

ANDRONIKOS III PALAIOLOGOS – THE LAST SOLDIER-EMPEROR OF THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

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Abstract: *The reign of Andronikos III Palaiologos often remains overshadowed by the tumultuous civil conflicts of the Palaiologan era and the subsequent events precipitating the rapid territorial decline and ultimate collapse of the Byzantine Empire. Amidst the multifaceted challenges confronting the empire during Andronikos's ascendancy, characterized notably by the loss of nearly all remaining territories in Asia Minor, his reign witnessed a noteworthy consolidation of imperial power. Through the pursuit of an assertive foreign policy, particularly marked by military engagements and demonstration of the empire's martial prowess, Andronikos managed, to the extent feasible, to effectuate a notable territorial expansion, constituting the final significant territorial expansion of the empire. By commanding the army personally and actively engaging in more than twenty campaigns and battles, Andronikos could rightfully earn the epithet of the last soldier-emperor of the Byzantine Empire.*

Keywords: *Andronikos III Palaiologos, Late Byzantine Empire, 14th century Balkans, medieval military history, soldier-emperor, Byzantine foreign policy.*

The reign of Andronikos III (1328 – 1341) is not characterized by intricate diplomatic processes or arduous efforts for the survival of the empire. His name is not linked to the Union of the Churches as is the case with Michael VIII Palaiologos, nor does he attain legendary status akin to the last Byzantine emperor, Konstantinos XI Palaiologos. Nevertheless, Andronikos' rule underscores that the Byzantine Empire, while in decline, could assert itself effectively as a regional power in the southern Balkan peninsula under the resolute leadership of an emperor. The audacity and determination exhibited by the emperor in facing challenges prompted the final revival of Byzantine power.

This article seeks to assess whether Andronikos III's military policies warrant his designation as the last soldier-emperor of the Byzantine Empire. The examination involves a concise analysis of the campaigns and battles personally

led by the emperor across all war fronts during his 13-year sole reign. The term “soldier-emperor” is utilized herein to characterize rulers who consistently engaged in military campaigns throughout their reigns or actively promoted their martial capabilities as integral facets of their public image. This classification is exclusive to rulers who did not ascend to the imperial throne primarily through a previous military career. It is imperative to note that this article will refrain from providing an exhaustive examination of the ultimate outcomes and enduring consequences of Andronikos' military campaigns, however it will highlight the aspects that show Andronikos' military prowess. The primary focus lies in evaluating his direct involvement in warfare rather than the overall effectiveness of his military endeavors.

The primary sources providing insights into the events of Andronikos' reign are the historio-

graphical works of John VI Kantakouzenos and Nikephoros Gregoras. A comprehensive depiction of Andronikos' activities can be found in the writings of Kantakouzenos, who served as a close confidant and high-ranking official during the emperor's rule. Kantakouzenos portrays Andronikos as a sagacious general and a courageous soldier, attributing his defeats to external factors such as the topography of the terrain or instances of treachery. Andronikos is depicted as adhering to appropriate Byzantine battle tactics, simultaneously earning commendation for acts of great valor on the battlefield, where he is frequently described as personally charging against the enemy and standing resolute in the face of superior forces. In contrast, Gregoras, a supporter of the elderly emperor Andronikos II, presents a contrasting view of Andronikos III. Gregoras portrays him as a mediocre, if not inadequate, general who failed to meet the challenges on the battlefield, even suggesting a lack of fortitude at some instances. Gregoras' account leans towards a more critical assessment of Andronikos III's military prowess, in stark contrast to Kantakouzenos' more favorable portrayal. The apparent dissonance in the historical accounts of Andronikos III's reign can be attributed to the perspectives and allegiances of the chroniclers. John VI Kantakouzenos, being the closest friend and collaborator of Andronikos III during both the First Palaiologan Civil War (1321 – 1328) and his sole reign (1328 – 1341), provided an account that likely portrayed the emperor more favorably. Kantakouzenos' proximity to Andronikos III may have influenced his narrative, emphasizing positive aspects of the emperor's rule. The proximity to the emperor and active involvement in virtually all recounted events, spanning campaigns and battles, afford the narrator an insider's perspective, a firsthand account, shaping the historical narrative. This perspective yields a richness of information and intricate details. However, it concurrently introduces considerations regarding objectivity, the degree of which

