

University of Nevada, Reno

**Byzantine Sorrow and Venetian Joy: The Failure of Byzantine Diplomacy and the
Expansion of Trade in the Mediterranean, 700-1200.**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in History

by

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Abstract

From the seventh century to the twelfth century, the Byzantine Empire faced the threat of invasion and trading competition from allies in the West. In order to address these problems, the emperors used a variety of diplomatic strategies that stood in contrast to those employed by Western European polities. These strategies included: gifts and tribute, Christian conversion, imperial marriage, subterfuge and father-figure-diplomacy. However, the diplomatic relationship between Venice and Constantinople shows the limitations of these strategies and their failure to stop Venetian economic dominance. By describing each feature in turn, it can be shown how Byzantine diplomacy helped create expanded trade in Western Europe as well as weaken the Empire against the rise of Venice as a major trading power.

To my wife Elizabeth who read it, ten pages at a time.

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I

Introduction

[I set a doctrine upon thee] first, in what each nation has power to advantage the Romans, and in what to hurt, and how and by what other nation each severally may be encountered in arms and subdued; then, concerning their ravenous and insatiate temper and the gifts they demand inordinately; next, concerning also the difference between other nations, *their* origins and customs and manner of life.

These things have I discovered of my own wisdom, and have decreed that they shall be made known unto thee, my beloved son, in order that thou mayest know the difference between each of these *nations*, and how either to treat with and conciliate them, or make war upon and oppose.¹

-Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, trade concessions from Constantinople to Venice weakened the Byzantine Empire and helped create a strong Venetian Republic. The resourcefulness of these Byzantine diplomatic strategies against other powers would indicate continued success with Venice, yet, the limitations of Byzantine diplomacy allowed Venice to monopolize trade in the Mediterranean. The emperors continued to rely on failed diplomatic policies, proving the eventual futility of these measures against Venetian maritime power.

Diplomacy, for the Byzantine emperors was regarded as a powerful tool and was integral to Byzantine foreign policy.² It became a further extension of the emperor's

¹ Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De Adminstrando Imperio* trans. R.J.H. Jenkins and Gyula Moravcsik (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1966), 45-47.

power and was used in lieu of continual warfare. Warfare, due to its costly nature, was a consideration of last resort.³ The emperors used specific strategies in negotiations with foreign powers. Many of these strategies were compiled in *De Administrando Imperio* (DAI), an empirical treatise written by the Emperor Constantine VII which was intended to guide his son and future emperors in their interactions with rival powers.

As indicated by primary sources such as *The Alexiad* of Princess Anna Comnena, *De Administrando Imperio* by Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus and the *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus* by John Kinnamos, the methods used by the emperors stress diplomatic placation of antagonistic rival powers. While the Empire was not opposed to warfare, the emperors differentiated Constantinople by emphasizing diplomatic strategies. This strategy in this form is distinctly Byzantine in nature and is unique in the ways that it was implemented. Strategies used by the emperors consisted of: the granting of titles and tributes, Christian conversion, the offer of *porphyrogenitus*, subterfuge and the emperor as a father-figure.⁴ These strategies were necessary to prolong the power of the Byzantine Empire until the late eleventh century due to

² Steven Runciman, *Byzantine Civilisation* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd., 1933), 155.

³ John Haldon, “‘Blood and ink’: some observations on Byzantine attitudes towards warfare and diplomacy,” in *Byzantine Diplomacy: Papers from the Twenty-fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge, March 1990* ed. Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin (Hampshire, UK: Variorum, 1992), 282. Haldon is paraphrasing research done by the sociologist Michael Mann in his examples for reasons against war. Haldon states that an empire such as one constructed by the Byzantines which was built upon agricultural labor and overseas trade, would seek secondary methods to avert crisis and not necessarily resort to war.

⁴ Jonathan Harris, *Constantinople: Capital of Byzantium* (London: Continuum UK, 2007), 63-64. The Great Palace of Constantinople (Boukoleon) was comprised of several buildings. One of the buildings contained the Purple Room or Porphyra. “Since the eighth century, it had been reserved for the lying-in of Byzantine empresses, so that it could be said that the heir of a reigning emperor was ‘porphyrogenitus,’

continued conflict with the Normans. In 1082, concessions made by the Emperor Alexius I to the Venetians proved too great and created a massive shift in the political and economic relationship between Constantinople and Venice.

The granting of titles and tribute was a method of diplomacy often implemented by Byzantine emperors as a method of averting protracted war. Even during low points in the Empire's history, emperors were able to utilize vast resources and this allowed the generous granting of titles and tribute. This tribute also came in the form of land. Large sums of gold and other precious objects were given to adversaries as conciliatory gestures.⁵ These payments helped prevent full-scale war in the very areas which produced the riches. In Chapters II and III, I discuss the use of titles and tribute and their effect on Venice's relationship with the emperors.

The Byzantine Empire required integration into the Christian community in order for outside, political entities to gain the benefits of a relationship with Constantinople. Constantinople, the new Rome in the east, was founded in order to be the imperial capital of not only Rome, but also of Christianity.⁶ In the early centuries of the Empire warring, barbarian tribes gained the benefits of the Empire, namely, protection, trade, acknowledgement of nobility and integration into Byzantine society by conversion to

⁵ Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad of the Princess Anna Comnena: Being the History of the Reign of Her Father, Alexius I Emperor of the Romans, 1081-1118 A.D.*, trans. Elizabeth A.S. Dawes (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1967), 266. In an effort to forestall and bribe his enemy, Bohemond of the Normans, Anna's father Alexius I, "selected a room in the palace and had the floor strewn with every kind of riches,...[sic] and so filled the chamber with garments and stamped gold and silver, and other materials of lesser values, that one could not even walk because of their quantity."

⁶ George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* trans. Joan Hussey (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1969), 27-28.

Christianity. As such, baptism was often used as a diplomatic tool.⁷ While this was a very effective diplomatic tactic in the early centuries, by the late eleventh century Christianity was prolific enough to no longer be effective. Venice, a firmly entrenched Christian society was immune to this form of diplomacy.

A presumptive heir born ‘in the purple,’ signified a major political tool used by emperors trying to consolidate power. These children, namely royal princesses, were considered to be ordained by Christ and purple was symbolically associated with the imperial persona. The rarity of porphyrogenitae and the conditions of their birth determined that these children were major factors in Byzantine diplomatic strategy. Porphyrogenitae and those connected directly to them through family stood closest to the imperial throne and succession.⁸ The Princess Anna Comnena described her porphyrogenita birth as, “he [Alexius I] found his wife in the pangs of childbirth in the room which had of old been set apart for the Empresses’ confinements, our forefathers called it the ‘purple’ room, and from it the name ‘Porphyrogeniti’ had become current in the world.”⁹ Until the tenth century, marriage alliances between imperial family

⁷ Jonathan Shepard, “The Uses of ‘History’ in Byzantine Diplomacy: Observations and Comparisons,” in *Porphyrogenita: Essays on the History and Literature of Byzantium and the Latin East in Honour of Julian Chrysostomides* ed. Charalambos Dendrinos et al. (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), 92. Shepard argues that the antiquity of the Byzantine Empire added to its diplomatic recourse in talks with other powers. A fundamental set of Christian principles combined with the awe inspiring nature of imperial understanding of its well established and enduring role in the world, meant that Byzantine propaganda and diplomatic relations were built upon time-honored and “Christ tested” ideals. The *ancientness* [my emphasis] of the Byzantine Empire meant that any diplomatic mission abroad brought with it the power of a millennia of history to back up its claims.

⁸ Warren Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 487. Treadgold is speaking directly of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus.

⁹ Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 150-151.

members and foreign powers were uncommon and remained a crucial, diplomatic strategy rarely employed.¹⁰ Marriage alliances between Venice and lesser imperial family members did occasionally occur but a union between a Venetian noble and a porphyrogenitae never transpired.

Subterfuge as a diplomatic strategy was used by the emperors as another method of avoiding war. Runciman described it as “beneath the veneer of pomp, Byzantine diplomacy was subtle, far-sighted and somewhat unscrupulous.”¹¹ Court etiquette and the role of the imperial ceremony was a carefully orchestrated method of showmanship and statecraft. When visiting dignitaries were brought forward, court ceremony demonstrated the power that emperors had at their disposal.¹² Encounters with the emperor were orchestrated to enhance his dignity in front of the visiting envoy. The walls and size of Constantinople were used as a method of intimidating visiting dignitaries. Even in times of political chaos, the emperor exuded an aura of majesty. Methods of diplomatic subterfuge were employed to convey the impression of invincibility on the emperor.¹³ By the tenth and eleventh centuries, subterfuge diplomacy

¹⁰ Ruth Macrides, “Dynastic marriages and political kinship” in *Byzantine Diplomacy: Papers from the Twenty-fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge, March 1990* ed. Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin (Hampshire, UK: Variorum, 1992), 299. Macrides states that marriages between foreigners and the imperial family up until the mid tenth century ‘can be counted on the fingers of one hand.’

¹¹ Runciman, *Byzantine Civilisation*, 158.

¹² Jonathan Shepard, “Byzantine diplomacy, A.D. 800-1204: means and ends,” in *Byzantine Diplomacy: Papers from the Twenty-fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge, March 1990* ed. Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin (Hampshire, UK: Variorum, 1992), 49-52.

¹³ Michael McCormick, “Emperors,” in *The Byzantines* ed. Guglielmo Cavallo (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 165. When foreign diplomats entered into the imperial court,

had little effect on a Venetian culture which was not awed by mechanical trinkets and could not be swayed by tricks.

