



## Summary :

David Grand Komnenos (1458-1461) is the last emperor of Trebizond. In 1458 with the support of Kavazites he set aside the legitimate heir Alexios V and became emperor on a critical moment for the Empire, when its very existence was threatened by the Ottoman domination in Asia Minor. On August 15, 1461 he was forced to surrender Trebizond to sultan Mehmed II and on November the 1<sup>st</sup>, 1463, he was executed in Constantinople.

## Date and Place of Birth

Between 1407 and 1409, Trebizond

## Date and Place of Death

November the 1<sup>st</sup>, 1463, Constantinople

## Main Role

Emperor of Trebizond (1458-1461)

## 1. Biography

### 1.1. David Grand Komnenos

David Grand Komnenos was born in [Trebizond](#) between 1407-1409. He was the son of [Alexios IV Grand Komnenos](#) (1417-1429) and Theodora Kantakouzene, and brother to Alexander Grand Komnenos (Skantarios) and the emperor of Trebizond [John IV Grand Komnenos](#) (1429-1458). He had four sisters,<sup>1</sup> but only for [Maria Grand Komnene](#) is there information on her life; she was married to the Byzantine emperor [John VIII Palaiologos](#) (1425-1448). David got married twice: in 1429 he married Maria of [Gothia](#), daughter of Alexios Gabras, the ruler of Theodoro (Mangup); this was probably after an agreement made in Gothia by his brother John IV.<sup>2</sup> Some time later he was married for the second time, to Helena Kantakouzene, daughter of George Palaiologos Kantakouzenos.<sup>3</sup> He had three sons with his second wife, Basil, Manuel and George Komnenos and two daughters, Anna Komnene, who married the governor of Lower Macedonia Zaĝanos Pasha, and another one who became the wife of Mamia Dadiani, ruler of the principality of Guria in Georgia.<sup>4</sup>

In 1429 he received the title of **despotēs**. In 1447 led the Trapezuntine forces which attacked the [Genoese trade colonies](#) at [Kaffa](#) and [Crimaea](#). In 1458 he was sent as a delegate in Adrianople in order to sign a treaty between the [Empire of Trebizond](#) and the sultan [Mehmed II](#) (1444-1481), after the destructive attack of the latter to the city of Trebizond, in 1456.<sup>5</sup> Under these circumstances, Emperor John IV was forced to sign a treaty, according to which the empire of Trebizond became tributary to the sultan. David was responsible for ratifying and concluding the treaty.<sup>6</sup>

### 1.2. Rise to the throne - Rule

In 1458, after the death of John IV Grand Komnenos (1429-1458), David succeeded him, setting aside the legitimate heir to the throne, the four-year-old nephew of the emperor Alexios V, son of Alexander Grand Komnenos.<sup>7</sup> David argued that Alexios was too young to rule and managed to gain the support of [Kabasitai](#), an influential family of Trebizond, and to become the ruler of the Empire.

During his reign he tried to follow the policy of his brother against the Ottomans. Thus, he was allied with the [Turkmen](#) and he turned to the West, with letters to the duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good, and Pope Pius II (1458-1464). However, these attempts were not fruitful. In the summer of 1461 Mehmed II (1444-1481) headed against Trebizond at head of a strong infantry and naval force, and after the submission of the neighbouring Muslim **emirates**, the empire of Trebizond **surrendered** too, on August 15, 1461. The last action of David was the conclusion of a treaty of surrender, which provided for leaving the population unharmed.<sup>8</sup>



### 1.3. After the fall of Trebizond

After the signing of the treaty with the Ottomans David, his family and members of the aristocracy, departed on an Ottoman ship to [Constantinople](#) and then to Adrianople, on Mehmed II's orders. Apart from his wife, Helena Kantakouzene, who had left before the fall and had sought refuge to the court of Mamia Dadiani of Guria, the rest of David's family was on the same ship with him; so were also members of the Kabasitai and the [Doranitai](#) lineages and the protovestiarios [George Amiroutzis](#). The imperial family settled in an estate on the valley of Strymon, near Serres. David's son George and his nephew Alexios V remained in Adrianople and converted to Islam under the influence of the Kabazites. David's daughter Anna remained in the court of the Ottoman Sultan and was given as a wife to the governor of Lower Macedonia Zağanos Pasha.<sup>9</sup> On March 26, 1463 the emperor was arrested on suspicion of conspiracy against the Sultan. David was executed along with his sons and his nephew Alexios on November the 1st of the same year.