hinges upon the underlying purposes of the narrative. The narrator's personal engagement raises pertinent questions about potential biases that may influence the storytelling, underscoring the need for a nuanced assessment of the presented information. This necessitates a balanced evaluation, acknowledging both the depth of insight and the potential for subjective influence rooted in individual motivations or loyalties. Therefore, a discerning approach to such historical accounts involves cross-referencing with diverse sources to cultivate a more comprehensive and objective understanding of the events under scrutiny. On the other hand, Nikephoros Gregoras, was a supporter of Andronikos II, maintaining personal relations with the dethroned emperor until his death in 1332. This allegiance might have influenced Gregoras to present the reign of Andronikos III in darker colors, leading him to downplay his achievements.

Kantakouzenos' portrayal of Andronikos III as a soldier emperor sharply contrasts with the depictions of his grandfather, Andronikos II, and his great-grandfather, Michael VIII, the founder of the Palaiologos dynasty. The prevailing sentiment from the 11th century emphasized the imperative need for a formidable soldier emperor to shield the empire against its surrounding enemies. Despite a general inclination towards diplomatic solutions to minimize bloodshed, it was underscored that such efforts could only be effective when accompanied by a willingness to employ military force when needed. Michael VIII, characterized in Byzantine texts as the restorer of the empire and a new Constantine, fervently dedicated himself to reclaiming territories lost after the Fourth Crusade. Although certain panegyric speeches celebrated his acts of valor in the Balkans and the Asia Minor frontier, aiming to portray him as an emperor with a concern for all the empire rather than a mere soldier emperor, a nuanced perspective emerges from historical events (Previale 1943 – 1949: 1 – 49; Treu 1906: 30 – 98; Boissonade 1829:

313 – 358). In contrast, despite being presented as the punisher of Turks and the exaggeration of his actions in the Asia Minor through panegyric speeches, Andronikos II's historical actions contradicted this image (Boissonade 1829: 359 – 39; Boissonade 1830: 1 – 56; Metochites Basilikos I: 81 – 96; Metochites Basilikos II: 145 – 158; Lampenos 1992: 27 – 82). While he participated in limited victorious campaigns in the Asia Minor frontier during his tenure as co-emperor and later as emperor, he predominantly refrained from direct military engagement. Similar to his father, he opted to appoint generals to lead Byzantine troops during expeditions. Consequently, the first two Palaeologan emperors cannot be unequivocally characterized as soldier emperors, despite attempts by their supporters to attribute such qualities for political reasons. Significantly, only one panegyric speech extolling the acts of heroism of Andronikos III is known, and it originates from his political adversary, Nikephoros Gregoras (Gregoras 1865: 21 – 27). Nevertheless, the available historical data itself supports Andronikos III's military prowess, countering any attempts to diminish his achievements.

Andronikos III's first campaign as the sole emperor unfolded shortly after his ascension to the throne, likely in the summer of 1328. The Bulgarian emperor, Michael Sišman, seemingly anticipating Byzantine inaction due to recent civil conflicts, seized the opportunity to plunder the border regions of Thrace. In response, Andronikos swiftly mobilized the available Byzantine forces, demonstrating an immediate preparedness for conflict. The Bulgarian emperor, seemingly caught off guard by the promptness of the Byzantine reaction, decided to retreat, allowing Andronikos to counterattack and loot the border town of Diaboli (Cantacuzenos 1828: 323 – 324; Bosch 1965: 69 – 70; Vásáry 2005: 129). Thus, from the onset of his reign, Andronikos implemented the strategy he had advocated to his grandfather during the civil war. He emphasized that foreign policy should not rely sole-

ly on diplomatic solutions but should showcase the Empire's strength through preemptive or retaliation attacks against its adversaries (Cantacuzenos 1828: 180, 219 – 223). The Bulgarian emperor invaded Byzantine Thrace once again just two months later. Despite initial diplomatic efforts by Andronikos to resolve the crisis, which proved unsuccessful, he strategically regrouped his forces in preparation for defense. Recognizing the logistical challenge of assembling the desired troops for a large conflict in a short span, Andronikos employed a strategy of deception. He consolidated available military forces from surrounding areas of Thrace and orchestrated an impressive parade before the eyes of the Bulgarian envoys, who were present in the Byzantine camp. Upon witnessing this display, the envoys informed Sišman of the apparent strength of the Byzantine forces. In response, the Bulgarian ruler, preferring negotiation over confrontation, altered his course, proposing a concession that was ultimately accepted by Andronikos (Cantacuzenos 1828: 324 – 329, 340 – 341; Gregoras 1829: 430 – 431; Dölger 1965: 2723; Bosch 1965: 70 – 72).