The role of the emperor as a father-figure was a Byzantine diplomatic strategy used to reinforce the political standing of kingdoms, subject to the Empire's control. The emperor also played the role of father over his own people as well as the guiding figure over his subjects' spiritual needs. Father-figure diplomacy formed to place the emperor over "a complicated hierarchy of states that developed with the ruler in Constantinople as Roman emperor and head of Christendom."¹⁴ Byzantine diplomacy made it clear that friendly kingdoms, though allied, were beholden to guidance from the father-figure authority in Constantinople. To the emperors, these kingdoms were allied but not equal. As Alexander Kazhdan stated, "the Christian world had been conceived of as a complex hierarchy of states and at the top of which stood the emperor surrounded by a family of princes."¹⁵ These princes were expected to adhere to the spiritual and political decisions

mechanical lions roared and mechanical birds sang. The emperor's throne even raised into the air. McCormick explains that, "the Byzantines were ingenious makers of mechanical devices that profoundly impressed and mystified in a pretechnological culture." As part of Byzantine diplomacy, mechanical devices were used to create an elaborate show with sound and sights to throw off the visiting diplomat and to convince him that the emperor was God's Anointed. McCormick also tells us, "tenth-century descriptions show that the sights and sounds that accompanied the emperor's self-manifestation to foreign diplomats were geared to produce a disorienting psychological impact: [the din and distance engulfing the participants obviated any discussion.]"

¹⁴ Ostrogorsky, *History of*, 28.

¹⁵ Alexander Kazhdan, "The notion of Byzantine Diplomacy," in *Byzantine Diplomacy: Papers from the Twenty-fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge, March 1990* ed. Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin (Hampshire, UK: Variorum, 1992), 10.

of the emperor.¹⁶ Father-figure diplomacy worked for a long time in the history between Venice and Constantinople yet Venice, a de facto, political entity as early as the ninth century, no longer sought permission in undertaking its political agenda.

In Chapter II the relationship between Venice and Constantinople is examined in further detail, with special attention given to the Chrysobull of 1082. This charter, drafted with the permission of Emperor Alexius I, granted generous trade concessions in Constantinople to the Venetians. This was done to gain Venetian help in the ongoing war against Norman invaders. The chrysobull was the culmination of centuries of Byzantine thought and was generated as a weapon of negotiation against a formidable enemy.¹⁷ The trade rights granted to the Venetians in the chrysobull, gave them overwhelming control over trade in Constantinople. It created a political and economic environment that steadily saw the power of Venice rise while the Empire remained static. The specific clauses of the chrysobull are discussed in detail. I also discuss the political relationship between Venice and Constantinople, showing how Venice began as a colony of the Empire and eventually rose to become a formidable competitor for trade in the

¹⁶Dimitri Obolensky, "Nationalism in Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages," in *The Byzantine Inheritance of Eastern Europe* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1982), 131. Originally published in *Papers given at the 12th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham 1978. Athens, 1979. 13*. "There is evidence to suggest that, even when they were in practice fully sovereign in their respective realms, they [Byzantine client states] usually subscribed to the belief that the emperor was the overlord of all Orthodox Christians and that some, like Boris of Bulgaria and Vladimir of Russia, publically acknowledged at their baptism that the Emperor was their spiritual father."

¹⁷ Donald M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 62. Nicol states, "as in all Byzantine documents of state the terminology is taken from the past."

Mediterranean. This chapter describes the beginning of the Venetian/Byzantine relationship and concludes with that relationship strained.

Chapter III describes the major problems associated with the excessive trade concessions granted to Venice by the Chrysobull of 1082. The inability of Byzantine strategies to counteract the rising influence of Venetian trade and power in Constantinople is explained. Shortcomings of the strategies detailed previously are made apparent as trade and economic power were gradually siphoned from the control of the emperors and into the hands of Venetian merchants. Over the twelfth century, Venetian trading power eventually stifled any competition from Byzantine merchants and the role of Venice as a major trading and political power in the Mediterranean came to fruition. Their diplomatic strategies having failed, the emperors were left with no other options but to allow for more concessions to take place. These were implemented to return trading hegemony back to Constantinople yet these efforts only exacerbated the problem.¹⁸

Historiography

The trading relationship between Venice and Constantinople is often encapsulated into theme of general diplomacy; certain historians include and discuss the relationship yet do not often separate it as a defining feature in the two powers' history. Historians

¹⁸ Treadgold, *A History*, 641 “[Emperor]Manuel’s main concern was the Sicilian Normans’ invasion. To stop them, he built a large fleet and asked for help from the Venetians. He confirmed their previous trading privileges and allowed them to expand their trading quarter in Constantinople.”

describe trade between Venice and the Eastern Empire yet the discussion is often centered on the increases and stagnation of the Byzantine economy over a large period. Usually, trade discussion is mentioned in passing to strengthen a point on the wartime outcomes the emperors encountered over time.

Agriculture and the taxes raised on the land worked by farming communities brought in the lion's share gold in the imperial treasury.¹⁹ Trade and merchant taxation were a form of economic supply yet were very minimal in comparison to the empire's agrarian output.²⁰ Historians point out the importance of Byzantine trade over the centuries but tend to stress the diplomatic relationship between Venice and Constantinople in terms of general diplomacy. Military, cultural and trade interactions between the cities are discussed in a larger context. They often use this context to explain the ebbing of relations between the two. They also discuss trade as a method of explaining the relationship of the market economy on the pivotal decisions enacted by emperors over time.

The historian Steven Runciman dedicated a large section of his book *Byzantine Civilisation* to the effects of commerce on the economy and relationships of the Eastern Empire yet the relationship between Venice and Constantinople is only given a few pages

¹⁹ Warren Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival, 780-842* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 36. Treadgold states, "the empire's economy was overwhelmingly agricultural, and agriculture is hard to destroy." His description explains how the central government continued to support itself even after habitual invasions which damaged local, agrarian communities.

²⁰Treadgold, *The Byzantine*, 36. Treadgold discusses the relationship between taxation and the Empire's economy by the eighth century. "The empire had never had much private trade or manufacturing to lose; [whatever had disappeared would have been an insignificant part of the whole economy.]"

in his discussion. Runciman ties up his chapter on trade and describes the role that Italian merchants played. Their involvement in eastern markets first lessened then signaled the death knell of trade as a source of income for the emperors. According to Runciman, Venetian and Italian control over Constantinople's warehouses and quays "humbled" the Empire.²¹ Runciman discusses the diplomatic strengths and weaknesses of the Empire in another section yet never really tied the important nature of trade into the larger framework with it. George Ostrogorsky's descriptions of the trade relationship between Venice and the Empire are very sparse. He mentions the Chrysobull of 1082 and details Venetian help against the Normans yet his descriptions are shown in the context of the specific characteristics of Emperor Alexius I's reign. In a later chapter, he describes some of the ramifications of trade concessions and Emperor Manuel I's attempt to counter them.²²

These historians describe numerous treaties and diplomatic episodes in the history of the Empire and attempted to detail each aspect of the empire as it related to the period in which they were describing. The unique nature of Byzantine diplomacy and the strategies used by the emperors is generally missing from the overall framework of their narratives. Byzantine diplomatic strategies and their relationship on trade agreements with Venice are stated in passing as a way to discuss the aspects of the chronological history of each set of emperors. They portrayed the Empire as a multifaceted

²¹ Runciman, *Byzantine Civilisation*, 178. He states, "the tragedy of the long death of Byzantium us above all a financial tragedy."

²² Ostrogorsky, *A History*, 389. Ostrogorsky's limited descriptions of these events fit into the larger context of his narrative; the rise and fall of the Byzantine state.

conglomeration. This method allowed for a large amount of chronological facts to be presented but lessened the opportunity to describe in detail the effects of specific and unique aspects of Byzantine culture.

Historians such as Frederic Lane and Thomas Madden focus their attention on the rise of Venice and the roles that the Empire had in the city's trading economic and military history. Lane describes three main characteristics of Venetian dominance in both the Adriatic and eventually the Mediterranean. He details their willingness to keep a close trading and military association with the Eastern Empire as well as their remarkable ability to use their navy both as a powerful military force and as a tool for lucrative piracy against rivals. Lane also distinguishes the role that Venice played as the middleman between the Holy Roman Empire and the Eastern Empire; using its powerful navy as a way to disrupt or promote trade between both powers. In any case, each mission carried out by successive doges had the continued prosperity of Venetian trade on the forefront of their plans. By the tenth century, Venice was the supreme power in the Gulf of Venice and by the eleventh century Venetian ships were firmly in control of trade and military operations in the entire Adriatic.²³ Madden describes the efforts of Doge Enrico Dandolo and his efforts to create a lasting and dramatic trading empire in the eastern Mediterranean. Both of these historians point out a specific and important date in the history of both Venice and Constantinople and that is 1204; the Sack of Constantinople and the taking of the Eastern Empire by the Latins. According to these

²³ Frederic Lane, *Venice: A Maritime Republic* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 26-27.

historians, this date more so than ratification of the Chrysobull of 1082, truly begins the dominance of Venetian trade monopolies in the eastern Mediterranean. Lane and Madden touch upon the treaty briefly yet their emphasis rests upon the rise of Venice as the preeminent trading power in the Mediterranean *after* the Sack of Constantinople in 1204. Lane's accounts of the rise of Venice's naval power correlate to the research presented further on yet I feel that the leading role played by Chrysobull of 1082 in the rise of Venice as a major trading power is left unanswered.

Later historians such as Donald Nicol, Warren Treadgold, Angeliki Laiou and Cécile Morrisson have dedicated greater emphasis on the effects of Byzantine diplomacy and trade. Much of their research details specifically the impacts made on the Byzantine state and the overall economy of the Empire before, during and after Italian dominance over trade. More importantly, they take into consideration descriptions of the Chrysobull of 1082 as well as other trade treaties in their discussions of the Empire's history after the Norman wars as well as during and after the Crusades.

These historians stress the importance of other factors in the Byzantine cultural history. They focus on factors such as: the build-up of the economy, religion as a motivator and the creation of ceremonial artifacts as catalysts for Byzantine power and the spread and contraction of the Empire's borders.²⁴

In this regard, Nicol, Laiou and Morrisson pay particular attention to the underlying cultural themes which were paramount in the continued political history of the

²⁴ Treadgold, *A History of*, 558-579.

