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978-1-107-00945-5 - Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: The Material for  
History of Nikephoros Bryennios

Leonora Neville

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## HEROES AND ROMANS IN TWELFTH-CENTURY BYZANTIUM

Nikephoros Bryennios's history of the Byzantine Empire in the 1070s is a story of civil war and aristocratic rebellion in the midst of the Turkish conquest of Anatolia. Commonly remembered as the passive and unambitious husband of princess Anna Komnene (author of the *Alexiad*), Bryennios is revealed as a skilled author whose history draws on cultural memories of classical Roman honor and proper masculinity to evaluate the politicians of the 1070s and, by implication, exhort his twelfth-century contemporaries to honorable behavior. Bryennios's story valorizes the memory of his grandfather and other honorable, but failed, generals of the eleventh century while subtly portraying the victorious Alexios Komnenos as un-Roman. This reading of the *Material for History* sheds new light on twelfth-century Byzantine culture and politics, especially the contested accession of John Komnenos, the relationship between Bryennios's history and the *Alexiad*, and the function of cultural memories of Roman honor in Byzantium.

LEONORA NEVILLE holds the John W. and Jeanne M. Rowe Professorship in Byzantine History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and is the author of *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society: 950–1100* (2004).

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## *Acknowledgments*

The task of understanding Nikephoros Bryennios's history has drawn me into new areas of scholarly specialization. The gracious generosity of friends has made this far more fun than daunting. Catherine Chin provided delightful orientation and guidance in gender theory. Sarah Ferrario helped me navigate the deep waters of classical studies and ancient historiography. Sarah has read more Nikephoros than probably any other card-carrying classicist. This book is much better because of her insights and I am deeply grateful for her interest. Philip Rousseau's invitation to help with the seminar of the Center for the Study of Early Christianity at The Catholic University of America, and his invariably insightful contributions on those occasions, provided an ongoing education on methodologies for approaching ancient and medieval texts. They are treasured friends and teachers.

Nikephoros Bryennios makes for good conversation, and I have had the pleasure of discussing this project with many friends, old and new. I presented parts of this project at various fora at The Catholic University of America where I benefited from discussions with Bill Klingshirn, Kate Jansen, Janet Timbie, Sidney Griffith, Therese-Anne Druart, Lourdes Alvarez, Frank Mantello, Tom Tentler, Leslie Wookcock Tentler, Jim Riley, Jerry Muller, Jennifer Davis, Caroline Sherman, Laura Mayhall, and John Petruccione. Elizabeth Fisher commented at a colloquium on an early chapter.

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saving me from errors. Those that remain are mine alone. Nancy Ševčenko advised me on possible cover images and Sharon Gerstel graciously shared her photo from Agioi Anargyroi in Kastoria.

The final stages of writing were supported by the John and Jeanne Rowe chair of Byzantine History at the University of Wisconsin Madison. Mr. and Mrs. Rowe's understanding of the value of scholarship in the humanities and the benefits of humanities education for reflective citizenship is a welcome light in an uncertain world. They have my deep gratitude.

When I first began to work on Nikephoros Bryennios's history one of the many factors recommending the project was that it seemed like something I could work on from home while tending my newborn son. One wonders whether the subject matter has had any influence on Anselm's particularly keen interest in play sword-fighting. By the time I realized I needed to write a chapter on Anna Komnene, my daughter Evangeline Joy had arrived and was old enough to ask if my book had any princesses in it. This book is dedicated to them in gratitude for their interest, patience, and delightful presence. As ever, many thanks are due to Stephen for his unwavering support.

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## *Note on citations*

Citations of classical sources follow the standard system of abbreviations in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. I have cited Byzantine sources according to section divisions that have been used by the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*. Often this is a page number in a particular edition. In some cases it is a book and chapter in the medieval text. The *TLG* seems to present the best chance Byzantinists have to develop a uniform system of citing our sources because the internet is more widely available than print editions of the texts. In the case of Nikephoros Bryennios, the references are to the section and line numbers used in the *TLG*, not to the page numbers of Gautier's edition. Appendix 1 shows the correspondences between *TLG* and Gautier's line numbering, enabling those with access to either edition to find the relevant passages. Citations to Attaleiates use the page numbers of the Bonn edition (used by the *TLG*), which are noted in the margins of the 2002 Madrid edition. Greek names are transliterated following the usage of the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. For the transliteration of Turkish names I have tried to use the form most readily found in current scholarship.