Having successfully repelled two Bulgarian invasions without open conflict shortly after ascending to the throne, Andronikos shifted his focus to the Byzantine lands in Asia Minor, which were under constant pressure from Turkoman emirates. In 1329, he mustered a military force and landed in Mesothenia to relieve Nicaea from the besieging forces of Orhan, the emir of the Ottomans. However, in the ensuing battle in early June 1329, at the region of Pelekanos, the Byzantine troops suffered defeat and were routed (Kyriakides 2010: 84 – 97; Kyriakides 2018: 299 – 321; Linder 2007: 21 – 26).

The primary sources detailing this battle, John Kantakouzenos and Nikephoros Gregoras, present disparate narratives. Kantakouzenos, a supporter of Andronikos and a participant in the battle, refrains from attributing the outcome to Andronikos, characterizing it as a setback rath-

er than an outright defeat. He lays blame on the terrain's morphology and the treacherous followers of the previous emperor who spread rumors of Andronikos' death among the army (Cantacuzenos 1828: 341 – 363). Conversely, Gregoras, a critic of Andronikos, attributes the defeat entirely to the emperor's military incompetence, asserting that he acted recklessly and without courage (Gregoras 1829: 433 – 437). While there is disagreement regarding the specifics of the battle, both sources corroborate that the emperor personally led the Byzantine troops.

Later, in the same year, Andronikos directed his attention to the reconquest of Chios, a strategically significant island in North-East Aegean, valued for both its strategic geographic location and substantial wealth. The Zaccaria family exerted control over the island of Chios as *lizioi*¹, or vassals, of the Byzantine emperor since the year 1304 (Pachymeres 1984: 535 – 537; Lopez 1996: 9 – 26; Carr 2014: 115 – 127; Miller 1964: 285 – 291). During Andronikos III's accession to the throne, the governance of the island rested in the hands of the brothers Martino and Benedetto Zaccaria. Over time, Martino gradually marginalized his brother from administrative duties and denied him access to the economic benefits associated with the government of the island. Martino initiated the construction of personal fortifications in the capital, brandishing his banners on existing fortifications, a direct violation of the terms of his vassalage. In response to these actions, Andronikos initially dispatched an ultimatum to Martino, demanding the cessation of all unauthorized construction and urging him to attend discussions in Constantinople concerning the reinstatement of his vassalage (Pachymeres 1989: 609; Cantacuzenos 1828: 370 – 371). The ruler of Chios, however, seemingly accustomed to the empire's inaction in preceding years, refused to comply and instead prepared for an im-

pending siege (Cantacuzenos 1828: 371 – 374; Dölger 1965: 2750 – 2751). Andronikos led a formidable and meticulously selected naval and infantry force in a campaign against his secessionist vassal. Kantakouzenos describes the size and quality of the imperial forces assembled as disproportionately large, considering the apparent difficulty of the task (Cantacuzenos 1828: 375; Gregoras 1829: 438). Whether these descriptions verge on exaggeration or not, they can be construed as a deliberate demonstration of imperial power in the broader region of the eastern Aegean. During that era, the islands of the Aegean Sea constituted a mosaic of Latin hegemonies with a pervasive presence of Turkoman and Latin pirates and corsairs. The Byzantine Empire maintained control over only a minority of the islands. Facing siege by the imperial forces and betrayed by his brother Benedetto, Martino soon submitted to the emperor without a fight and was imprisoned (Miller 1964: 292 – 293; Argenti 1958: 68; Bosch 1965: 115). Following this success, Andronikos swiftly directed his attention to Nea Phocaea on the neighbour coast of Asia Minor, where another secessionist vassal, the Genoese governor Andreolo Cattaneo, held sway (Miller 1964: 287 – 288). Andronikos arrived outside the city walls on the head of the byzantine forces. Exploiting the absence of Andreolo, the emperor subdued the defenders of the city with minimal resistance (Cantacuzenos 1828: 388 – 390). This series of military actions not only showcased the emperor's strategic prowess but also asserted the Byzantine presence in the eastern Aegean region.

