

The Reign of Andronikos III

Hello and welcome to Eastern Roman History.

Ruling from AD1328-1341, Andronikos III Palaiologos, led the Eastern Roman Empire's last genuine revival before its decline and fall in 1453. Andronikos, son of emperor Michael IX, came to the throne after a civil war with his grandfather, Andronikos II, who had been emperor since 1282.

On the night of 23 May 1328, Andronikos III bribed a guard patrolling the walls of Constantinople. He let down a rope ladder that allowed Andronikos' men entry. They threw open the St. Romanos gate and his army of 800 soldiers entered the city. Andronikos II abdicated the throne and was exiled to a monastery, where he died in 1332.

The newly crowned soldier-emperor, Andronikos III, and his best friend, John Kantakuzenos, fended off the Bulgarian Tsar's invasion of Thrace in June 1328. After defeating the Tsar, Andronikos signed a peace treaty with him which secured the border.

John Kantakuzenos revitalised the Imperial navy with the construction of 10 warships that were largely paid for by donations from the aristocracy. The fleet helped secure the coasts of the empire from attack and relieved the Eastern Roman Empire's total dependence on Italian merchant republics for naval aid.

In 1329, Andronikos and John led an army of 4,000 troops into Bithynia to rescue the cities of Nikomedia and Nicaea, which were besieged by the Ottoman Turks. On route to Nikomedia, the Romans engaged the Ottomans at the Battle of Pelekanon. The Romans were winning until Andronikos III was wounded and word quickly spread that the emperor was dying. The army panicked

and routed. The Ottomans pursued and inflicted heavy casualties on the Eastern Roman Army. Andronikos and John withdrew from Bithynia. While Andronikos recovered, he asked John to become co-emperor but John refused. The Battle of Pelekanon was significant because it was the last time the Romans attempted to reverse their declining fortunes in Asia Minor. It was also one of the only major battles fought between the Ottomans and the Romans.

In the autumn, Leo Kalothetos led a Chian uprising against the Genoese rulers of the island. Andronikos sent the Roman fleet to support the revolt and captured the Genoese lord. Having taken Chios, Andronikos then sailed to the Genoese colony of Phocaea which offered him tribute. While in Phocaea, he received embassies from the Turkish Emirs of Aydin and Saruhan.

Meanwhile, Andronikos III and John enacted sweeping reforms to the justice system in the Eastern Roman Empire. Corruption was a major problem that had become rampant under the incompetent Andronikos II. The sale of offices was endemic and the rural poor often turned to ecclesiastical courts to get their justice, as they were generally much fairer than civic courts. To rectify these circumstances, Andronikos and John set up four Universal Justices of the Romans. Two were clergymen and two were laymen. They had exceptional powers to enforce the law anywhere in the empire, especially when dealing with corruption and tax evasion. Their verdicts were final and irreversible. Later in his reign, Andronikos also created local equivalents of the Universal justices, for places such as Thessalonika and Morea, to restore order and prevent corruption. Further, Matthew Blastares compiled the *Syntagma*, a collection of rulings from civic and church courts in 1335. The reform of the justice system spurred the creation of the last major Byzantine judicial works, the *Hexabiblos* by Constantine Harmenopoulos in 1345. This replaced Leo VI's *Basilika* as the standard law book of the empire until its fall in 1453, and was the basis of other law codes such as the Code of Stephen Dushan.

In 1330, Serbia became more of a threat on the empire's western borders. Andronikos and Michael Shishman planned a joint campaign against Serbia. However, the death of the Bulgarian Tsar at the Battle of Velbuzd caused Andronikos to turn on Bulgaria. He then conquered Mesembria and Anchialus. Soon afterwards, Andronikos III fell seriously ill while staying at Didymoteichon so he designated John Kantakuzenos as heir-presumptive.

In 1331, Nicaea fell to the Ottoman Turks and the Bulgarians retook Mesembria and Anchialus from the Romans. Emir Orhan allowed the populace to flee to Eastern Roman territory and then occupied the city.

The following year, Andronikos III's son John V was born. Andronikos accepted an invitation from the Venetians for the Eastern Roman Empire to join a Holy League against the Turkish Emirates of Anatolia. The league included: the Pope, Venice, France, Cyprus and the Knights Hospitaller of Rhodes. The league establish a standing navy of 20 galleys from Venice, Byzantium and Rhodes, with the Romans providing half the ships. Their purpose was to keep Turkish pirates in check. Andronikos launched an invasion of Bulgaria; taking advantage of a rebellion against Tsar Ivan Alexander. Andronikos' army was defeated at the Battle of Rusokastro but peace was re-established.

In 1333, the ruler of Thessaly and a semi-independent Byzantine vassal, Stephen Gabrielopoulos the Kouropalates, died. Michael Monomachos and a Roman army invaded Thessaly at the same time as John II, Orsini of Epirus. John conquered the west and the Romans captured both the north and east. Andronikos III arrived in the autumn at the head of an army and drove the Epirotes out of the west of Thessaly. He fully annexed the Despotate of Thessaly in a few weeks. This was the empire's first significant territorial conquest in decades. To save the city of Nikomedia, which the Ottomans besieged, Andronikos III negotiated peace with the Ottomans at the price of an annual tribute of 12,000 gold hyperpara.

