



Summary :

The Byzantine aristocratic family of Argyros emerged in the mid-9th century. It had strong ties with the themes of Charsianon and Anatolikon. The family reached its heyday during the reign of Romanos III Argyros. After the late 11th century, Argyros lineage gradually becomes less and less influential.

Date and Place of Birth

mid-9th century

Main Role

aristocratic lineage

1. General

The Byzantine aristocratic Argyros family from the [theme](#) of [Charsianon](#) entered the limelight of the Byzantine history in the mid-9th century. Right from the start, the members of the family held key and prestigious positions, mainly in the army. In the first half of the 10th century the Argyros family was forged its ties with the capital thanks to their alliance with the [Lekapenos family](#) and through them with the [Macedonian dynasty](#). The Argyros' alliance with the dynasty was consolidated in the 11th century, when a member of the lineage ascended the imperial throne. The reign of Romanos III Argyros (1028-1034) was the most powerful period of the family, which was allied to other prominent Byzantine families too, such as the [Skleros](#) and the Diogenes lineages. Towards the late 11th century, the Argyros lineage begun to lose power and it gradually declined, as reflected in the positions held by people under this name in the 12th century. Although descendants from [Asia Minor](#) can still be traced through the 15th century, their exact relation to the once prominent Argyros lineage are uncertain.

2. Emergence and origins of the family

The earliest information about the Argyros (Argyropoulos) family dates back to the mid-9th century. The family was probably named after an ancestor, whose nickname "Argyros" (silver) was adopted as family name. We know that the family had ties with the region that came under the jurisdiction of the Asia Minor theme of Charsianon exactly in that period, and that members of the family held military posts in this theme, as they did in the [theme of Anatolikon](#) too.¹

The ascent of the Argyros family begun during the reign of Michael III (842-867), when its first members are attested among the Byzantine military officials. The first known Argyros, a certain Leo of humble origins, was a military official; he served as a [tourmarches](#) and grabbed the chance to ascend thanks to the war against the [Arabs](#) and the [Paulicians](#) in the eastern part of the Empire. Leo Argyros founded the monastery of St Elisabeth in the theme of Charsianon.

3. The family in the late 9th and early 10th c.

It would not be a mistake to suggest that it was the career of [Eustathios Argyros](#), Leo's son and second known important member of the family, that gave his descendants the opportunity to attain their place among the most prominent families of the empire. Under Leo VI (886-912), Eustathios Argyros, already a [patrikios](#), became [strategos](#) of Anatolikon. He went on to become [strategos](#) of the theme of Charsianon (*ca.* 907), while in the following year he was awarded the title of [magistros](#) and served as [droungarios of the vigla](#). Shortly later, Eustathios Argyros fell out of favour for unknown reasons and was exiled to his family domain in the theme of Charsianon. But his career and ascent opened the way to his three sons, who were able to occupy the highest military dignities. Two of them, Pothos and Leo, held the position of [domestikos ton scholon](#), while Leo also became [strategos](#) of the [theme of Sebasteia](#).

4. The association of the lineage with the capital



The Argyros lineage was greatly esteemed and had authority in the theme of Charsianon, something also confirmed by the fact that [Romanos I Lekapenos](#) (920-944) married his young daughter Agathe to Romanos Argyros, Eustathios' grandson.² The wedding took place in 921 and indirectly allied the Argyros family to the Macedonian dynasty, since Lekapenos' elder daughter, Helen, was married to the then underage Constantine VII (Porphyrogenitus / 913-959). This marriage gave the Argyros family the opportunity to increase their influence in [Constantinople](#) and make several distinguished friends.

5. The family in the 10th century

During the reign of Romanos I Lekapenos (920-944), the Argyros family along with the [Mouzalon](#) and the Saronites families were among the families supporting the new emperor.³ As co-emperor of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913-959), Romanos I Lekapenos tried to consolidate his position and become independent from the Macedonian dynasty with the support of the above families. The Argyros family grabbed the opportunity and participated actively in Byzantine political matters. They also attempted to take part in the conflicts that broke out among the members of the Lekapenos family. In this framework, Marianos Argyros, the brother of Romanos, the emperor's son-in-law, backed the rebellion staged in 944 by the sons of Romanos I, who wanted to overthrow their father. The rebellion was only partially successful: although Romanos I was deposed, his sons failed to seize the throne; instead, Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, the legal representative of the Macedonian dynasty managed to assume power.