After Andronikos's return from the successful campaign in Chios and Nea Phocaea, and following the demobilization of the troops and the fleet, the emperor was compelled to confront a Turkoman incursion that was pillaging the vicinity of Traianoupolis-Vira. Due to the brevity of the previous campaign, there was insufficient time to amass a sizable military force to counter the Turkoman marauders. Nevertheless, through

¹ For the term of *lizios* and its meaning see J. Ferluga 1961: 97 – 123.

the assembly of forces from neighboring areas, Andronikos managed to surprise the raiders and achieve victory over them (Cantacuzenos 1828: 389 – 390).

The next year, around the end of spring in 1330, the Serbian king Stephen Uroš III Dečanski initiated attacks against the northern regions of Byzantine Macedonia. After successfully repelling a Turkoman force raiding Thrace, Andronikos promptly mobilized against the Serbian aggressors. The Serbs, sensing the Byzantine response, swiftly withdrew and relinquished control of certain forts before the advancing Byzantine forces. Simultaneously, Michael Sišman, the Bulgarian ruler, had amassed an army to retaliate against the Kingdom of Serbia. In apparent coordination with the Bulgarians, Andronikos also marched against Serbia, traversing the fields of Pelagonia. Encountering minimal resistance, the Byzantine army seized several border forts (Cantacuzenos 1828: 427 – 429; Živojnović 1996: 56 – 57; Filiposki 2016: 286 – 291). Notably, the emperor refrained from reinforcing the Bulgarian forces, potentially for strategic reasons. Subsequently, the Bulgarian forces under Sišman suffered a decisive defeat at the Battle of Velbuzd. Instead of supporting the Bulgarians further, Andronikos redirected his efforts, capitalizing on the weakened state of Bulgaria. Under the pretext of having ousted his sister Theodora from the Bulgarian throne, Andronikos launched a campaign that culminated in a resounding Byzantine victory. This military success led to the reintegration of numerous cities and castles into the Byzantine Empire (Cantacuzenos 1828: 431, 458 – 459; Gregoras 1829: 457 – 458).

The next crisis unfolded at 1331 when the newly crowned Bulgarian emperor, Ivan-Alexander, swiftly recaptured most of the territories that had previously fallen into Byzantine hands. In response, Andronikos promptly prepared for a counter-campaign in the spring of 1332. However, during this process, news reached Andronikos that Nicomedia was under Ottoman siege. Act-

ing decisively, he led a Byzantine army against the Ottomans, who retreated without engaging in battle (Cantacuzenos 1828: 459 – 460; Schreiner 1975: 64, 79). This episode highlights Andronikos' consistent approach to managing the foreign policy of the empire. An earlier instance in 1326, when Prusa was besieged by the Ottomans, reveals a similar strategic mindset. At that time, Andronikos had suggested to his grandfather a ceasefire in the Civil War between them to enable him to confront the Ottoman besiegers at the head of a small force. Despite his counsel, the grandfather refused, leading to Prusa falling into Ottoman hands shortly afterward (Cantacuzenos 1828: 219 – 223; Gregoras 1829: 401 – 402). While the outcome of the proposed campaign remains uncertain, four years later, the Ottomans chose to retreat without a battle, despite their earlier victory at the fields of Pelekano.

Following the successful, although ephemeral, repulsion of the Ottoman threat, Andronikos proceeded with his original plan and led the Byzantine forces against Bulgaria. The campaign resulted in the recovery of nearly all previously lost territories. However, around mid-July, the two armies clashed at Rusokastro, with the Bulgarian emperor emerging victorious (Cantacuzenos 1828: 459 – 470; Gregoras 1829: 483 – 488; Bosch 1965: 78 – 81). Here, once more, conflicting accounts from Kantakouzenos and Gregoras arise. Kantakouzenos attributes the Byzantine defeat to the betrayal of the Bulgarian ruler, who initially agreed to a peace treaty and then attacked the Byzantine army with reinforcements. On the other hand, Gregoras places blame on Andronikos for both the unjustified initiation of the campaign in Bulgaria and negligence on the eve of the battle (Kyriakides 2018: 306 – 308). Despite these discrepancies, it appears that Andronikos did lead the Byzantine troops in response to Bulgarian attacks and personally participated in the ensuing battle of Rusokastro.