However, once the emperor returned to Constantinople, Syragiannes Palaiologos rebelled and led Serbian armies to conquer Kastoria and Ochrid. Andronikos led an army to drive out the Serbs and his officer, Sphrantzes Palaiologos, assassinated Syragiannes. The king of Serbia, Stephen Dushan made peace with emperor Andronikos, who handed back over Kastoria but kept Ochrid. Andronikos then helped Serbia drive off a Hungarian invasion. The Hungarians withdrew at the sight of Roman troops.

Andronikos III re-opened negotiations for Church Union with the Pope. A letter from 1339 by Barlaam indicates that Andronikos III wanted to mend the Great Schism with an ecumenical council of bishops from east and west, involving the five traditional patriarchs.

In 1334, the Holy League launched an attack on the Aydinid pirates with the intention of capturing Smyrna. Their armada of 40 vessels defeated the Karasi Turks at Adramyttion, but failed to reach Smyrna. The fleet withdrew and the League collapsed. Some blamed the Romans because they did not send their own fleet.

The Genoese colony of Phocaea cancelled their suzerainty to the Eastern Roman Empire then attacked Chios and Lesbos. Andronikos responded by razing the walls of the Genoese colony of Galata, next to Constantinople, and used his navy to blockade Phocaea and Lesbos. John Kantakuzenos made an alliance with the Aydinids and with their aid defeated the Genoese. Andronikos III's solution to the Turkish threat and the Latins was to ally with rival Turkish Emirs.

With Phocaea, Chios and Lesbos firmly in Eastern Roman control, Andronikos married his bastard daughter Irene Palaiologina to the emperor of Trebizond, Basil Grand Komnenos.

John II Orsini was poisoned by his wife, Anna, in 1337. She became regent for her son Nikephoros II Orsini. In addition, 12,000 Albanian nomads in northern Greece rebelled against the Romans and raided Berat and Kanina. Meanwhile, the Ottomans advanced and captured Nikomedia, breaking the peace treaty from 1333. Three Universal Justices of the Romans were put on trial for accepting bribes and then exiled. This trial seems to have ended the spread of corruption at the time.

Andronikos and John prioritised exploiting the weakness of the Despotate of Epiros rather than reclaiming Nikomedia. In 1338, they both led an army, supplemented by 2,000 Aydinid allies. The Turks were decisive in crushing the Albanian rebels. Hoards of loot were recovered and the Albanians were subdued. Also, this was the first time an emperor had visited Northern Epiros since Manuel I.

The regent Anna tried to negotiate a surrender with Andronikos at Berat, but he insisted on their total surrender. The Epirotes wanted to avoid the slaughter and enslavement that the Aydinids had unleashed on the Albanians so they surrendered the Despotate to Andronikos. Anna and her daughters were resettled in Thessalonika. Meanwhile, Nikephoros II was spirited off to Achaia by Epirote loyalists.

In 1339, Nikephoros II, supported by Catherine of Valois, returned to head an Epirote revolt against Eastern Roman rule. Michael Monomachos and John Angelos were sent with an army to check the rebellion in December 1339. Andronikos and John arrived the following year. The Romans besieged Arta, the rebel's stronghold. Thanks to John's charismatic diplomacy they persuaded the Epirotes to end their rebellion. By November 1340, the rebellion was over and Nikephoros II joined the emperor's court in Thessalonika. Nikephoros was betrothed to John Kantakuzenos' daughter Maria. This spurred the Frankish lords of the Peloponnese to declare their loyalty to emperor Andronikos rather than Catherine of Valois in 1340. They sent envoys to convey their allegiance.

During Andronikos' reign the Hesychast controversy broke out. This religious controversy was propounded by Gregory Palamas, a Monk from Mt. Athos. He believed that the light surrounding God could be seen by repeating a short prayer and holding his breath. Barlaam of Calabria proclaimed this to be heresy. In June 1341, the Orthodox church examined Hesychasm at a church synod and rejected Barlaam of Calabria's anti-Hesychast stance. They also forbade further discussion of the matter. Days after this council and a little before the Peloponnesian lords arrived in Andronikos' court, the emperor suddenly fell seriously ill and died. His eldest son, John V, became emperor and John Kantakuzenos acted as regent.

The reign of Andronikos III Palaiologos was successful, despite some initial problems. He had already rectified many of the failures of his grandfather's reign. Although, it could be said that Andronikos should have better planned for his succession, the subsequent civil war after his death was more the fault of his successors than Andronikos himself. His had been, on the whole, a productive reign. The empire had won Epirus, Thessaly and the islands even though it lost in Bithynia and around Ochrid. Better still, more gains were within reach in Greece, and the real architect of Andronikos' success, John Kantakuzenos, remained in good health. Loyal to his friend's memory, Kantakuzenos was the ideal protector for Andronikos' son John.

I have been your host, IronEarth. And this has been Eastern Roman History.