Empire. In their work, *The Byzantine Economy*, Laiou and Morriison emphasize the working conditions and cultural impact that the merchant and working class as well as the peasantry had on the Byzantine state. They describe the roles that these people played in the economy with the government in Constantinople as a regulator of taxes and an overseer of the landlords. These landlords made sure that resources from the countryside found their way back to the imperial capital. They also detail the nature of the Byzantine state; an entity which exacted tight control over its resources and ensured a limited, free-trade economy.²⁵ Nicol describes in detail the strong bond between Venice and Constantinople; a relationship which was connected in multiple ways. He also describes the defining characteristics of diplomacy between Venice and Constantinople and highlights the disintegration of relations between the powers.

Nicol, Laiou and Morriison all place emphasis on a more detailed and accurate depiction of Byzantine history. Treadgold's works do this to a lesser extent. They stress the importance of the emperors' actions, politically and militarily, through the use of concepts of culture and economy. Yet these authors do not specify distinct Byzantine diplomatic strategies even though many of them make references to the uniqueness of these diplomatic stratagems.²⁶ Also, most of them describe the opening of the west to Greek ideas with imported Greek, cultural theories as the main culminating point of

²⁵ Angeliki E. Laiou and Cécile Morriison, *The Byzantine Economy* (Cambridge, UK. Cambridge University Press, 2007), 33

²⁶ Nicol, *Byzantium*, 65-67. Nicol describes the *Pala d'Oro*, a magnificent altarpiece created by Byzantine craftsman in 1105, which was ordered as a wealthy purchase by the Doge. In 1105, relations were still on sound footing between the two powers yet the cracks were starting to show. Nicol states, "it was a partnership in which the senior partner and giver of good things was Byzantium."

interaction between the Eastern Empire and Western Europe. I feel that these authors gloss over or disregard two main points of the relationship between Venice and Constantinople. One, by using the evidence discovered in the historiography a clear case can be made that there were unique, Byzantine, diplomatic strategies which were culturally, economically and militaristically different from the rest of Europe. Two, that the diplomatic relationships that evolved between Venice and Constantinople succeeded in opening the west to trade from the east and allowed for a vast expansion in material wealth as well as ideas to perpetually flow into Western Europe.

The primary sources used to discuss Byzantine diplomacy provide a dramatic perspective into the cultural foundations of Byzantine, political history. Medieval Greek and Latin sources should not be used as guidebooks since accountability and perspective are clouded by stereotypes and cultural biases. Yet, there is a much to be gained from examinations of their perspectives and their historical focus. Pertinent information is found which greatly expands the themes discussed in this thesis. The uniqueness of Byzantine culture and its effects on Byzantine diplomatic strategies are observed by reading statements in these sources.²⁷

Primary material used defines the role that Byzantine culture had in the underlying foundation of the diplomatic thought processes of the emperors. Examples

²⁷ Porphyrogenitus, Constantine VII, *De Administrando Imperio* Subheading 29. *Of Dalmatia and the adjacent nations to it*, 123. One example of Christian conversion policy is expressed in the following example by the Emperor Constantine VII who described a diplomatic interaction between the Emperor Basil I and Slavic tribes. “In the time of Basil, the Christ-loving emperor, they [Slavs] sent diplomatic agents, begging and praying him that those of them who were unbaptized might receive baptism and that they might be, as they had originally been, subject to the empire of the Romans...”

used from Princess Anna's *The Alexiad*, *The Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus* by John Kinnamos and the previously introduced *De Administrando Imperio* help shape the context of the chapters in this thesis. These chapters follow the natural progression of Byzantine diplomatic strategies; their benefits and eventual failure at the negotiating table. Usage of these sources helps determine factors instrumental in the relationship between eye-witness accounts and the historic narrative.

The descriptions by Anna Comnena on the relationship between her father Emperor Alexius I and the Crusaders give the reader insight on the cultural exchanges between two foreign and inherently opposite cultures. Her personal involvement most certainly clouded her statements and created less than perfect characterizations of her father's enemies but her primary and secondary accounts of the events used in the following chapters are expressive and a necessary inclusion. Her narratives allow the reader to benefit from her contemporary knowledge of important dates that occurred during Alexius' reign; the 1st Crusade's passage through Constantinople, the Normans' first attacks against the Empire and the role of the Venetians as allies of the imperial throne.²⁸

Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus' words to his son in *De Administrando Imperio* provide a specific and insightful glimpse into the mental framework which comprised Byzantine diplomatic and cultural history from the perspective of the imperial authority

²⁸ Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 26-31. Anna portrays the Norman Robert Guiscard and the rest of his countrymen as western barbarians, intent on plunder and slaughter. However, she places much of the blame on Byzantine troubles with them on the political moves of the Byzantines themselves, namely an emperor who preceded her father; Emperor Michael VII Ducas.

in charge of it all: the emperor. Constantine's descriptions are laced with words of encouragement and the hope that his son, the future Romanus II, would benefit from his teachings and strive to be a successful emperor.²⁹

The primary sources utilized in the following chapters portray various institutions of the Eastern Empire and project their prominence through economic, militaristic, cultural and diplomatic means. The reader is unable to determine how much of the specific information is fabrication, exaggeration or emotion but the overall explanations encountered in these sources go far in supplementing the authenticity of the themes of Byzantine diplomacy and how they were implemented.

²⁹ Porphyrogenitus, Constantine VII, *De Admistrando Imperio* Preface, 45. "A wise son maketh glad a father, and an affectionate father taketh delight in a prudent son." Constantine VII's heartfelt plea to his son begins the DAI and establishes its context.

II

Byzantine and Venetian Diplomacy: Relations between the Two Powers

Now when this king Atilla had devastated all the country of the mainland and had advanced as far Rome and Calabria and had left Venice behind, those who had fled for refuge to the islands of Venice, having obtained breathing-space and, as it were, shaken off their faintness of heart, took counsel jointly to settle there, which they did, and have been settled there till this day.

The Venetians assailed them with arrows and javelins, and stopped them from crossing over to the island. So then king Pippin [Pepin, King of the Franks], at a loss, said to the Venetians: "You are beneath my hand and my providence, since you are of my country and domain." But the Venetians answered him: "We want to be servants of the emperor of the Romans, and not of you."³⁰

-Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus

In order to examine the relationship between Constantinople and Venice, a chronological history of Venice from a Byzantine colony into a major political rival must be revisited. Venice began as a possession of the Empire then gained prominence as an independent, trading power. Byzantine trade concessions, culminating with the Chrysobull of 1082 granted them unrivaled trading privileges in Constantinople. This secured their control over Mediterranean trade and greatly weakened Byzantine economic and diplomatic power from the late twelfth century on.

³⁰ Porphyrogenitus, Constantine VII, *De Administrando Imperio* Subheading 28. *Story of the settlement of what is now called Venice*, 121.

Venice as a Possession

Venice began its history as a backwater of the Eastern Empire. Over the centuries, it slowly gained a stronger prominence in the economic and political world of the medieval Mediterranean. This settlement on the lagoon gradually became more and more important to the geopolitics of the region and capitalized on the lessening of Byzantine influence and power in the Adriatic. The small area of Venice in the northern Adriatic saw the continuous ebb and flow of invaders who swept down from central and eastern Europe and who were in their turn, invaded by other barbarian tribes. Because of this, sometime during the sixth century Venetians who lived and worked on the mainland took refuge on the sandbars and islands which formed the Rialto. This area gradually became the permanent home for these people.³¹ The political foundation and autonomy of Venice remains a point of contention between historians in regards to the specific dates. This is notable because the election of *doges* (duke) and their dates in office did not correlate to definitive self-governing rule.

The early political, economic and military histories of the Eastern Empire and Venice were inextricably intertwined from the fall of the Western Empire to the eventual fall of Constantinople in 1453. Two major policies of foreign control or suzerainty as well as economic/military assistance came into play between Constantinople and its

³¹ Nicol, *Byzantium*, 4. Nicol describes the Venetian tradition as overstating the ‘facts’ of history. Much of Venetian tradition states that by as early as the seventh century, Venice enjoyed autonomy, free from Byzantine control which bends the truth. “In 639 the *Provincia Venetiarum* was still Byzantine territory governed by a master of soldier answerable to the Exarch of Ravenna.” 7

former vassal. These two policies were to mark dramatic events as they occurred in the history of both powers. Both aspects occur in the early and later history between them.

The first policy involved the role of the Eastern Empire as the suzerain of former imperial possessions, most importantly Venice. “Venice first appeared as a regional force in the 730s, in the wake of the first Lombard occupation of Ravenna,” while “the dynamic center of gravity, unmistakably, lies at the head of the Adriatic, Venice.”³² In the seventh through ninth centuries Venice still remained politically and economically beholden to Constantinople. The settlement was still administered as an imperial possession and as a source for the majority of the goods traded to the West. A large percentage of Venetian trade goods flowed from the Black Sea back to trading centers in Western Europe and Africa. Using a specific industry, silk, Robert Lopez discusses the relationship between the West and how this industry relied on the continued necessity of a middleman. Venice and other maritime city-states gained prominence in this capacity while still staying under the control and forced obligation of their overlord, the eastern emperor. “The lack of a commercial *modus vivendi* was one of the main causes of economic isolation of Western Europe, and contributed to making the fortune of Venice and other Italian cities, *nominally* subject of the Byzantine Empire.”³³ Venice’s early

³² Michael McCormick, *The Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, A.D 300-900*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 526.

