiologoi. The dispute was resolved in 1310.
	chartophylax An ecclesiastical office attested from the 6th century and usually accorded to deacons. <i>Chartophylax</i> was responsible for the archives of the Church of Constantinople or other great provincial Churches, conservating the canonical records from both Oecumenical and local councils. By the 10th century, chartophylax had become head of the sekreton of chartophylakeion and a principal assistant to the Patriarch with increased functions, such as the examination of candidates to the priesthood and the right to represent the Patriarch in his absence even in the synod. Some monasteries also had a <i>chartophylax</i> , a monk with archival duties. In the years of Andronikos I, <i>megas</i> was added to the title which therefore became megas chartophylax .
	endemousa synodos (permanent synod) of Constantinople A consulting synod of ecclesiastic officials dwelling in Constantinople, convened every year in the capital to discuss current matters, the demands of



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bishops and prelates etc.

Great Church

The original name of the Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. This appellation survived for a long time, used in parallel with that of "Hagia Sophia". By the 8th century the term was also applied to the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

megas oikonomos

High-ranking official of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. In the 11th century the epithet *megas* was attached to the title of *oikonomos*, who was responsible for managing the economics of the Great Church of Constantinople.

oikonomia (theol.)

Term which in Byzantine ecclesiastical literature denotes the canonical power of the Church used to loosen up the strictness of the ecclesiastical law, removing thus an impediment to salvation.

protekdikos

An ecclesiastical official of Constantinople. Between the 12th and the 15th century, the protekdikos was responsible for the protection of those who sought sanctuary in the church of Hagia Sophia.

sakellarios - sakellion

A Byzantine administrative term with two basic meanings: 1. The imperial treasury. A significant institution for administrative work and disbursement of funds. Connected with this are the offices of sakellarios (originally), chartulary of the sakelle (from the 9th c.), the sekretion of the sakellion, o epi sakellion (the dignitary in charge since the 11th-12th c.). The "sakellarios" was, in all probability, the medieval name of the "tamias ton vasilikon chrematon" (royal treasurer).

2. The treasury of the Great Church of Constantinople, i.e. Hagia Sophia. In the patriarchal sakelle were kept documents attesting to the property rights of the Patriarchate. In monasteries and lesser churches the corresponding title was megas sakellarios or "ho sakellion".

skeuphylax (megas)

A cleric, usually a priest, whose main duty was to look after the sacred valuables and liturgical vessels of a church.

tetragamy

A political and ecclesiastical controversy that followed the fourth marriage of emperor Leo VI (886-912). Since his only male heir had been a product of this marriage, it was of vital importance to Leo to have the marriage recognised, whereas to the Church this was unacceptable. The issue was finally resolved in the Council of Constantinople in 920.

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List of the bishops and Patriarchs of Constantinople up to 1453
(according to the official catalogue of the Ecumenical Patriarchate)

Andrew the Apostle, the founder of the Church of Constantinople [30 Nov.]