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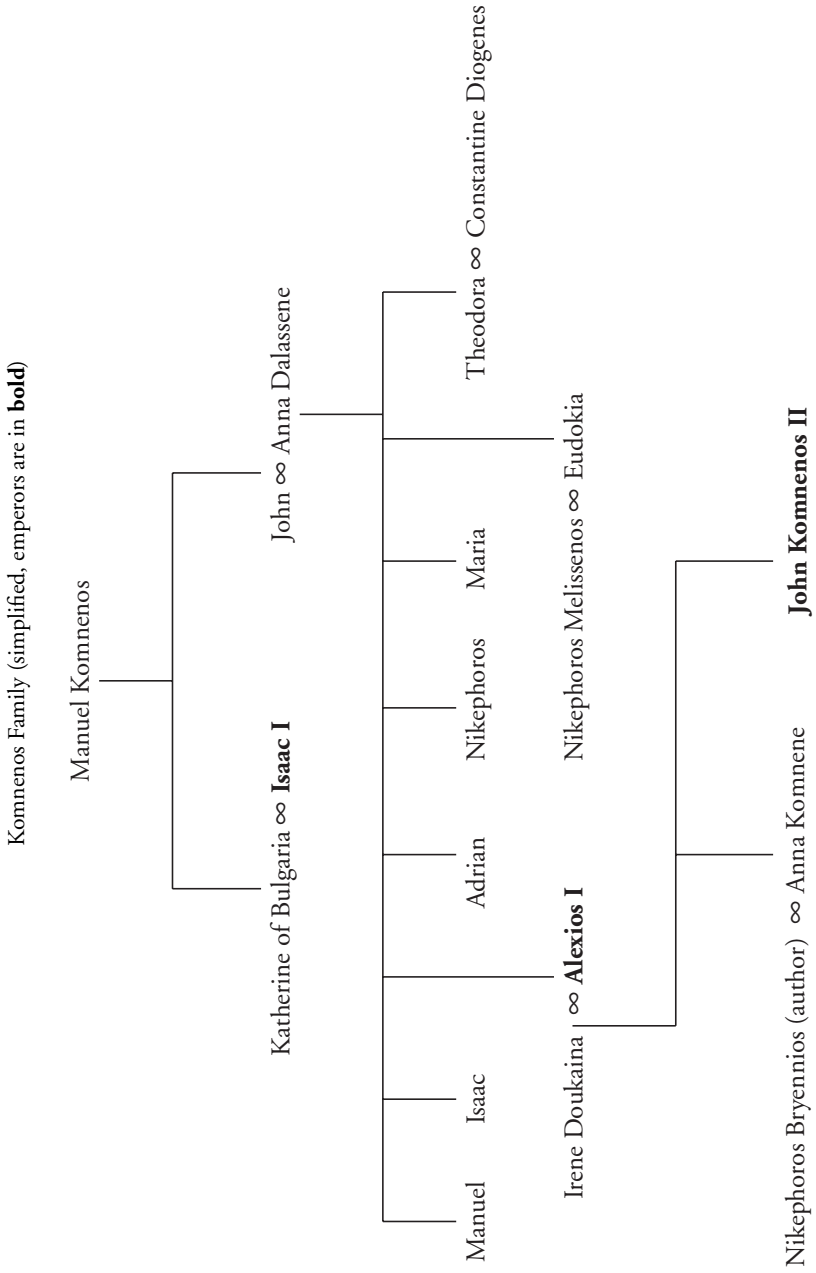
[More information](#)*Main characters and genealogical tables***Eastern Roman Emperors**