## 2. In the face of the Ottoman danger

David became Emperor in a critical period for his state, the very existence of which was threatened by the Ottoman dominance in Asia Minor. He tried to follow the policy of his brother John IV Grand Komnenos (1429-1458) who had become ally with the Turkmen [emirs](#) of the region. David turned to the West in the hope of fostering a crusade against the Sultan. He sent letters to the duke of Burgundy Philip the Good and Pope Pius II (1458-1464), emphasizing on the importance of forming alliance towards this end. In these letters, sent with Michael Deligeorgis, he listed the forces he had on his side and the help that each one offered against the Ottoman threat. So, in his letter to Philip he names as allies the rulers of Mingrelia, Imerete, Abkhazia, Alania, Armenian Cilicia, the [Karamanid emirate](#), Ismael of the [Isfendiyar Oğullari](#) of [Sinope](#) and Uzun Hasan of the [Akköyunlu](#). However David must have exaggerated the forces of each of these allies in an effort to impress the duke of Burgundy and convince him to offer his support. He even referred to a supposedly impending capture of Jerusalem, which he promised to the duke.

Pope Pius II also sent a letter to the duke of Burgundy, in support of David's efforts in the East and the West. According to the contents of this letter (January 13th, 1460), he had sent the Franciscan monk Ludovic of Bologna to Trebizond and to other courts of the East to promote a common strategy against Sultan Mehmed II. Despite such mobility in the courts of Europe, the efforts of the last emperor of Trebizond were not fruitful. On the contrary, they caused the concern of the Sultan and motivated him to organise immediately a campaign against Trebizond and the neighbouring emirates, in 1461.

However, the intentions of Mehmed II had already been uncovered in the previous year, when David had sent his niece [Theodora Grand Komnene](#) in Constantinople, to convey a request for the remission of the annual tribute paid by Trebizond according to the treaty signed under John IV. Theodora added a demand of her husband Uzun Hasan, emir of Akkoyunlu, concerning a certain debt.<sup>10</sup> The sarcastic reply of the Sultan foreshadowed the conclusion.

## 3. Siege and surrender of Trebizond

Not only were David's contacts with the Western rulers and pope Pius II were ineffective, but they also caused Mehmed's concern, further intensified by the intercession of Theodora Grande Komnene. Thus, in June 1461 the sultan with massive armies that he had gathered in [Prousa](#) and very well equipped naval forces, headed to the Euxine and Trebizond. On his way there he subordinated the emirates of Sinope<sup>11</sup> and [Amaseia](#), and later he forced the ruler of Akkoyunlu Uzun Hasan to sign a treaty with him and break alliance with Trebizond.<sup>12</sup>

After the sign submission of the Turkmen emirates, David was left alone against the forces of the sultan. At first he was attacked by the Ottoman navy and subsequently by the army who had turned against Uzun Hasan. David managed to endure the siege by sea for 32 days until the vanguard of the sultan arrived. The vanguard under Mehmed Pasha draw near Trebizond and took Skylolimne.

The appearance of the army close to the city walls, the news about the treaty between Uzun Hasan and the sultan, and the lack of water and food forced the emperor to start negotiations with the Ottomans. The [protovestiarios](#) George Amiroutzes, who appears in



the sources as a relative of Mehmed Pasha, was the delegate,<sup>13</sup> from the Ottoman side the interpreter Thomas Katavolinos was sent. The emperor suggested a peaceful settlement and promised his daughter Anna as wife to the sultan, as well as estates which would give the same income with the city of Trebizond. But his suggestions were not accepted by the sultan, who asked for an immediate surrender of the city; finally the emperor yielded. The reasons behind his decision are uncertain. Some scholars argue that George Amiroutzes's role was decisive,<sup>14</sup> based on the fact that the latter one was later honoured with high offices by the sultan. A treaty was signed between the two powers, according to which David would surrender Trebizond to the sultan and Mehmed II would grant him an estate where David and his family could live. Additionally he granted him a high income and the right to maintain all his movables.

#### 4. The end of David Grand Komnenos

On the day of the city's surrender David Grand Komnenos boarded on a Ottoman ship to Constantinople; subsequently he went to Adrianople on the sultan's orders and finally he settled near Serres. Two years later, on March 26th, 1463, David and the male offsprings of the dynasty of Trebizond who lived in Adrianople were arrested and taken to Constantinople, where they were imprisoned in [Yedikule](#) (*Eptapyrgion*). They were executed on November the 1st, 1463 (according to the local tradition, after David declined to convert to Islam). Their bodies were thrown outside the walls of Constantinople. They were later collected and secretly buried by Helena Kantakouzene Grand Komnene, who was present at the executions of her husband and children. George Grand Komnenos, the son of David, was spared on that day due to his young age, but later he met the same fate.