Approximately one month after suffering defeat at Rusokastro, around August Andronikos

was informed that a hostile Turkoman fleet of the Emirate of Aydin, after attacking Samothace, was advancing toward the opposite Thracian coastline searching for a place to disembark. It is plausible that this Turkoman attack was a part of the aftermath of the siege of Kallipoli that must have happened around this period (Enveri 1954: 61 – 63; Lemerle 1957: 72 – 74). Andronikos, commanding a modest force, established a camp at Koumoutzina². The leader of the Turkoman forces was prince Umur, later renowned as the formidable Emir of Aydin and a steadfast ally of Andronikos and Kantakouzenos. He recognized the readiness of the Byzantine army, albeit numerically inferior, and opted for a strategic retreat, avoiding confrontation (Cantacuzenos 1828: 470 – 473).

In the summer of 1333, the Byzantine Emperor undertook the next campaign, targeting the hegemony of Thessaly. Following the death of its ruler, Gavrielopoulos, the region plunged into anarchy, becoming susceptible to exploitation by neighboring powers. Andronikos responded swiftly by dispatching the governor of Thessalonica, Michael Monomachos, to prepare the ground. Subsequently, the emperor personally led an army, and with minimal resistance, incorporated the northern Thessalian territories into the Byzantine Empire. This campaign marked a successful extension of imperial influence in the face of regional instability (Cantacuzenos 1828: 473 – 474; Bosch 1965: 134 – 135; Nicol 1984: 102 – 104; Magdalino 1976). Not long afterward Andronikos was again campaigning in Nicomedia to repel the Ottomans who were besieging the city again, this time led by emir Orhan himself. Eventually, the crisis was resolved through diplomacy and the Ottomans retreated (Cantacuzenos 1828: 446 – 448).

In the spring of 1334, the Byzantine Empire faced a significant threat due to the defection of Syrgiannes Philanthopenos Palaiologos to the

court of the Serbian king, Stefan IV Dusan. Syrgiannes was one of the, if not the primary, instigators of the First Palaiologan Civil war. He was a friend and close relative of Kantakouzenos and also a relative of Andronikos. He was an influential figure who easily gathered supporters around him. However, his opportunist actions led him several times at the disgrace of the ruling emperor. This time Syrgiannes had escaped from Constantinople where he was facing trial under severe accusations of treason against the emperor (Cantacuzenos 1828: 436 – 446; Binon 1938: 378 – 407; Bosch 1965: 89 – 93)³. So, urged by the Byzantine turncoat, the Serbian ruler launched an expedition against Byzantine Macedonia, coming dangerously close to Thessalonica. In response, Andronikos swiftly assembled an army at Didymoteicho to repel the attackers. During the mustering of troops and the subsequent march to Thessalonica, Andronikos, leading a small military force, successfully repelled two Turkoman raids – one in the region of Raidestos and another in Chalkidiki. He also tried to intercept another one that was laying waste at Kissos, but he arrived after the marauders left with their loot (Cantacuzenos 1828: 435 – 436, 455 – 456; Gregoras 1829: 538).

Despite these formidable challenges, the imperial forces eventually reached Thessalonica. The crisis, however, found resolution through the assassination of Syrgiannes and the subsequent signing of a Byzantine-Serbian treaty. This diplomatic solution effectively quelled the immediate threat, stating Andronikos's adept management of both military and political challenges during this critical period (Cantacuzenos 1828: 451 – 457; Gregoras 1829: 495 – 501; Bosch 1965: 89 – 95).

The subsequent year, likely in late 1335 or early 1336, the emperor initiated a campaign against Dominico Cattaneo, the descendant of

³ For an approach on the character and the charges Syrgiannes faced though his life see, Kyriakides 2021: 221 – 238.

² Modern day Komotini.

Andreolo and heir to the seat of governor of Nea Phocaea. He, in alliance with other Latin forces in the Aegean, had established autonomy in Nea Phocaea and occupied almost all the island of Lesbos. The Genoese of Galata in order to delay the emperor from campaigning against their compatriot, had started sabotage actions against the byzantine fleet and begun to arm themselves. Before embarking for the campaign Andronikos attacked the Genoese colony of Galata in Constantinople demolishing many fortified houses and confiscating big amounts of arms he found there. The ensuing campaign against Dominico concluded triumphantly for Byzantium after a few months marked by skirmishes and sieges. This successful resolution further demonstrated Andronikos's ability to navigate through and overcome both military and political obstacles, solidifying his strategic acumen during periods of crisis (Cantacuzenos 1828: 476 – 495; Gregoras 1829: 525 – 535).