³³ Robert S. Lopez, “Silk Industry in the Byzantine Empire,” in *Byzantium and the World around it: Economic and Institutional Relations*. Section III (London: Variorum Reprints, 1978), 36. Originally published in *Speculum XX* (Cambridge, MA, 1945). Lopez brings up an interesting point which can be touched on briefly. The intransigence between the Holy Roman Empire and the Eastern Empire as to who carried the mantle of former Roman glory prevented a cohesive union from ever emerging between the two powers. Thus, trade was weakened as it happened directly between them and so smaller powers acting as

economic successes did not translate to full political self-rule even though Venetian tradition stresses a very early autonomy due to their role in the politics of the Adriatic and then the Mediterranean. In his work on Byzantine-Venetian trade diplomacy, Nicol describes the relationship of Venice towards Byzantium as a smaller partner which eventually took control and subverted the authority of the former leading partner. Nicol uses a dialogue from a primary source, John the Deacon (secretary to Doge Pietro II), writing about events which occurred in the early eighth century. “All the Venetians, together with the patriarch and the bishops in common council, determined that henceforth it would be more dignified to live under *duces* than other tribunes; and after much deliberation the nominated the illustrious Paulicius and set him up as *dux* at Heraclea.”³⁴ This is an interesting idea which guides the reader into believing that Venice was a self-controlled power well before the tenth century, but Nicol states that “Paulicius” was a Byzantine official and was duly appointed by the Exarch of Ravenna.³⁵ Nevertheless, Venetian maritime expeditions further from traditional trade routes slowly expanded Venetian presence in the Mediterranean. The former backwater slowly became a lucrative trading partner with most Mediterranean powers including the Holy Roman Empire.

middlemen gained from their stubbornness and acted as intermediaries on the geographic boundaries of the empires. (my emphasis)

³⁴ Nicol, *Byzantium*, 9.

³⁵ Nicol, *Byzantium*, 9.

The changing fortunes of the Byzantine Empire and the geographic location of Venice meant that over time, the principle of control gradually grew weaker and weaker with each successive generation. For Constantinople, facing direct and legitimate threats at home and closer to the main heartland of the Empire was of far greater importance than making sure that a possession such as Venice stayed firmly under imperial control. By the early tenth century, the Venetians still considered themselves friends and allies of the Empire but the relationship had changed; from supplicant, to lower-ranked peer. The emperor regarded the Venetians as his subjects. This connection, of an inferior to a superior, gradually shifted to a more equal balance. The Empire in the tenth century did not have the resources to launch a full scale expedition to bring Venice and the surrounding areas to heel as Justinian had done in his re-conquest of the West.³⁶

Venice gradually pulled away from Byzantine hegemony and forged its path using trading power as its main weapon. Venice's creation as an economic and maritime community, separate from Byzantine control, was helped by numerous factors. Frederic Lane states that "its earliest notable naval exploits were in defense of the peaceful exchange of commodities, of the trade which had developed under Byzantine protection," but "at the same time, the Venetians unhesitatingly resorted to violence to maintain and enlarge their own part in that trade, collecting the process considerable booty."³⁷ One of these factors was the continued efforts of each successive doge to push farther and farther into unknown and lucrative markets in the Levant; territory still held, controlled and

³⁶Runciman, *Byzantine Civilisation*, 35-36.

³⁷ Lane, *Venice*, 23-24

taxed by Constantinople. Another factor was overland trade which permeated between the upstart city and Western Europe. “Early on, the Franks expanded Venice’s economic hinterland by promoting links across the Alps to the Rhineland.”³⁸ Yet another example of continued Venetian economic expansion is the slave trade which was fostered and expanded with Venetian help. Slaves were captured in central and eastern Europe and sold in markets to both Frankish and Arab buyers. The trade was very lucrative and Arab gold which normally would have gone through Constantinople to be taxed was instead siphoned off by enterprising Venetian traders.³⁹ Exporting slaves from central and eastern Europe to predominantly Muslim controlled stretches of former Byzantine territory expanded the role of Venetian commerce in Italy and Western Europe. This economic activity built up over time creating further opportunities for Venetian merchants. The slave trade and other exotic wares became so lucrative that even when pirate activity increased and the routes between the Adriatic and the Constantinople grew increasingly dangerous, new sea routes were opened to keep the flow of materials unchecked.⁴⁰ Venetian autonomy was also correlated to their growing maritime power and their political and economic cooperation with the Frankish Kingdoms in Western Europe. By the late ninth century, successive Carolingians had effectually used Venetian

³⁸ McCormick, *The Origins*, 793.

³⁹ McCormick, *The Origins*, 792. McCormick states that as the Carolingian expanded eastward and southward towards Italy, the rise of new economic capabilities greatly increased and new markets were expanded into and realized. These new markets offered exotic and unique commodities which were rarely seen in Western Europe. Expertly, the rising Venetians saw this as opportunity to grow their trade activities using their lucrative trade routes as political clout. McCormick puts it succinctly as “the Venetians perhaps were the first to figure this out.”

⁴⁰ McCormick, *The Origins*, 795.

trade as a bulwark against Byzantine hegemony in Italy and the Adriatic. Good relations opened up between Venice and the Holy Roman Empire and commerce continued unabated as the years progressed. Sitting geographically distant from Constantinople factored into the rate of Venice's pulling away from Byzantine rule by the late ninth century. This was not so much an inevitability but an end result to a process which had started two centuries previously.

By the ninth century, Venice had sufficiently progressed in stature as a regional power and trading partner of Western Europe to the point where it undertook treaty ratifications with other kingdoms as if it were an entirely self-sustained and independent city-state. This type of authority had previously been reserved for the emperor and had been implemented by the exarchs in his stead.⁴¹ This practice was unheard of in any of the administrative centers closer to Constantinople and directly regulated by the imperial government but distance dictated that Venice could and would be able to guide its own affairs. With the extinction of the Exarch in Ravenna in 751, Venice enjoyed a specialized role in the political structure of the Empire and the imperial throne was quite powerless to do anything about it. Nicol describes treaties ratified between Venice and

⁴¹ Ostrogorsky, *A History of*, 80. Byzantine power in the West rested with the exarchs, the leading one in Ravenna. The exarch or Byzantine governor was the mouthpiece for the emperor and exacted and doled out imperial law and administration set down to him by the central government in Constantinople. The exarchs became weaker over successive generations as Byzantine power waned in the West until the final Exarch in Ravenna was killed fighting the Lombard invasion of 751(170).

the Franks during the ninth century, stating, “the Franks accepted that Venice was free to act as an independent power.”⁴²

The gradual separation of Venice from under the control of the imperial East did not signify a strategic and aggressive breakdown between the two powers. Likewise, Venetian limited independence did not mean that Venice had forsaken its close history and strong relations with its former master. In fact, Venice continued to play the role of subjugate to Byzantine authority in Southern Italy once the Eastern Empire’s gaze turned towards its last possessions there. Well into the tenth century, Venice still contributed ships, men and materials to help Byzantine military efforts. They did this first against Frankish aggression and then against Norman invaders intent upon expansion and conquest. The relationship between Venice and Constantinople was a special partnership between a powerful and older veteran and its upstart and innovative younger protégé. Good relations were maintained for a long period of time and both parties took advantage of the others’ strengths. Eastern goods continued to flow to a multitude of ports through Venetian shipping and Venice was still counted upon to help in military expeditions undertaken by various emperors in southern Italy and the east coast of the Adriatic. According to tradition, Venetian city-state status came into being sometime around 880-915 and yet Venice continued its close link to the Byzantine court doing so out of an imparted tradition.⁴³ It is clear that before the turn of the first millennium; Venice was

⁴² Nicol, *Byzantium*, 33.

⁴³Nicol, *Byzantium*, 36 Mentioned before, Nicol uses documentation from John the Deacon as a way to show dates that correspond to Venice’s rise to power and to pinpoint the chronology of Venetian economic and political expansion. “Tribuno (Doge Pietro II) and his successors continued to respect the

well beyond looking towards Constantinople for guidance in military, economic, and political matters.

Venice as an Equal

By the first decade of the eleventh century, two major political events occurred which document the continued rise of Venice as a powerful and autonomous regional player. Both of these events had dramatic and specific connections with Byzantine diplomacy; how they were envisioned and how they were instituted.

The first event occurred in 879 and its political implications involved titles and crafty statecraft. The Emperor Basil I extended diplomatic overtures towards the Venetians and the West since assuming the role of emperor in 867. Talks were held between both the Eastern Empire and the Holy Roman Empire. These negotiations were instituted in order to form a pact of cooperation between East and West. This was begun in an effort to combat both empires' mutual foe; the Arabs.⁴⁴ These talks of combined cooperation eventually came to nothing and the unification of the two empires stayed a political dream. In addition, it is important to note that no Venetian ships were sent down to assist the Byzantines in their military maneuvers against the Arabs in Southern Italy. In fact, Nicol states that, "there is no evidence that they [Venetians] were alerted or

traditional contact with Byzantium. It must be assumed that they did so willingly and not under duress, since the emperors could hardly have enforced even a nominal subjection upon them."

⁴⁴ Treadgold, *A History of*, 456.

invited to send ships to Bari.”⁴⁵ Invited in this context shows the perceived relationship between the Empire and Venice. As a suzerain under the direction of Constantinople, Venice was obligated to send ships to help in the battle against the Arabs but as an independent city-state that was guided by their own conditions and terms, their cooperation and involvement in the war was entirely of their own choosing.

Regardless of non-inclusion of Venetian help in his military efforts, Basil I still recognized the importance of friendship with the rising city-state. In 879 he sent a delegation in an effort to form a lasting bond of cooperation between them. This diplomatic delegation helps shed light on how far Venice had risen in the political world of the Adriatic and the Mediterranean. Negotiations in previous centuries demanded complete Venetian cooperation and they would have taken place in Constantinople. By the late ninth century, political fortunes had changed to a sufficient degree with the implications that Venice was no longer a trivial power to be coerced into action. Military actions undertaken by the city were carefully determined to see how the resulting changes in the political world would benefit or stymie Venetian, economic progress.

The Byzantine envoys that arrived in Venice in 879 were seeking to accomplish the following goals: to form a stronger relationship with Venice, to reconnect the city to Constantinople, and to bolster their previous history together much like the relationship between a teacher to a student. Many aspects previously discussed and attributed to

⁴⁵ Nicol, *Byzantium*, 33. Nicol makes an important and telling claim here based upon the lack of evidence of Venetian help in the assault on Bari. “What evidence there is suggests, on the contrary, that they had now decided to pursue their own policies, conduct their own wars and make their own treaties with Arabs and Slavs without feeling obliged to follow the lead of their Byzantine masters.”