The execution of the Grand Komnenoi was precipitated by the letters he exchanged with Theodora Grand Komnene, in which she had expressed her wish to have one of David's sons or Alexios V Grand Komnenos sent to Mesopotamia. These letters were betrayed to the sultan and strengthened his suspicions of secret arrangements between David and Theodora in order to organise a campaign against the Ottomans; they thus furnished the excuse for the arrest, confinement and execution of David and the male offsprings of the Grand Komnenoi lineage.

1. The emperor had probably one more sister, Valencia, who married Niccolò Crispo, duke of the Archipelago and Lord of Santorine. This view is suggested by Varzos, K. «Η μοίρα των τελευταίων Μεγάλων Κομνηνών της Τραπεζούντας», *Βυζαντινά* 12 (1983), pp. 269-289, esp. 269.
2. Βαρζός, Κ., «Η μοίρα των τελευταίων Μεγάλων Κομνηνών της Τραπεζούντας», *Βυζαντινά* 12 (1983), pp. 269-289, esp. 273.
3. She is considered a daughter of George Palaiologos Kantakouzenos by Nicol, D.M., *The byzantine family of Kantakouzenos, ca. 1100-1460. A genealogical and prosopographical study* (Washington D.C. 1968), p. 187. On the other hand, she is considered the sister of George Palaiologos Kantakouzenos and a possible daughter of Demetrios Kantakouzenos, grandson of the Byzantine emperor John VI Kantakouzenos, see. Βαρζός, Κ., «Η μοίρα των τελευταίων Μεγάλων Κομνηνών της Τραπεζούντας», *Βυζαντινά* 12 (1983), pp. 269-289, esp. 273.
4. Nicol mistakenly reports that David was the father of nine children from his second marriage with Helena Kantakouzene, see. Nicol, D.M., *The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos, ca. 1100-1460. A Genealogical and Prosopographical Study* (Washington D.C. 1968), pp. 189-190.
5. In 1456 the Ottoman sultan sent army against Trebizond under the command of Chetir, governor of Amaseia. The Ottoman army besieged the city by land and sea and later depredated it and captured 2.000 inhabitants, see Nicol, D.M., *The Last Centuries of Byzantium* (London 1972), p. 406.
6. During the negotiations the amount of the annual tribute of the Empire of Trebizond was settled to 3000 pieces of gold. However at an early stage the amount was 2000 pieces of gold, see Miller, W., *Trebizond. The Last Greek Empire* (London 1926), p. 88.
7. Emperor John IV had designated his brother's son Alexios (V) as his heir shortly before he died, see Βαρζός, Κ., «Η μοίρα των τελευταίων Μεγάλων Κομνηνών της Τραπεζούντας», *Βυζαντινά* 12 (1983), p. 271, n. 19.
8. The Sultan did not keep his promises; he massacred and plundered the city and subsequently he divided the population in three parts. The first he settled to Constantinople, the second outside the walls of Trebizond and the third was recruited for the Janisaries. Miller, W., *Trebizond. The Last Greek Empire* (London 1926), p. 106.
9. According to the tradition Anna Grand Komnene, after separating from Zaġanos Pasha, returned to Trebizond, namely in Chapsia of Sangare, where



she founded a village with the name 'Kyra-Anna'. From there she went to Mouzena. An inscription in the church of St. Taxiarches of Chapsia commemorates her faith, her piety and the children she had had, probably with a nobleman. See Miller, W., *Trebizond. The Last Greek Empire* (London 1926), p. 110.

10. It was a tribute owed to the grandfather of Uzun Hasan, which was set after the battle of Ankyra (1402), see Λαμψίδης, Ο., «Η Τουρκοκρατία στο μικρασιατικό Πόντο, 1463-1922», *Αρχαίον Πόντου* 33 (1975-1976), pp. 115-208, esp. 136-137.

11. The ruler of Sinope was in terms with the sultan and later he was forced to leave Sinope for Philippoupolis. See Λαμψίδης, Ο., «Η Τουρκοκρατία στο μικρασιατικό Πόντο, 1463-1922», *Αρχαίον Πόντου* 33 (1975-1976), pp. 115-208, esp. 136.