The new emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus started his reign with the reinstatement of the [Phokas family](#) by appointing some of its members to key military positions and at the same time awarding Marianos Argyros the title of **comes tou stavlou**. Marianos Argyros later fought in southern Italy and in 959 he was given the leadership of the troops of the Empire's European themes.⁴

When Romanos II (959-963) died, Marianos Argyros joined the opponents of the usurper [Nikephoros Phokas](#) (963-969) and was among the architects of the capital's defence against the rebels. However, his resistance failed to succeed and Marianos, fatally wounded during a conflict, died on August 16, 963, on the day [Nikephoros Phokas](#) was crowned at the church of [Hagia Sophia](#).

6. The Argyros family at the peak of their power: the reign of Romanos III Argyros

The next reknown generation of the Argyros family included the descendants of a certain Argyropoulos, who was the grandson of Romanos Argyros and Agathe Lekapene. Among them was the most prominent member of the family, Romanos III Argyros (1028-1034).

Before he ascended the throne, Romanos Argyros had been **prefect of Constantinople**, a title of which [Michael Psellos](#) had written that it designated an imperial dignity, only without the Purple.⁵ The fact that Romanos Argyros was one of the most prominent officials of the capital in that period is apparent in Constantine VIII's choice of him as his son-in-law and successor while on his deathbed in 1028.⁶

In the years of Romanos III (1028-1034), the Argyros family reached the peak of their power and fame. Various relatives of the emperor were highly honoured and were awarded state positions. For example, in the early years of the reign of Romanos III, his sister Pulcheria Argyropoulina, who was married to Basil Skleros, an offspring of the [Skleros family](#), had considerable influence over the palace. Towards the end of his reign, Romanos III was supplanted by the [Paphlagonians](#), [John Orphanotrophos](#) and his brother Michael, the subsequent emperor [Michael IV](#) (1034-1041). Because Emperor Romanos III had no children, the Argyros family was not able to found a dynasty. The reign of Romanos III ended in April 1034, when the emperor died under mysterious circumstances and Michael IV the Paphlagonian ascended the throne.⁷

7. Relations of the Argyros family to other families

The Argyros lineage, as a notable and wealthy family, had the opportunity to form alliances with distinguished families. The wedding between Romanos Argyros and Agathe Lekapene in 921, as mentioned above, made the Argyros family one of the first families of the



Empire to be allied to the Macedonian dynasty. In the years of Basil II (976-1025), the Argyros family were related to the Skleros family: Pulcheria Argyropoulina was married to Basil Skleros, the grandson of the renowned usurper [Bardas Skleros](#). A sister of Romanos III got married to an offspring of the Karantinos family.⁸

Romanos III Argyros's (1028-1034) ascend to throne was the result of his marriage. Romanos had to marry either Zoe or Theodora, the daughters of Constantine VIII, in order to become emperor. According to the Byzantine historian John Skylitzes, the marriage was first proposed to Theodora, who refused to marry Romanos, either because of the possible conflict resulting from the already established marital alliance between the Macedonian dynasty and the Argyros family, or because Romanos was already married in that period. However, the conflict resulting from the alliance was resolved with the intervention of the patriarch.⁹ Finally, Romanos Argyros got married to Zoe and assumed power as Emperor Romanos III (1028-1034). The Argyros family then went on to establish alliances with the Diogenes family: a niece of Romanos III was married to the patrikios [Constantine Diogenes](#), the father of the subsequent Emperor [Romanos IV Diogenes](#) (1068-1071).¹⁰

According to [Nikephoros Bryennios](#), before [Alexios I Komnenos](#) (1081-1118) got married to [Eirene Doukaina](#), he had been engaged (maybe even married?) to an offspring of the “notable” and “wealthy” Argyros family.¹¹ This is not reported by other sources but in case it is true, the betrothal (or marriage) could have taken place in the early years of the second half of the 11th century. The fiancée (or wife) of Alexios Komnenos must have died before 1077, when Alexios got married to Eirene Doukaina.

However, despite such relations to prominent Byzantine families, the lack of alliance with the Komnenian dynasty was decisive for the future of the Argyros family. After 1081, when Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118) ascended the throne, the key positions of the state were reserved to the relatives of the Komnenos and the [Doukas](#) families. The fact that the Argyros lineage failed to marry into any of these two families lowered their prestige and influence and led to its gradual decline towards the late 11th century.