Byzantine diplomacy are seen in the treaty's stipulations. First, Basil did not demand the Venetians' presence in the imperial capital instead, he sent his envoys *to* Venice. This shows that Basil was willing to forgo previously held tenets of Byzantine diplomacy including the Byzantine tradition of forcing subservient rulers to come when commanded before the seat of imperial power. Bringing the Venetians to the capital served as a way to awe them into submission and this was the normal intention of the practice yet Basil recognized that the Empire was not in a politically or militarily strong enough position to demand too much from an ally especially one whom he desperately wanted good relations with in that region. Second, the Byzantine envoys did not come empty handed. "The ambassadors presented valuable presents from the emperor," and gave the gifts over to the Venetians as a father would hand them over to a cherished son.⁴⁶ Third, the envoys presented other gifts from the emperor: titles bestowed upon the Doge and the leading members of the city. Nicol tells us that "they conferred upon the doge the imperial title of *protospatharios*. The enhanced status of the dignity did not pass unnoticed. Previous doges had accepted the humbler titles of *spatharios* or *hypatos*. Orso had been promoted in the ranks of the Byzantine family."⁴⁷ These titles were largely honorific and conferred

⁴⁶ Nicol, *Byzantium*, 33. Nicol does not state what the gifts were but based upon previous discussions, the emperor no doubt sent gold, valuable spices and perhaps even rare silk in an effort to win over the Doge Orso I. For further reading on silk used a diplomatic tool, see Anna Muthesius' "Silken diplomacy," in *Byzantine Diplomacy: Papers from the Twenty-fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge, March 1990*, ed. Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin (Hampshire, UK: Variorum, 1992), 315-316.

⁴⁷ Nicol, *Byzantium*, 33. For a further explanation of Byzantine titles and honorifics, see both Michael McCormick's *Eternal Victory: Triumphal rulership in late antiquity, Byzantium, and the early medieval West*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986),²¹ "Like the triumph itself, such titles soon came to be restricted to the emperors," and Ostrogorsky's *History of the Byzantine State* "Basil I and Leo VI," 248-252.

upon political allies of the Empire. Handed down through the Eastern Empire since their origins in the original Roman Empire, these titles conveyed several aspects of power upon their bearers. Most of these Byzantine titles carried little political weight but they still extended to the bearer the representation of power. The titles also held sway across regions in contact with the Empire. A leader fortunate enough to be assigned a title was held in high esteem with the emperor and the power involved linked any aggression against that titled person directly to action against the Empire itself.

The Treaty of 879, besides the granting of gifts and the conferring of titles, also granted Venice a stronger role in the family structure of the Empire. Venice, solidified its presence as an ally and partner of the Byzantines and looked to keep close connections with Constantinople. Charged by the emperor, the Byzantine envoys strengthened Venice's standing in the family of Byzantine partners. As Nicol states, "they[Byzantines] retained a firm belief, inherent in their Roman imperial tradition, that the granting of court titles to foreign powers domesticated them and made them feel what they would be missing if they succeeded from the family."⁴⁸

The second major event which occurred a few years after the turn of eleventh century involves a marriage. This marriage was not an ordinary one though and its very existence shows just how far Venice had come as a major power. In 1005 the Emperor Basil II, in close cooperation with Doge Pietro Orseolo II recommended that the doge send his eldest son to Constantinople. In a dramatic and politically charged arrangement,

⁴⁸ Nicol, *Byzantium*, 34. Nicol continues by stating that the embassy to Venice signified that it "was in some sense still a member of their family."

Giovanni, the son of Pietro, was married to Maria Argyropoulos, a member of the royal household. As we have read, political marriages and contracted marriages to porphyrogenitus were out of the question at such an early period in Byzantine diplomatic history. Maria was *not* an immediate family member of Basil II yet her family was part of the cadet branch of the royal household. Quoting John the Deacon, Nicol states that, “[Maria] was one of the sisters of the future Emperor Romanus III,” and of “imperial stock.”⁴⁹ The marriage was celebrated throughout Venice and Constantinople and the happy couple soon returned to Venice with “the holy relics of St. Barbara,” in tow.⁵⁰

This marriage demonstrates several facets of Byzantine diplomacy as well as the progression of Venice as a political entity closely connected to Constantinople. Imperial marriages were rare occurrences and this one was no different. The doge’s son did not marry directly into the imperial family. The Byzantine emperor saw the necessity of strengthening the bond between the two cities and used a valuable strategy of Byzantine diplomacy to gain a stronger footing with an ally. Maria was one step under the imperial household and her marriage to the doge’s son was a dramatic and resounding success for Venetian politics at home and abroad. The marriage was a resounding success for Byzantine diplomacy as well because it strengthened the bond between Venice and the imperial throne and placed Venice solidly on the side of Byzantine politics in the Adriatic and Italy. For Basil II, the marriage was a way for him to cement a political and military

⁴⁹ Nicol, *Byzantium*, 46. John the Deacon also states that she was a sister of Basil II but Nicol disputes this. However, she was directly related to the emperor but through a distant branch of the family.

⁵⁰ Nicol, *Byzantium*, 46. In a tragic piece of history, the couple did not survive long. Maria, Giovanni and their infant son were killed by the plague in 1007.

commitment from Venice. This arrangement was necessitated by the Empire's struggles with Croatia and the Slavic peoples as well as his situations in regards to Byzantine claims in both Sicily and southern Italy. Venice provided a strong navy that the emperor could rely upon to help with these major, regional problems. In return, the emperor parted with a distant relative accompanied by valuable gifts which sweetened the deal. Those gifts along with the promotion of Giovanni Orseolo to a patrician fostered a stronger commitment which continued on for centuries.⁵¹

Both the marriage of Maria Argyropoulos and the Byzantine diplomatic mission to Venice in 879 attest to the resounding success that was Byzantine diplomacy. In each instance, usages of Byzantine diplomatic strategies paved the way for a continued Byzantine presence in the Adriatic and on the Italian mainland as well as Sicily. As early as the ninth century, without these treaties and the specific, diplomatic strategies used to ensure their success, the presence of the Eastern Empire in the regions west of Greece appears dismal. The emperors needed their Venetian partners to act as a military and economical presence for them in a region which was far removed from the strength of the Empire's heartland in the east. With Venetian assistance, Constantinople was assured a continued existence in Italy and that part of the Mediterranean well into the twelfth century.

These two major events employed all necessary diplomatic strategies used by the Byzantines throughout their history and each event was achieved to further the

⁵¹ Nicol, *Byzantium*, 46.

prerogative of the imperial throne. Concessions were made, tribute was paid and titles were granted. A marriage alliance was accomplished and Venice was brought tighter under the protection of the imperial family. By the time Venice was recognized as a rising power in the Mediterranean, Byzantine diplomatic strategies had already been in use for at least 300 years. The reliance on diplomacy to work in conjunction or as a direct replacement for military expenditures was standard fare for the Eastern Empire when the time came to treat Venice as an equal. By the eleventh century, Constantinople still considered Venice somewhat less than an equal, but the economic and military necessities of the time made the city-state considerably more than that. The Byzantine Empire was forced to use all aspects of diplomatic strategies to assure its cooperation. Referencing the marriage of Maria and Giovanni, the historian Louis Bréhier described the alliance and stated, “the consequences of these events were manifold: above all a new power was born in the Adriatic.”⁵²

Events over time and the continuous rising of new enemies against the Empire ensured that Byzantine diplomatic strategies had to be used repeatedly as a stop gap measure against the usage of armed intervention. The diplomatic concessions made to Venice before the eleventh century, helped continue its struggle against the onslaught of Muslim advances, Slavic incursions, and eventually Norman invaders. This same reliance on diplomacy helped transform Venice from a backwater of the Empire into a rival power. The Venetians cooperated for many years with Constantinople and this

⁵² Louis Bréhier, *The Life and Death of Byzantium (Le Vie et mort de Byzance Vol. 1 Le Monde Byzantine)* trans. Margaret Vaughan (New York: North Holland Publishing, 1977), 162.

cooperation was structured upon Byzantine strategy yet this same strategy eventually helped in the Empire's inevitable collapse.

The Chrysobull of 1082

“The content of the document [Byzantine-Venetian Chrysobull of 1082], however, is rather more important than its date, for it was by far the most comprehensive and detailed charter of privileges hitherto granted to Venice by a Byzantine Emperor. It was also the most consequential, for it became the corner-stone of the Venetian colonial empire in the eastern Mediterranean, the prototype of a series of imperial chrysobulls for Venice in the next one hundred years. Alexios[Alexius I] was in a generous mood.”⁵³

By the turn of the eleventh century it was clear to both Byzantines and Venetians that the former possession was subject to Byzantine control no longer. It was also clear that any help made to the Byzantines by the Venetians was done for two reasons; a symbolic sense of tradition and pride to a former controlling power and the understanding that helping Constantinople in her fight against enemies was good for business. The Chrysobull of 1082 was in many ways a concession of Constantinople to the rest of Europe that the once mighty Empire was forced to seek help from other powers to further their goals.⁵⁴ It also showed Western Europe how far the Venetian city-state had come in

⁵³ Nicol, *Byzantium*, 60.

⁵⁴ Thomas F. Madden, “The Chrysobull of Alexius I Comnenus to the Venetians: the date and the debate.” *Journal of Medieval History* Vol.28 (2002):40. There is a debate as to the specific year of the issuing of the chrysobull which is discussed at length by the medievalist historian Thomas F. Madden. Madden's own research supports the 1082 date. Madden describes the arguments made by certain historians as to the timing of the chrysobull and against the year 1082. According to some, 1082 marks a time which the treaty could not or would not have taken place since the important city of Dyrrhachium in modern Albania had already fallen to the Norman invaders. Evidence to this belief is seen in Anna

the political and commercially charged environment of Mediterranean politics. 1082 marked a turning point in the history of the Eastern Empire and signaled the end of Byzantine domination once and for all in Italy and the West. This lessening of power did not mean a downward trajectory militarily for the Empire yet it did signify that Constantinople had to rely on its diplomatic history to a large extent to help save it from a powerful adversary with whom it had never been encountered before; the Normans.