In 1337, the frontier in Asia Minor collapsed as the Ottomans occupied Nikomedia and, shortly thereafter, the entire region of Mesothenia. Subsequently, they landed on the outskirts of Constantinople with the intent of plunder. In response to this dire situation and with the Byzantine army once again in disarray, the emperor, alongside the Megas Domestikos John Kantakouzenos, acted swiftly and, against all odds, successfully repelled the Ottoman forces. This decisive action was executed under the direct leadership and participation of the emperor himself, clearly demonstrating his military prowess in the face of a significant threat (Cantacuzenos 1828: 505 – 508; Gregoras 1829: 539 – 542).

Shortly thereafter, Andronikos turned his attention to the issue of semi-autonomous Albanian tribes in the vicinity of Beratio. These tribes had revolted, causing disruptions and raids in the area from Kanina to Beratio. Recognizing the challenges posed by a campaign against these mountainous tribes, the emperor sought assistance and successfully secured aid from Umur,

the emir of Aydin, a steadfast ally of the empire during this period. More specifically, it is mentioned that the emperor knew that the Byzantine cavalry would not be able to pursue the Albanians in the mountainous terrain of the area. For this reason, he requested that light foot soldiers suitable for the occasion be sent to him. In 1338, Andronikos led a mixed army comprising both Byzantine and Turkish soldiers into Albania. This combined force effectively quelled the Albanian revolt, showcasing the emperor's strategic approach in addressing regional challenges through a combination of diplomatic alliances and military intervention (Cantacuzenos 1828: 495 – 499; Gregoras 1829: 544 – 545; Bosch 1965: 135 – 138; Nicol 1984: 108 – 110).

When Andronikos III subdued the Albanian tribes in the vicinity of Beratio in 1338, the lords of Epirus were alarmed due to the proximity and might of the Byzantine army. The apprehensions of the Epirotes were validated, as Andronikos not only established a presence in the area but also exploited the military advantage at his disposal. His commitment to a dynamic foreign policy aimed at integrating the hegemony into the empire prompted secret correspondence with Byzantine circles in Epirus. These contacts sought to gather intelligence on the prevailing situation, enabling strategic decision-making. A faction of influential lords, led by Anna Palaiologina, the widow of the Despot John II Orsini, staunchly advocated armed resistance against the emperor's potential incursion. However, a majority of the lords recognized the pragmatic limitations of rallying an army, especially due to the young age of the heir to the throne, Nikephoros II Doukas. They acknowledged that pursuing a diplomatic approach for conditional submission would yield greater benefits than engaging in open conflict. Given Anna's influential position and the trust she commanded among the Epirotes, she ultimately opted for the diplomatic route. To this end, an embassy was dispatched to Andronikos, who was stationed at Beratio. The proposal in-

volved the betrothal of Nikephoros to the daughter of Kantakouzenos, with the condition that Epirus would retain self-governance within the Byzantine Empire's framework. The Epirotes aimed to preserve their autonomy by presenting this proposal as essentially a dynastic marriage. However, Andronikos was unwilling to do what he perceived as a concession on his part. Notably, the Despotate of Epirus had previously accepted Byzantine suzerainty about a century earlier, concurrently maintaining vassal status with the Kingdom of Naples. The laxity with which the Epirotes treated their engagements indicated a degree of insolvency. In response, the emperor advocated for the absolute submission of the Epirotes and the assimilation of the hegemony's territories into the Byzantine Empire. Observing the emperor's unwavering stance, the Epirotes recognized that total submission or war were the only viable options, and so they chose submission. Rulers who willingly submitted were promised titles and privileges, while Anna faced deposition as queen, assuming the role of a private citizen with the concession of a substantial estate for her comfortable subsistence. This counter-proposal showed Andronikos' vigorous management of the empire's foreign policy and his determination to organically integrate the Despotate into the imperial fold. The emperor, having disbanded the Turkoman units, advanced towards the cities of Epirus. The punitive campaign in Albania contrasted with the emperor's strategic restraint in Epirus, emphasizing his reluctance to plunder the territories slated for incorporation and his desire to avoid antagonizing the Epirotes unnecessarily (Cantacuzenos 1828: 499 – 504; Gregoras 1829: 545 – 546; Nicol 1984: 110 – 114).