8. The Argyros lineage in the 12th c.

Although there is information about certain people under the surname Argyros-Argyropoulos through the 12th century, the importance of the family was reduced and the Argyros family was no longer ranked among the [upper class](#) of the Byzantine society. Some Argyroi held administrative offices. It seems that the descendants of the old Argyros family withdrew from the army at some point in the second half of the 11th century. Furthermore, although the name Argyros-Argyropoulos can be attested in different regions of the empire, such as Crete, it is impossible to define the relation of these persons to the Asia Minor lineage. This is also the case with various Argyroi attested in the 14th and the 15th c. in the European territories of the Empire (Chalkidike Peninsula, Serres and Thessaloniki).¹² However, the descendants of the Argyros family of Asia Minor can still be traced until the 15th century.¹³

9. The surname Argyros in Southern Italy

The surname Argyros was in use in various regions of southern Italy. However, it is rather a coincidence, as it was used sporadically and not as a family name going back to the Byzantine Argyros lineage of Charsianon.¹⁴

1. The sons of Basil Argyros (the brother of Romanos III), influential figures of the theme of Anatolikon according to Skylitzes, took part in the rebellion of Isaac Komnenos in 1057; see Thurn, J. (ed.), *Ioannes Scylitzes, Synopsis historiarum* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae V, Berlin - New York 1973), p. 488.

2. According to John Skylitzes, Agathe got married to Leo, Eustathios' son; see Thurn, J. (ed.), *Ioannes Scylitzes, Synopsis historiarum* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae V, Berlin - New York 1973), p. 213. However, the information provided by Theophanes Continuatus that Agathe married the son of Leo and grandson of Eustathios should be considered more reliable; see *Symeonis magistri ac logothetae, Annales: Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon magister, Georgius Monachus*, Bekker, I. (ed.) (CSHB, Bonn 1838), p. 399. See also Vannier, J-F., *Familles byzantines: Les Argyroi (IXe – XIIIe siècles)* (Paris 1975), p. 26.



3. In the years of Romanos I Lekapenos, the Argyros, Mouzalon and Saronites families entered the limelight, while the Phokas family declined. When Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus ascended single-handed the throne, he sought support from the Phokas family, who became very influential in the empire, while the followers of the overthrown Romanos I Lekapenos were ousted from their positions.
4. On that occasion, Marianos Argyros is reported as *μονοστράτηγος* (monostrategos-the only strategos) of the European themes; see Vannier, J-F., *Familles byzantines: Les Argyroi (IXe - XIIIe siècles)* (Paris 1975), p. 31.
5. Renauld, É. (ed.), *Michel Psellos, Chronographie ou histoire d'un siècle de Byzance I* (Paris 1926, 1928), p. 30.
6. According to John Skylitzes, Constantine VII at first intended to appoint Constantine Dalassenos his successor, but later changed his mind and appointed the prefect of the city, Romanos Argyros, who was clearly supported by eminent figures of the capital and the imperial court; see Thurn, J. (ed.), *Ioannes Scylitzes, Synopsis historiarum* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae V, Berlin - New York 1973), pp. 373-374.
7. According to John Skylitzes, the death of Romanos Argyros was the result of a conspiracy planned against him by John Orphanotrophos, Michael of Paphlagonia and their followers. According to the same source, on April 11, 1034, Romanos III was murdered in his bath; see Thurn, J. (ed.), *Ioannes Scylitzes, Synopsis historiarum* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae V, Berlin - New York 1973), p. 391. Michael Psellos also reports that Zoe, Michael and John Orphanotrophos were considered responsible for the emperor's death; see Renauld, É (ed.), *Michel Psellos, Chronographie ou histoire d'un siècle de Byzance I* (Paris 1926, 1928), pp. 50-52.
8. He was Constantine Karantinos; see Vannier, Jean-F., *Familles byzantines: Les Argyroi (IXe - XIIIe siècles)* (Paris 1975), p. 42.
9. The first wife of Romanos was called Helen. Because she renounced the world and became a nun, Romanos Argyros entered into a second marriage. See Σκυλιτζής, Thurn, J. (ed.), *Ioannes Scylitzes, Synopsis historiarum* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae V, Berlin - New York 1973), p. 374.
10. She was the daughter of Basil Argyros, the brother of Emperor Romanos III; Thurn, J. (ed.), *Ioannes Scylitzes, Synopsis historiarum* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae V, Berlin - New York 1973), p. 376. See also Vannier, J-F., *Familles byzantines: Les Argyroi (IXe - XIIIe siècles)* (Paris 1975), pp. 49-50.
11. Gautier, P. (ed.), *Nicéphore Bryennios histoire: introduction, texte, traduction et notes* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae IX, Bruxelles 1975), p. 221. See also Vannier, J-F., *Familles byzantines: Les Argyroi (IXe - XIIIe siècles)* (Paris 1975), p. 51 and n. 1 and 4. Βαρζός, Κ., *Η γενεαλογία των Κομνηνών I* (Thessaloniki 1984), p. 87, reports that Alexios Komnenos married the daughter of the wealthy feudal lord of Italy Argyros circa 1076, but she soon died.
12. For the Argyros/Argyropoulos family members appearing in the late Byzantine years, see *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit*, fasz. 1 (Wien 1976), no. 1242-1292. See also *PLP, Addenda und Corrigenda zu Faszikel 1-8* (Wien 1988), no. 91279-91412.
13. Brand, C.M., "Argyros", in Kazhdan, A. (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium I* (New York - Oxford 1991), pp. 165-166.
14. For more information about the above mentioned people, see Vannier, J-F., *Familles byzantines: Les Argyroi (IXe - XIIIe siècles)* (Paris 1975), pp. 57-61.