12. The negotiations with the sultan were carried out by Sarah Hatun, the mother of Uzun Hasan, see Χρυσάνθος, μητροπολίτης Τραπεζούντος, «Η Εκκλησία Τραπεζούντος», *Αρχαίον Πόντου* 4-5 (Αθήνα 1933), p. 534.

13. Miller, W., *Trebizond. The Last Greek Empire* (London 1926), p. 103.

14. Lampsides suggests another view, arguing that not one of the contemporary sources – Kritoboulos, Doukas, Sfrantzes – refers to the betrayal of the city by George Amiroutzes; the only sources attesting to this – Chalkokondyles and *Ekthesis Chronike* – are subsequent and contain false evidence, see Λαμψίδης, Ο., «Πώς ηλώθη η Τραπεζούς», *Αρχαίον Πόντου* 17 (1952), pp. 15-54.

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## Glossary :

	<b>despotes</b>
Title introduced in the 12th century. In administrative hierarchy, the office of despotes was under the emperor and the co-emperor. From the 14 <sup>th</sup> century onwards, the title was given to the governors of the Byzantine Peloponnese.	
	<b>emir</b>
(from Arabic amir) Emir meaning "commander" or "general", later also "prince". Also a high title of nobility or office in some Turkic historical states.	
	<b>emirate</b>
Arab emirates were divisions administered by a military officer, the emir. In the Seljuk Sultanate, emirates were territories granted to members of the dynasty as suzerainties. In late 13 <sup>th</sup> and during the 14 <sup>th</sup> century, emirate designates any small state established in Asia Minor by Turkmen rulers, after the dissolution of the Seljuk Sultanate of Iconium.	
	<b>Isfendiyar Oğullari</b>
A Turkmen dynasty, which established its dominion around Kastamone (Castamona) in the late 13 <sup>th</sup> c., under Mongol suzerainty. In the period of 1301-1340, they expanded their dominion as far as Sinope, as independent sovereigns. By 1460 they had passed under Ottoman suzerainty, and so their territory was absorbed in the Ottoman Empire.	
	<b>Karamanid emirate</b>
The Karamanid emirate was established in early 14 <sup>th</sup> c. in the central and southeast Asia Minor. It comprised territories until Lycaonia and Cilicia. Iconium was its capital. The Karamanids were temporarily pushed back by the Mongol khan of Persia Ulajtu, an ally of Andronikos II against the Turkmen. After Ulajtu's death in 1316, the emirate grew into a considerable power. It was assimilated into the Ottoman empire in the second half of the 15 <sup>th</sup> century.	



## protovestiarios

(and protovestiarites) Honorific title given to high-ranking officials and future emperors during this period. The protovestiarios 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.

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## Chronological Table

Between 1407 and 1409: Birth of David Grand Komnenos

c. 1429: First marriage of David Grand Komnenos to Maria of Gothia, daughter of the ruler of Theodoro, Alexios. David receives the title of *despotes*

1447: By order of his brother, E. John IV Grand Komnenos (1429-1458), David is put at head of the military expedition against the Genoese trade colonies of Crimaea and Kaffa

1458: David is sent to the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II in Adrianople as the delegate of E. John IV/ Ascent to the throne of Trebizond

January 13, 1460: Letter of Pope Pius II to the duke of Burgundy Philip the Good, promoting the adoption of a common policy against the Ottoman expansion

June 1461: Sultan Mehmed II launches a campaign in the Black Sea region

August 15, 1461: David surrenders the city of Trebizond to Mehmed II

March 26, 1463: David is arrested, along with his sons and his nephew Alexios V. They are imprisoned in Yedikule at Constantinople

November 1, 1463: David, his sons and nephew Alexios V are executed in Yedikule

## Auxiliary Catalogs

List of the Grand Komnenoi (emperors of Trebizond)

Alexios I (1204 -1222)



Andronikos I (Gidon) (1222 - 1235)

John I (Axouchos) (1235 -1238)

Manuel I (1238 -1263)

Andronikos II (1263 -1266)

George (Planos) (1266 - 1280)

John II (1280 -1285)

Theodora (1285)

John II (again 1285 - 1297)

Alexios II (1297 -1330)

Andronikos III (1330 -1332)

Manuel II (1332)

Basil (1332 -1340)

Eirene (1340 - 1341)

Anna (Anachoutlou) (1341-1342)

John III (1342 -1344)

Michael (1341/ 1344 -1349)

Alexios III (1349 - 1390)

Manuel III (1390 -1417)

Alexios IV (1417 - 1429)

John IV (1429 - 1458)

Alexios V (1458)

David (1458-1461/1463)