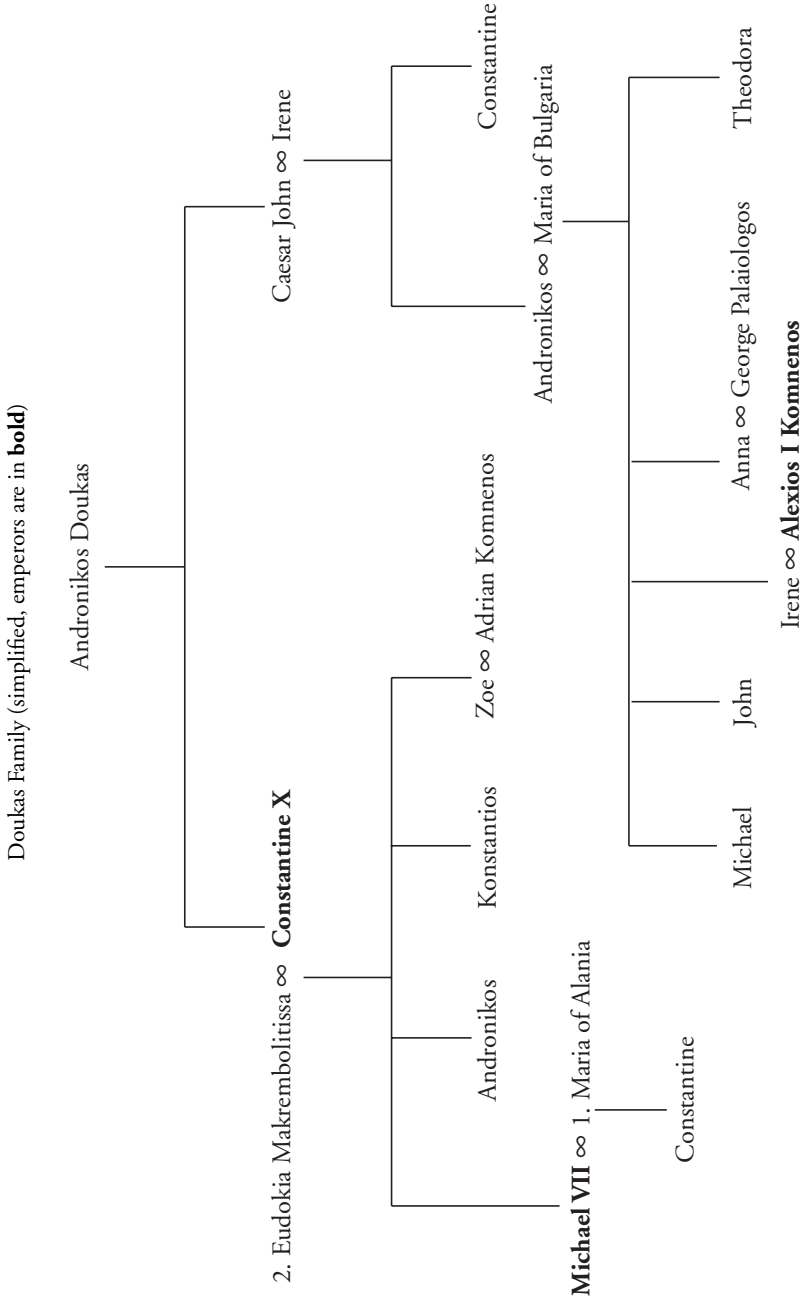
- 1057–1059 Isaac Komnenos  
 1059–1067 Constantine X Doukas  
 1067 Eudokia (Constantine's  
 widow)  
 1068–1071 Romanos Diogenes  
 (Eudokia's second  
 husband)  
 1071–1078 Michael VII Doukas  
 (Eudokia's son)
- 1078–1081 Nikephoros III  
 Botaneiates
- 1081–1118 Alexios I Komnenos  
 1118–1143 John Komnenos  
 1143–1180 Manuel Komnenos

**Revolts/Counter Emperors (Select)**

- Romanos Diogenes October  
 1071–August 1072  
 Roussel de Bailleul 1072–1073 or  
 1073–1074  
 John Doukas (with Roussel) 1073  
 or 1074  
 Nikephoros Bryennios November  
 1077–late spring 1078  
 Nikephoros Botaneiates October  
 1077–early spring 1078  
 Nikephoros Basilakes summer 1078  
 Konstantios Doukas (Michael VII's  
 brother) spring 1079  
 Nikephoros Melissenos fall  
 1080–April 1081  
 Alexios Komnenos February–April  
 1081

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### *Note on Nikephoros and Bryennios*

Two gentlemen named Nikephoros Bryennios figure dominantly in this book. One led an unsuccessful bid to become emperor in 1077. His revolt is described in detail in the history written by his grandson and namesake. For the sake of clarity in the following I have tried to call the twelfth-century author “Nikephoros” and the eleventh-century usurper “Bryennios” or “Nikephoros Bryennios the Elder.” This is my usage and not that of our source material.