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Glossary :

	domestikos ton scholon
	Commander of the regiment of <i>scholae</i> . The first officer with this title appears in 767/8. In the 10th C the domesticos became very powerful among the army of the <i>themata</i> ; in mid-10th C the office was divided in two, <i>domestikoi ton scholon</i> of the East and those of the West, commanders in chief of the eastern and the western provinces' army respectively.
	droungarios tes viglas
	Commander of the tagma of the vigla (military corps in the Constantinople). The title is mentioned from the 9o C and existed until the 15o C. "Droungarios tes viglas" was responsible for guarding the emperor in the palace and on expeditions.
	komes tou stavlou
	Komes tou stavlou (mean. comes of the stables) was a dignity known already from the Early Byzantine period. In the 9th and 10th C., the komes tou stavlou was in charge of the cavalry in the capital (of the imperial stables), and was also responsible for the stables at Malagina (a major station for the imperial cavalry used in campaigns to the eastern part of the Empire). A <i>komes tou stavlou</i> had many subordinate officials. During campaigns, the <i>komes tou stavlou</i> was also responsible for the provisions of fodder, as well as for the mules of burden. After the 11th C., the dignity of <i>komes tou stavlou</i> was designated by the title of <i>konostavlos</i> .
	magistros
	Higher office that Philotheos in his Kletorologion places above the anthypatos. This title lost its importance from the 10th century and gradually disappeared - most probably in the middle of the 12th century.
	patrikios
	(from lat. <i>patricius</i>) Higher title of honour, placed, according to the " <i>Tactika</i> " of the 9th and the 10th centuries, between <i>anthypatos</i> and <i>protospatharios</i> . 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.
	praefectus urbi (prefect of the city)
	(later referred to as the <i>eparch</i> of the city) Administrator and virtual governor of Constantinople in the Early/Middle Byzantine Era. He was responsible for the surveillance and the harmonious life of the Capital. One of his responsibilities was to control the commercial and manufacturing activities of Constantinople. After 1204, however, the office began to diminish, while from the 14th century, his responsibilities were assumed by two officers, the so-called <i>kephalatikeyontai of the capital</i> .
	strategos ("general")



During the Roman period his duties were mainly political. Office of the Byzantine state's provincial administration. At first the title was given to the military and political administrator of the themes, namely of the big geographic and administrative unities of the Byzantine empire. Gradually the title lost its power and, already in the 11th century, strategoi were turned to simple commanders of military units, responsible for the defence of a region.



tourmarch

Civilian and military commander of a *tourma*, subdivision of a *theme*.

Sources

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Chronological Table

mid-9th c.: First mention of the Argyros lineage from the theme of Charsianon, Asia Minor

reign of Michael III (842-867): Leo Argyros, founder of the monastery of St Elisabeth in the theme of Charsianon, holds high military positions

reign of Leo VI (886-912): Eustathios Argyros becomes *strategos* of the theme of Anatolikon and holds high offices

c. 907: Eustathios Argyros, the son of Leo Argyros, becomes *strategos* of the theme of Charsianon

c. 908: Eustathios Argyros is awarded the title of *magistros* and is appointed *droungarios of the vigla*

first half of the 10th c.: Two sons of Eustathios Argyros, Pothos and Leo, among other offices they held, are also appointed to the position of *domestikos ton scholon*

921: Romanos Argyros gets married to Agathe, the daughter of Romanos I Lekapenos (920-944)



944: Marianos Argyros participates in the conspiracy staged by the sons of Romanos I Lekapenos to overthrow their father

945: Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913-959) appoints Marianos Argyros *komes tou stavlou*

959: Marianos Argyros in head of the army of the West

963: Marianos Argyros resists the usurper Nikephoros Phokas, the subsequent Nikephoros II (963-969), and dies because of the wounds he suffered during the conflicts of August 16, 963

August 16, 963: Nikephoros Phokas is crowned at Hagia Sophia

reign of Basil II (976-1025): Pulcheria Argyropoulina, the sister of the subsequent Emperor Romanos III, marries Basil Skleros, the grandson of the usurper Bardas Skleros

late 10th or early 11th c.: The sister of Romanos III marries Constantine Karantinos

1028: The prefect of Constantinople Romanos Argyros is appointed successor of Constantine VII (1025-1028). He also marries Zoe Porphyrogeniti, of the Macedonian dynasty.