In her discussion of events, Princess Anna briefly describes the treaty and her words read like an afterthought. She states, “by promises and bribes, he [Alexius I] also solicited the aid of the Venetians,” “and if they carried out his request, and by God’s help gained the victory or (as may always happen) they were defeated, even then they would receive all he had promised, just the same as if they had conquered.” She continues, “he received them with great honor, as was natural, bestowed many benefactions upon them, and then dismissed them with a large gift of money for the Doge of Venice and his subordinate magistrates.”⁵⁵

Comnena’s own assessment that the treaty would occur after the Normans would be defeated as well as conflicting accounts written by Doge Andrea Dandolo almost two hundred years after the fact in his *Chronica per extensum descripta*. However, the Byzantine historian Peter Frankopan has come to the conclusion that the chrysobull could not have occurred any time before 1092. See Peter Frankopan, “Byzantine trade privileges to Venice in the eleventh century: the chrysobull of 1092,” *Journal of Medieval History* Vol.30 (2004):158-160.

⁵⁵ Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 100-101. Princess Anna describes what seems like a casual military treaty that promised the Venetians riches if they helped the Byzantines. Interestingly, by this period of Byzantine-Venetian relations it is clear that the Emperor *asks* the Venetians for help instead of demands. In return, he grants them privileges and gold. More importantly, Venice jumps at the opportunity to help and Anna, ever politic, shows how her father was as good as his word.

The Chrysobull of 1082 was anything but a simple military treaty and the implications of its creation and implementation provide direct examples that Venice had become a powerful and autonomous economic authority in the Mediterranean. The chrysobull was not the first major pact between the two powers but it was the catalyst which intertwined the two cities inextricably for the rest of their history. The beginning excerpt from Nicol shows how powerful a document the treaty was and what dramatic repercussions such a far reaching and economically, all-encompassing pact had on the political and economic landscape. Descriptions of the chrysobull and the specific terms of the treaty provide striking evidence of Byzantine diplomatic strategies in action. The major terms of the treaty set out and provide a strengthening of Venetian economic hegemony in the east and allow for the Venetians to play a major role in the remaining history of the Byzantine Empire. The treaty's main points cover the expansion and consolidation of Venetian trading rights within Constantinople and the East in return for military help from Venice.

Historians see the chrysobull as a method for viewing and understanding the reorganization of the Empire under the Emperor Alexius I. This understanding of the document is extremely important in but the treaty and the defining points made in the clauses are often glossed over in an effort to continue the narrative and progress the chronology towards events which took place a short time after its creation. Events such as Alexius I and the Empire's reactions against the coming of the First Crusade take much of the impetus of this period. George Ostrogorsky discusses the treaty in a small

paragraph.⁵⁶ He stated “from now onwards, the Italian maritime republic was a determining factor in Byzantine development.” Francois Ganshof discusses the treaty along with another chrysobull of 992 noting that, “Byzantium concluded commercial treaties with quite a number of other peoples, notably with Moslem[sic] and Russian princes.”⁵⁷ Steven Runciman states, “certain nations, such as the Russians and later the Italians, won special privileges and freedom from tolls, in return for political services.”⁵⁸

Focusing on specific clauses in the treaty show how important Byzantine diplomatic strategies had become in the continued success of the Byzantine world. Each clause emanated from a strategy discussed previously but only a few of the most important will be evaluated individually. The main clauses have been bulleted as they are seen in Donald Nicol’s *Byzantium and Venice*. Each clause has been abridged in an effort to focus on the main facets of each point.

1. An annual grant of twenty pounds (of gold coins) is to be made for the distribution among their [Venetian] churches as they see fit.
2. The Doge is to be honored with the title of *protosebastos*, with a substantial stipend; and this honor is accorded not simply *ad personam*, as it would be in Byzantium; it is to be hereditary and handed on to his successors in perpetuity.

⁵⁶ Ostrogorsky, *History of*, 359.

⁵⁷ Francois L. Ganshof, *The Middle Ages: A History of International Relations (Le Moyen âge: Histoire des relations internationales)* trans. Rémy Inglis Hall (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1970(reprint), 131-142.

⁵⁸ Runciman, *Byzantine Civilisation*, 172.

3. The Venetians are to be allotted a number of shops, factories and houses in Constantinople in the market area or Perama, with free access to and egress from the district, etc.
4. These dispensations are offered to the Venetians as true servants of the emperor who have provided their goodwill towards him and have promised to serve him and his heirs with all their might forever more.
5. The emperor grants to Venetian merchants the right to trade in all manner of merchandise in all parts of his empire *free of any charge, tax, or duty payable to his treasury*.⁵⁹

The major terms of this treaty are structured in such a way to show the resourcefulness of Byzantine diplomacy and each of these clauses directly corroborates several of the main strategies discussed previously. In Clause 1, “an annual grant of gold is made to the churches in Venice as they see fit.” The grant is tribute being paid to Venice in return for loyal service against the Empire’s enemies; namely the Normans. As we have seen, it was much easier for emperors to buy off their enemies. It was also easier to pay someone to help with the war effort than to wage a protracted war which siphoned off valuable resources. Venice was already connected to Byzantium in history, trade and politics as well as in marriage. Paying tribute to an ally in exchange for help against a powerful enemy was a distinctive Byzantine feature.

⁵⁹ Nicol, *Byzantium*, 60-61 (my emphasis)

In Clause 2, “the Doge is to be honored with the title *protosebastos* and granted a stipend,” furthermore, the title is perpetual and passes on to his successors.” The motivation for granting a title is evident but the last part of the clause is important in that the title carries on to the next doge and so on. Titles in the Empire were granted by the emperor yet were not passed on to successive generations of that noble household. “Titles were for sale, usually at a standard price.”⁶⁰ The granting of the title to the doge can be seen as a re-solidifying of relations between Venice and Constantinople. Both the title that was granted in perpetuity and the salary which accompanied it demonstrated Byzantine diplomacy at its best. The doge would be honored with an imperial title, his family would be enriched by the stipend granted by the throne and Constantinople would have a solid ally connected to the throne with the use of a majestic sounding title. The title itself was largely honorific as most Byzantine titles were yet they conveyed a powerful sense of authority upon the person to whom they were given.

Clause 3, “allot[ing] a number of shops, factories and houses in Constantinople in the market area of Perama” shows the paying of tribute and the granting of gifts in an extremely important and new way. Granting Venice the lucrative trade rights to the aforementioned areas as well as properties in the heart of the Empire was a historical act which fostered dramatic, unsurpassed and irreversible consequences for both parties. Granting the Venetians these shops, factories and houses was the culmination of

⁶⁰ Mark Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium, 600-1025*. (Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1996), 111. Byzantine historian Mark Whittow explains that along with the title there was also conferred a salary which was taxed by the Byzantine state. Granting the titles allowed for nobility to pursue parts in the government and increase their prestige but it also was a money-making endeavor by the imperial throne.

Byzantine diplomacy in the ushering in of a new method of treaty formation. By allowing the Venetians such important parts of the city in return for their efforts against the Norman aggressors, the imperial throne had taken Byzantine diplomacy to a new level. Gifts, titles, lands and lesser brides were given to would-be allies in the past yet Venice had taken a spot among the most exalted and permanent of Byzantine allies. Treaties struck with potential allies would benefit the Empire in either the short-term or long term but by granting these lucrative trading rights, the throne was essentially stating that potential long term problems with the Venetians were negligible in the face of present dangers.

Clause 4, stipulating that “the Venetians are true servants of the emperor,” “and have promised to serve him and his heirs” corresponds to the symbolic and historical relationships between the emperor and his supplicants. As has been shown, the relationship between the Empire and Venice was a strong collusion of tradition, diplomacy, geography and trade. Even at this late stage of the Empire, the emperor saw the Venetians as his subjects, beholden to him and entitled to his love, friendship and cooperation. Using Byzantine diplomatic strategies passed down through successive generations of emperors, the Venetians were coaxed into helping Constantinople against a mutual enemy.

Clause 5, the last major clause, is also the most important in regards to the future of both powers. In his study on the Venetian Quarter in Constantinople (briefly referenced in Clause 3), Horatio F. Brown explains the unprecedented ramifications of the Chrysobull and its importance in establishing Venetian prominence in Eastern Empire

and Mediterranean economic history. “These privileges gave Venice an overwhelming superiority among the Italians trading in Constantinople; competition with her became futile and thus laid the roots of that bitter jealousy which Genoa, and probably Pisa and Amalfi, subsequently displayed.”⁶¹ The creation of the Chrysobull gained the Empire the one weapon which it always seemed to require; time. By offering Venice *carte blanche* in regards to economic freedom in the east, the Empire ensured the continued support of a military which it desperately needed against a foe which threatened to overwhelm it. This treaty took into account the short-term consequences of granting Venice increased economic power in the very heart of the Empire. Alexius I created a treaty with the subtle tendency of Byzantine diplomacy well understood; give up power now and reconcile that sacrifice at a later time and work to re-strengthen his position. A multitude of honorific titles could be given, huge sums of gold could be presented as gifts and the key to the economic treasure chest that was the trading port of Constantinople could be granted all in an effort to ensure that Byzantine diplomacy granted the Empire time to recover and re-take what was lost.

It is understandable that in the long history of the Eastern Empire, the use of these safeguards and the inclinations behind their methods sometimes overshot their desired intentions. In 1082, Alexius I was facing a new and entirely militaristic threat far from his base of operations and on the periphery of his Empire. He needed help and the logical choice was the loyal and one time subject of Constantinople; Venice. Byzantine history

⁶¹ Horatio F. Brown, “The Venetians and the Venetian Quarter in Constantinople to the Close of the Twelfth Century,” *The Journal for Hellenic Studies* Vol.40 (1920):72.

was littered with the strengths and weaknesses of a continued diplomatic policy which saw short-term conditions take precedence over long-term ones. Hindsight could only serve the Empire as far as the successive emperor was concerned. This policy set the bar for each successive emperor. The Chrysobull of 1082 was another page in the diplomatic affairs of an Empire which had used the same tricks and strategies continuously. The treaty was written on the terms of an Empire that, while not renegeing on its promises, could always come back to the terms at a later date and reevaluate them as needed. This Byzantine understanding of diplomacy is summed up by Nicol who says “it was a form of charter which emanated from him [Alexius] alone, could be withdrawn at any moment for all its protestations of perpetuity. At the time he badly needed the continuing help and friendship of Venice. When order had been restored in the world he could modify the terms or cancel the arraignment, as his successor tried to do.”