Stachys the Apostle [31 Oct.] 38-54

Onesimus [15 Feb.] 54-68

Polycarp I 71-89

Plutarch 89-105

Sedekion 105-114

Diogenes 114-129

Eleutherius 129-136



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Efzois 148-154

Laurence 154-166

Alympius (Olympius) 166-169

Pertinax 169-187

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Philadelphus 211-217

Cyriacus I 214-230

Castinus [25 Jan.] 230-237

Eugenius I 240-265

Titus 242-272

Dometius Rufinus I 284-293

Probus 303-315

Metrophanes I [4 June] 306-314

Alexander [30 Aug.] 314-337

Paul I [6 Nov.] 337-339, 341-342, 346-351

Eusebius of Nicomedia 339-342

Macedonius I 342-346, 351-360

Eudoxius (of Antioch) 360-370

Evagrius 370

Demophilus 370-380

Gregory I of Nazianzen [25 Jan.] 379-381

(Maximus the Cynic) 380



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Nectarius [11 Oct.] 381-397

John I Chrysostom [13 Nov.] 398-404

Arsacius [11 Oct.] 404-405

Atticus [8 Jan.] 406-425

Sisinius [11 Oct.] 426-427

Nestorius 428-431

Maximian [21 Apr.] 431-434

Proclus [20 Nov.] 434-446

Flavian [16 Feb.] 446-449

Anatolius [3 July] 449-458

Gennadios I [17 Nov.] 458-471

Acacius 472-489

Fravitas 489

Euphemius 489-495

Macedonius II [25 Apr.] 495-511

Timothy I 511-518

John II [25 Aug.] 518-520

Epiphanius [25 Aug.] 520-535

Anthimos I 535-536

Menas [25 Aug.] 536-552

Eutychius [6 Apr.] 552-565,577-582

John III the Scholastic [21 Feb.] 565-577

John IV the Fasting [2 Sept.] 585-595

Cyriacus (Cyril) [30 Oct.] 595-606

Thomas I [18 Feb.] 607-610

Sergius I 610-638



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Pyrrhos 638-641, 654

Paul II 641-653

Peter 654-666

Thomas II [15 Nov.] 667-669

John V [18 Aug.] 669-675

Constantine I [9 Aug] 675-677

Theodore I [27 Dec.] 677-679, 686-687

George I [18 Aug.] 679-686

Paul III [2 Sept.] 687-693

Callinicus I [23 Aug.] 693-705

Cyrus [8 Jan.] 706-711

John VI 712-714

Germanos I [12 May] 715-730

Anastasius 730-754

Constantine II 754-766

Nikitas I 766-780

Paul IV 780-784

Tarasios [25 Feb.] 784-806

Nikephoros I [2 June] 806-815

Theodotos I Kassiteras 815-821

Antonius I Kassimatis 821-836

John VII Grammatikos 836-842

Methodius I [14 June] 842-846

Ignatius I [23 Oct.] 846-858, 867-877

Photios I [6 Feb.] 858-867, 877-886

Stephanos I [18 May] 886-893



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Antonios II Kauleas [12 Feb.] 893-901

Nicholas I Mysticos [16 May] 901-907, 912-925

Euthymios I [5 Aug.] 907-912

Stephanos II [18 July] 925-928

Tryphon [19 Apr.] 928-931

Theophylaktos 931-956

Polyeuktos [5 Feb.] 956-970

Basil I Skamandrinos 970-974

Antonios III the Studite 974-980

Nicholas II Chrysovergis [16 Dec.] 984-995

Sisinius II 996-999

Sergius II [12 Apr.] 999-1019

Efstathius [31 May] 1020-1025

Alexius Stoudite 1025-1043

Michael I Kiroularios 1043-1059

Constantine III Leichoudis [29 July] 1059-1063

John VIII Xifilinos [30 Aug.] 1063-1075

Kosmas I of Jerusalem [2 Jan.] 1075-1081

Efstratius Garidas 1081-1084

Nicholas III the Kyrdiniates 1084-1111

John IX Ierommemon 1111-1134

Leo Styppis [12 Nov.] 1134-1143

Michael II the Kourkouas 1143-1146

Kosmas II the Attic 1146-1147

Nicholas IV Mouzalon 1147-1151

Theodotos I 1151-1153



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Neophytos I 1153

Constantine IV Chliarinos 1154-1156

Luke Chrysovergis 1156-1169

Michael III 1170-1177

Chariton Eugeniotis 1177-1178

Theodosius II Vorradiotis 1178-1183

Basil II Camateros 1183-1186

Nikitas II Mountanis 1187-1189

Leontius Theotokitis 1189-1190

Theodosius III or Disitheus 1190-1191

George II Xifilinos 1191-1198

John X Camateros 1198-1206

Michael IV Autoreianos 1207-1213

Theodore II the Peaceful 1213-1215

Maximos II 1215

Manuel I Charitopoulos 1215-1222

Germanos II 1222-1240

Methodius II 1240

Manuel II 1240-1255

Arsenius Autoreianos [28 Oct.] 1255-1260, 1261-1267

Νικηφόρος II 1260-1261

Germanos III 1267

Joseph I [30 Oct.] 1267-1275, 1282-1283

John XI Vekkos 1275-1282

Gregory II 1283-1289

Athanasius I [28 Oct.] 1289-1293, 1304-1310



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John XII 1294-1304

Nifon I 1311-1315

John XIII Sweet 1316-1320

Gerasimos I 1320-1321

Isaias 1323-1334

John XIV Kaletas 1334-1347

Isidore I 1347-1349

Kallistos I [20 June] 1350-1354, 1355-1363

Philotheos Kokkinos 1354-1355, 1364-1376

Makarios 1376-1379, 1390-1391

Neilos 1380-1388

Antonius IV 1389-1390, 1391-1397

Kallistos II Xanthopoulos [22 Nov.] 1397

Matthew I 1397-1410

Euthymios II 1410-1416

Joseph II 1416-1439

Metrophanes II 1440-1443

Gregory III Mammas 1443-1450

Athanasius II 1450-1453