Not long after the emperor had departed from the territories of the former Despotate, some loyalist Epirot lords rebelled against Byzantine authority, driven by the return of their fallen leader, Nikephoros II. However, the rebellion was limited in scope, and the anti-Byzantine fac-

tion only managed to gain control of a few positions. When Andronikos learned of the events in Epirus, he was facing another episode of his chronic illness and was unable to lead the army. Nevertheless, he dispatched troops to contain the rebellion's spread and exert pressure on the rebel positions. In 1340, a few months later, Andronikos arrived in Epirus at the head of a new expeditionary force. Faced with the emperor's presence, the rebels realized the futility of their endeavor and surrendered after a few months of resistance (Cantacuzenos 1828: 509 – 534; Gregoras 1829: 550 – 554).

To summarize, over the course of his 13-year reign, Andronikos III Palaiologos led the Byzantine forces in more than 20 campaigns and battles, encompassing both offensive and defensive operations on land and sea across the borders of entire the Byzantine Empire. Despite numerous perils, he displayed determination and quick reflexes, actively engaging the enemies on the battlefield and leaving them little room for reaction. In several occasions the emperor achieved victory by attacking numerically superior enemies, taking them by surprise with his commitment to battle. Besides, Andronikos' chronic illness and the frequent episodes that eventually led to his death in 1341, have been linked, and not unjustly, to the constant physical strain he endured during his campaigns. Emphasizing the military power of the empire as a tool for foreign policy, Andronikos achieved the last significant territorial expansion through a combination of military and diplomatic means. He managed by exploiting the power vacuums in the hegemony of Thessaly and the Despotate of Epirus, combined with rapid military mobilization, to incorporate these regions into the empire, putting most of mainland Greece back under Byzantine control. Concurrently, he managed to curb, to a certain extent, the advances of the Kingdom of Serbia and the Empire of Bulgaria, that were tightening their grip on Byzantium. Furthermore Andronikos managed to subdue the disloyal Latin vassal gov-

ernorns of Chios and Nea Phocaea. Last but not least Andronikos fought back several turkoman raids in Macedonia and Thrace, while he also tried, though unsuccessfully, to defend the last byzantine territories in Bithynia and Mesothenia. This does not mean, of course, that the byzantine army did not suffer defeats in the battlefield such as in Pelekano and Rousokastro. Indeed, these were the only two pitched battles of the Byzantine army during the reign of Andronikos, a fact which demonstrates the weakness of the Byzantine army of that period to cope with a conventional battle in an open field against an organized army. Nevertheless, Andronikos, by marshaling the forces at his disposal and through, managed to a vigorous government lead the empire into the last revival of its might, even as a regional Balkan power.

While Kantakouzenos may have portrayed his actions with some exaggeration, it is evident that Andronikos chose to rule with a sword in hand, spending a considerable portion of his life on the battlefield, leading Byzantine forces in an impressive number of battles in such a short period of time. The overall assessment of his campaigns suggests that while he may not have been the best tactician or a strategic mastermind, Andronikos III Palaiologos undeniably stood as the last soldier-emperor of the Byzantine Empire.

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ABBREVIATIONS:

BZ: Byzantinische Zeitschrift

REB: Revue des études byzantines

ZRVI: Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta

CFHB: Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae

CSHB: Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae

АНДРОНИК III ПАЛЕОЛОГ – ПОСЛЕДНИЯТ ВОЙНИК-ИМПЕРАТОР НА ВИЗАНТИЙСКАТА ИМПЕРИЯ

Георгиос Михайлидис

Резюме: *Управлението на Андроник III Палеолог (1328 – 1341) често остава засенчено от двата бурни граждански конфликта от епохата на Палеолозите и последвалите събития, ускорили бързия териториален упадък и крайния крах на Византийската империя. На фона на многостранните предизвикателства, пред които е изправена империята по време на възхода на Андроник III, характеризиращи се по-специално със загубата на почти всички останали територии в Мала Азия, неговото управление е свидетелство на забележителна консолидация на имперската власт. Чрез провеждането на настоятелна външна политика, белязана от военни ангажменти и демонстрация на военното могъщество на империята, Андроник успява, доколкото е възможно, да осъществи значително териториално разширение, което се оказва и последното такова в историята на империята. Командвайки лично армията и активно участвайки в повече от двадесет кампании и битки, Андроник с основание си спечелва славата на последния войник-император на Византийската империя.*

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