The Chrysobull of 1082 signaled a change in the diplomatic, economic, militaristic and political world of the eastern Mediterranean, a change which Alexius I and years of Byzantine diplomatic policy could never have foreseen. The give and take relationship which the Eastern Empire had enjoyed in the political world around them had sufficed for centuries previous to the Chrysobull. The same scenarios of invasion, power struggles and changing demographics around the Empire had occurred numerous times. The only thing that changed were the players who bumped against Byzantine authority and who challenged them for political, economic and military supremacy. Each successive foreign problem was dealt with on an as needed basis. For Byzantine diplomacy, the changing of the map was a typical outcome. The one constant which

Byzantine diplomatic strategies could not envision a solution to was the inevitable failures of those same diplomatic strategies when placed up against a problem from which they had no recourse. As we shall see, the limitations of Byzantine diplomatic strategies against the encroachment of Venetian economic power relegated the Empire into a secondary and subservient role.

The Chrysobull of 1082 did not seal the fate of the Byzantine Empire nor did it suddenly and irrevocably change the power structure of the eastern Mediterranean. By the turn of the twelfth century, the Empire was a more solidified and stronger power than in the previous fifty years of its gradual decline. In fact, after the reign of Alexius I had ended and the reign of his son John II started, the Empire was in a very strong position to continue its role as sole and ultimate power in the eastern Mediterranean. Its position remained as the director of political and economic considerations in all facets of rule in the region.⁶²

Three consequences of Byzantine diplomacy did change the future of the Empire and these changes slowly relegated the emperors' position in the political hierarchy from sole leader to senior partner to struggling survivor. First, the invasion of the Normans signaled the permanent loss of previously held Byzantine possessions in Italy; a loss which ensured that the Empire never again permanently controlled former imperial lands in Italy. Manuel I regained a few southern Italian cities in the early twelfth century but they too were lost forever after a short time. Documented Byzantine diplomacy with the

⁶² Brown, "The Venetians," 77.

Normans is rare. Second, the inability of the Empire to deal with the massive threat of Norman invasion without the help of the Venice signaled the rise of a dominant Venetian presence in the eastern Mediterranean and the slow decay of Byzantine hegemony. Third, the Chrysobull of 1082 granted concessions to the Venetians which at the time of its creation, seemed a small enough price to pay to counteract a much bigger threat in the Normans. The Chrysobull (for whatever Alexius' intentions in the long term were) granted the Venetians unprecedented economic and geographic power against their rivals and eventually, power against the Byzantines themselves.

III

Byzantine Diplomacy and Trade: The Disintegration of the Empire and the Opening of the Mediterranean to Western Europe

It is clear that toward the end of the twelfth century the condition of the Byzantine merchants of Constantinople had become critical because of competition from the Italians. There had been repeated attempts to get rid of them, either by using state-supported violence or with direct action. Nothing yielded the anticipated results. The economic region of the Constantinople continued to be the most coveted market, but the control of Byzantine businessmen managed to exercise over it continued to diminish.⁶³

The problems associated with Byzantine diplomacy and the repercussions of the Chrysobull of 1082 are discussed. The major differences between Venetian and Byzantine merchants are explained in greater detail. A case by case basis is made describing how Byzantine governmental interference and over regulation of the merchant class prohibited successful counters to Venetians trade domination. Successive treaties, which only served to exacerbate the problem and were created to check the Venetian stranglehold over trade, are also discussed. The ascension of Venice as the dominating, political and economic partner is detailed extensively by using comparisons encapsulating the recurring problems associated with failed Byzantine diplomatic strategies. The Chrysobull of 1082 and the inability of time-tested, Byzantine strategies

⁶³ Nicolas Oikonomides, "Entrepreneurs," in *The Byzantines* ed. Guglielmo Cavallo (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 165.

of diplomacy ensured that Venice would never again relinquish control of the lucrative trading economy back to the Byzantine Empire.

Venetian Trading Privileges Gain Momentum

By the tenth century, Byzantine merchants had largely settled into their roles as speculators. They were businessmen who were content to reside in the confines of Constantinople and let others come to them.⁶⁴ As we have also seen, the events of the last years of the eleventh century created vast opportunities which the Venetians and other maritime Italian city-states had in opening and expanding trade with Constantinople. Trade at this level with the East had not ever been fully realized. The Chrysobull of 1082 decisively and irrevocably opened a flow of economic traffic which accelerated into the twelfth century. This economic surge helped in the creation of trading fortunes and unbridled power for Venice. To a lesser degree, this trading power was assumed by Genoa and Pisa as well. The core stipulations of the chrysobull, devised and ratified in a time of duress for the Empire, were continually re-ratified and re-issued with each successive emperor. By 1119, less than ten years into his reign, Alexis I's successor John II attempted to curtail Venetian trade aggression hoping to limit the power of Venetian merchants in Constantinople which had exploded into a whirlwind of trading activity after the ratifying of the treaty.⁶⁵ He did this by expelling many Venetians from

⁶⁴ Oikonomides, "Entrepreneurs," 157-160.

⁶⁵ Treadgold, *A History of*, 630.

Constantinople and then refusing to re-ratify the treaty. The move backfired when Venice, entirely unwilling to give up its lucrative monopoly in the Imperial capital, attacked several Byzantine islands in the Aegean and demanded the treaty be re-signed. Not wanting to face another enemy and unwilling to make an adversary out of a dwindling supply of allies, “the emperor was forced to ratify all privileges in a fresh treaty (1126).”⁶⁶ Even with its trading power slowly ebbing away to Venice and other Italian merchants, the Empire was still the more formidable of the two yet the days of Byzantium forcing subjugation upon the fledgling power in the Adriatic were long over. These circumstances set the precedence for the continued, dominant Venetian trade relations between itself and the Empire. The relationship between Constantinople and Venice, which started in friendship, was soon reconciled as a constant struggle for supremacy between the two powers. This struggle often turned to bitter animosity as described by the biographer of both John II and his son Manuel I, John Kinnamos. “At this time [Manuel] committed the Venetians who lived in Byzantion and anywhere else in the Romans’ land to public prisons and caused their property to be registered in the state treasury.”⁶⁷ In regards to John II’s expulsion order previously described Kinnamos

⁶⁶ Ostrogorsky, *History of*, 377.

⁶⁷ John Kinnamos *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus* trans. Charles Brand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 209. Kinnamos (mid to late twelfth century) was a court biographer and historian of both Emperors John II and Manuel I, the son and grandson of Alexius I respectively. His personal, written accounts of the emperors’ military expeditions shows a political world which the Byzantine emperor was very much in the middle of diplomatic policy making. He explains that a major spark for this excessive and incredibly brazen decision by the emperor was the attack against Genoese and Pisan merchants by Venetian merchants in Constantinople in 1170. Manuel I, unrelenting his anti-Venetian politics had signed chrysobulls with both the Genoese and Pisans allowing them to set up trading districts in Constantinople. This was an act which the Venetians saw as threatening to their stranglehold on trade from the East. See Nicol *Byzantium*, 96-97

states, “angered therat[sic], emperor John expelled them from the Romans’ state,” in response to this, “the wretches pursued a course of piracy by sea and had no mercy for mankind.”⁶⁸ The previous policy of friendship through mutual association had changed. Venice grew into a powerful and self-assured economic rival. The strategies of Byzantine diplomacy had little effect in bringing the city back under the immediate control of the Empire.

By the mid twelfth century it was clear that the lucrative trading activities in Constantinople were being undertaken primarily by the Venetian merchants in their expanded quarter in the city. Byzantine merchants suffered the most from a loosely regulated and non-taxed, Venetian trade policy in Constantinople, the basis of which had originated in the original Chrysobull of 1082. That treaty along with subsequent treaties added fuel to the flames and created a trading situation against which Byzantine merchants could not hope to stand on an equal footing. “In the long run, the logic of the situation [Venetian merchants not paying the 10 per cent duty (Clause 5 in the Chrysobull of 1082)] gave the Italians a larger share of domestic trade, thus creating a situation where profit-sharing with the native merchant was no longer necessary.”⁶⁹

The unintended repercussions of Byzantine diplomacy had unleashed a torrent of trading activity that increased year after year and served to benefit Venetian merchants. Venice and her Italian rivals experienced a new role as the main traders between eastern markets and the trading houses in Italy. These veins of trade, expanded, lengthened and

⁶⁸ Kinnamos, *Deeds of John*, 210.

⁶⁹ Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine*, 146

grew to enormous economic proportions. With each passing year, newer and previously rare goods made their way in ever increasing quantities back to Italy for dispersal to markets further west. Major upheavals in the geo-political region of Byzantine hegemony had taken power from Byzantine traders' hands and had expanded the avenues from which goods could be acquired by Italian merchants. By the mid to late twelfth century, the Crusades had opened up new and untapped trading opportunities between Western Europe and the east. The Christian kings of the Kingdom of Jerusalem had no qualms about allowing Venetian and other Italian merchants to conduct business in their territory and even went so far as to ally with them in their struggles against the Muslims.⁷⁰ The relationship between the Eastern Empire and the Crusaders was chilly at best and Jerusalem saw nothing wrong with tweaking the nose of its Christian rival. Venetian centers of trade grew to much larger and active proportions in areas both in and outside of Byzantine control even if Venetian commerce with Muslim nations was extremely limited.⁷¹ This led to an extreme and irrevocable split between the two by the

⁷⁰ Nicol, *Byzantium*, 79. Less than a quarter of a century after the Fall of Jerusalem, the crusaders in the Levant needed all the help they could get. "They [Venice] were moved to action by a desperate plea for help addressed to them in 1120 by Baldwin II of Jerusalem." After crushing the Egyptian navy off the shores of Ascalon, "[a treaty was drawn up] in return for their services the Venetians were to be given, among other rewards, a street, a church, baths and a bakery in every town in the kingdom of Jerusalem and to be exempted from all taxes and dues." Just as Venice had played the role of military savior to the Byzantines, their saving of the Christian Kingdom in Jerusalem brought with it more power and more trading opportunities in regions still up for grabs.

