EMPIRE OF TREBIZOND

BACKGROUND NOTE

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When Constantinople fell in the Fourth Crusade in 1204 to the Western European and Venetian Crusaders, the Empire of Trebizond was one of the three smaller Greek states that emerged from the wreckage, along with the Empire of Nicaea and the Despotate of Epirus. Alexios, a grandson of Byzantine emperor Andronikos I Komnenos, made Trebizond his capital and asserted a claim to be the legitimate successor of the Byzantine Empire.

The rulers of Trebizond called themselves Grand Komnenos (*Megas Komnenos*) and at first claimed the traditional Byzantine title of "Emperor and Autocrat of the Romans." After reaching an agreement with the Byzantine Empire in 1282, the official title of the ruler of Trebizond was changed to "Emperor and Autocrat of the entire East, of the Iberians and the Transmarine Provinces" and remained such until the empire's end in 1461. The state is sometimes called the *Komnenian* empire because the ruling dynasty descended from Alexios I Komnenos.

Trebizond initially controlled a contiguous area on the southern Black Sea coast between Soterioupolis and Sinope, comprising the modern Turkish provinces of Sinop, Ordu, Giresun, Trabzon, Bayburt, Gümüşhane, Rise and Artvin. In the thirteenth century, the empire controlled Perateia which included Cherson and Kerch on the Crimean peninsula. David Komnenos expanded rapidly to the west, occupying first Sinope, then Paphlagonia and Heraclea Pontica until his territory bordered the Empire of Nicaea founded by Theodore I Laskaris. The territories west of Sinope were lost to the Empire of Nicaea by 1206. Sinope itself fell to the Seljuks in 1214.



I The Byzantine Empire in 1265.
Byzantine Empire
Greek Empire of Trebizond
Greek Despotat of Epirus
Kingdom of Bulgaria
Kingdom of Servia

Fig 1. *The Empire of Trebizond and other states carved from the Byzantine Empire, as they were in 1265 (From William R Shepherd,* Historical Atlas, *1911).*