1028-1034: Reign of Romanos III Argyros

April 1034: Romanos III dies in his bath under mysterious circumstances

mid-11th c.: A niece of Romanos III marries Constantine Diogenes, the father of Romanos IV (1068-1071)

1057: Two sons of Basil Argyros, the brother of Romanos III, who are reported among the ruling class of the theme of Anatolikon, join the usurper Isaac Komnenos

before 1077: Possible betrothal or marriage between an offspring of the Argyros family and Alexios Komnenos

late 11th c.: The Argyros lineage gradually declines

14th-15th c.: It is not possible to decide whether certain people living in the western part of the Byzantine Empire under the name Argyros have any relation to the Argyros family of Charsianon

Auxiliary Catalogs

Brief biographical notes on the most distinguished members of the Argyros family:

Leo Argyros: The first known prominent member of the Argyros family appeared in the years of Michael III (842-867) as a tourmarches. He participated in the battles against the Arabs and the Paulicians and founded the monastery of St Elisabeth in the theme of Charsianon.

Eustathios Argyros: Son of Leo Argyros. He held several military-administrative offices in the years of Leo VI (886-912). He served as strategos of Anatolikon, *strategos* Charsianon, *magistros* and *droungarios of the vigla*. He was largely responsible for the ascent of the Argyros family and had at least three children.

Leo Argyros: Son of Eustathios Argyros. In 917 he participated in the battle of Anchialos, where the Bulgarians defeated the Byzantines. He served as *strategos* of Sebasteia, *magistros* and *domestikos ton scholon* succeeded by his brother Pothos.



Pothos Argyros: Son of Eustathios Argyros. He held military positions and in 921 became *domestikos ton scholon*.

Romanos Argyros: The third son of Eustathios Argyros. He held military positions, while along with his brother Leo he participated in the battle of Anchialos in 917.

Romanos Argyros: Son of Leo Argyros and grandson of Eustathios. He lived in the first half of the 10th century and married Agathe, the daughter of Romanos I Lekapenos (920-944). Through that marriage the Argyros family were indirectly allied to the Macedonian dynasty, as Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913-959) was married to Helen, the eldest daughter of Romanos I.

Marianos Argyros: Son of Leo Argyros and grandson of Eustathios. In 944 he participated in the conspiracy staged by the sons of Romanos I Lekapenos against their father. When Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus ascended the throne, he was rewarded with the title of comes tou stavlou and other kindred positions. In 955 he was sent to southern Italy and in 959 became *domestikos ton scholon* of the West. He opposed the usurper Nikephoros Phokas, the subsequent Nikephoros II (963-969). He was among the architects of the capital's defence, but was wounded during the conflicts and died on August 16, 963.

(anonymous) Argyropoulos: He lived in the 10th century and was the father of Romanos III (1028-1034), Basil Argyros and Pulcheria Argyropoulina.

Romanos III Argyros (1028-1034): Son of the above Argyropoulos: he served as political official and in 1028, while he was prefect of Constantinople, Constantine VII appointed him his successor. Romanos married Zoe Porphrogennete and ascended the throne. He died childless on April 11, 1034.

Pulcheria Argyropoulina: Sister of Romanos III. She was married to Basil Skleros, the grandson of the usurper Bards Skleros in the years of Basil II (976-1025). Pulcheria exercised considerable influence over the palace in the early years of the reign of Romanos III.

Basil Argyros: Brother of Romanos III. In the years of Basil II he served as strategos of Samos, katepano of Italy/Lombardy and *katepano* of the theme of Basprakania. Two of his sons, whose names remain unknown, participated in the rebellion of Isaac Komnenos in 1057, while John Skylitzes places them among the "ruling class" of the theme of Anatolikon.

(anonymous) Argyropoulina, daughter of Basil Argyros: According to John Skylitzes, the daughter of Basil Argyros was married to Constantine Diogenes, the father of the subsequent Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes.

(anonymous) Argyropoulina: Unknown offspring of the Argyros family engaged (or married) to Alexios Komnenos, according to Nikephoros Bryennios. In case this was true, this anonymous Argyropoulina must have died before 1077, when Alexios Komnenos married Eirene Doukaina.