⁷¹ Thomas F. Madden, *Enrico Dandolo & the Rise of Venice* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 121. Madden shows how cooperating with papal restrictions on trade with the "infidel" hindered Venetian economic expansion into market dominated by Muslim merchants especially Egypt and North Africa. Backing up his claim, Madden states that when the "Third Lateran Council in 1179 forbade Christians to traffic in strategic goods with Muslims it was simply duplicating existing Venetian law."

latter half of the twelfth century. In fact, contrary to the terms of the first chrysobull, Venice went so far as to make peace with the Empire's mortal enemies, the Normans and ratified a trade treaty with them in 1179.⁷² By the twelfth century, Venice had firmly laid claim to multiple trading regions under Byzantine suzerainty and actively participated in lucrative trading deals with both local and foreign merchants found there. "It was an impressive list [Clause 5 *all parts of his empire*] stretching from Laodikeia (Beirut) and Antioch in the east to Durazzo and Valona in Albania and the island of Corfu in the west."⁷³

Regardless of this, Constantinople was still the top priority for Venice and its trading empire. Each treaty ratified between the two ended with the same results; more lucrative subsidies granted to Venetian merchants and more limitations optioned to the Byzantine merchant class. Venetian merchants were not constrained by political and militaristic prohibitions which caused the Greek merchants in Constantinople to be unable to trade on an equal footing with their western counterparts. "Byzantine merchants went on business voyages only in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, but the large west European markets were closed to them by their Italian competitors." This signified the economic dominance of eastern goods in western

⁷² Brown, "The Venetians," 83. Brown states this as major turning point in Byzantine-Venetian relations. By the end of the twelfth century, Venice had almost indefatigably come to the aid of the Empire whenever the Normans showed aggression. After almost two centuries of conflict, Venice had decided that war cost money while trade *made* money. Venice consolidation in the Adriatic as a major sea power had reached the point that they would not be a willing participant in continued conflict between Southern Italy and Constantinople. They would choose what options were in the best interest of the city. It was hardly surprising that the Byzantines would take the treaty as an ultimate betrayal.

⁷³ Nicol, *Byzantium*, 91.

markets. This flourishing trade network which had begun centuries earlier saw the rise of the Mediterranean as the major source of luxury and surplus items which flowed to burgeoning European markets. The creation of the chrysobulls and the continued usage of Byzantine diplomatic strategies unleashed a competitor against Byzantine hegemony the likes of which the Empire had never encountered in that capacity. Each measure enacted to control the influx of Venetian merchants and the money flowing out of the Empire's cities presented the imperial throne with economic and political problems that were out of its control. Vast sums of money were lost on un-taxed trade goods entering and leaving Constantinople and its other cities due to the generous concessions granted in the chrysobulls. The situation proved lucrative for Venice and equally debilitating for the Eastern Empire's economy. Taxes and duties which normally had been levied on all goods were gradually pulled into a deeper Venetian field of control and taken out of the hands of the emperor's tax collectors. After a century of increased Venetian trading power, Byzantine diplomacy had successfully created a problem from which there was no way out. Over time, Venice had gone from a fledgling supplicant to an active and dominating partner and director of Mediterranean trading power. The increased presence of Italian merchants in Constantinople generated power for Venice which helped create a situation that eventually spelled disaster for the Empire.

Byzantine Trading Perspectives and Problems

As we have noted the rise of Venice as a competitor for Byzantine trade angered successive emperors who tried unsuccessfully to counteract the lasting and detrimental effects of the chrysobulls on the Byzantine economy. What were these effects and how could they have been so debilitating for the Empire and yet so economically strengthening for the Mediterranean and Western European burgeoning economies?

In regards to the Greek entrepreneurial class, there was “a division of the empire into two economic regions: the developed region of the capital and the less developed region of the provinces.”⁷⁴ Overland trading was slow, time-consuming and not cost effective. The bulk of this trade involved goods which had less worth than rarer goods that had to be shipped from great distances. The time and money it took to travel hundreds of miles overland from distant parts gave competitors who reached the markets faster a distinct advantage. Besides being cheaper, sea travel was preferred for these reasons and but it had its own set of problems notably the loss of both ships and goods to Arab pirates along shipping routes.⁷⁵ Because of its status as the Empire’s capital and the seat of its wealth, Constantinople received the bulk of trade and the largest influx of merchants. Consequentially, the greater portion of levies and dues to the Byzantine state were collected there.

⁷⁴ Oikonomides, “Entrepreneurs,” 152.

⁷⁵ Warren Treadgold, *The Byzantine*, 365. Treadgold downplays the effects of Arab piracy on the trading networks. Most networks were connected to “secure bases” which made piracy a very dangerous game. Besides, “the fact that ship-owners kept up regular trade in the face of the Arab danger confirms that there was a good deal of money to be made in commerce at the time.”

The Byzantine state controlled markets and Greek merchants plied their trade understanding that the officials of the emperor could and would direct affairs for them. A free market system of unobstructed trade was not unheard of yet state control over the business practices of the merchant class grew more stringent the more the individual merchant came into contact with Constantinople. This was done for varying reasons namely the lucrative source of profit that it generated for the emperor. Money lending was seen as a disreputable profession and an unworthy practice by the majority of the Byzantine aristocracy and so it fell to the authority of the state to extend loans to businessmen and merchants.⁷⁶ These loans were structured to facilitate the return of the larger portion of revenue to the state coffers; a very profitable business for the emperor. While merchants were allowed to spend their money freely on investments those investments were curtailed by the rules and stipulations directed upon them by tax collectors and state officials in accordance with the limits of their trade.⁷⁷

Byzantine merchants were considered second-class citizens in the cultural hierarchy in Constantinople. Their power was relegated to a “subordinate place of the mercantile class in Byzantium;” indicative of the restrictive maritime privileges imposed upon them. This was true except in the cases of very wealthy merchants or the landowning aristocracy.⁷⁸ Coinciding with this, Oikonomides describes the limitations of

⁷⁶ Oikonomides, “Entrepreneurs,” 152.

⁷⁷ Oikonomides, “Entrepreneurs,” 154.

⁷⁸ Alan Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900-1200*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 238. Harvey discusses the rise of the aristocracy as a key player in the rise of trade through shipping and the increased role that trading privileges played on the Byzantine economy.

Byzantine shipping in conjunction with trade due to ship building and ship owning being viewed as a dishonorable endeavor.⁷⁹ While trade was not the exclusive money maker of the Empire, the rise of a vigorous and expanded trade economy in the Mediterranean in the ninth century assured the Eastern Empire great wealth which flowed to it from the efforts of those merchants.

As we have seen with the granting of titles, the influence granted by the aristocracy and the emperor to certain merchants did not pass to the next generation. This meant that each merchant regardless of his background or beginnings had to lobby constantly in order to be granted the sponsorship that he needed to gain success among the bitter world of trade in Constantinople. Each of these defining characteristics of the Byzantine merchant class obstructed their continued success and the success of the Byzantine state in the face of Venetian trading power.

The general distaste of shipping by the Byzantine government and the concentration of Constantinople's underdeveloped merchant class predominantly around and in Constantinople facilitated the development of Byzantine trading enclaves which were only remotely controlled by the central government. Much like the example of

However, this rise started to occur by the eleventh century, well late after the surging Venetian maritime trading monopoly has taken effect. Also the task of owning a ship carried its own hardships as the emperor could confiscate it in times of war.

⁷⁹ Oikonomides, "Entrepreneurs," 149. "The important ship owners of Constantinople-they were, in fact, merely sailors who owned their ships-had no special social prestige." Oikonomides describes a story involving Emperor Theophilus who discovered that his wife, the Empress Theodora owned a ship used to import wheat. The Emperor "ordered the ship burned with its cargo, for that trade brought dishonor to him."

Venice's remote location from Constantinople, the Empire's most distant cities in Italy and the Adriatic coast created a climate of autonomy among the merchants living there. In his book on Mediterranean trade, the historian Robert Lopez describes the contents of a treaty which occurred between the *magister militum* "Master of the Soldiers" in Naples and the Lombard prince Sicard.⁸⁰ In the treaty, a strict code of guest rights are reaffirmed and adhered to. Merchants visiting in each party's territory are not to be mistreated, the contents of shipwrecks are to be returned to the original parties and Lombard citizens are not to be sold into slavery.⁸¹ The adherence of these distant trading centers to Byzantine customs and rules continued but a clear distinction was drawn between Constantinople and these trading centers beyond immediate reach of the emperor and his tax collectors. Distance allowed for more leeway. The treaty concluded a war between the two parties, a war which Constantinople "stood aloof."⁸² Lopez states, "they [towns still under Byzantine control after the Lombard invasion in the sixth century] maintained political and commercial ties with the Byzantine Empire, but they had won sufficient autonomy to deal with their Lombard-dominated hinterland and later with the Carolingian and Ottonian empires."⁸³

⁸⁰ Robert S. Lopez, "The Meeting of East and West in Southern Italy" in *Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World* trans. by Robert Lopez and Irving W. Raymond (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 33.

⁸¹ Lopez, "The Meeting of East," 34-35.

⁸² Lopez, "The Meeting of East," 33.

⁸³ Lopez, "The Meeting of East," 33. Lopez also specifies, "these towns had remained Byzantine islands in a Western world."

The rise of guild membership expanded Byzantine trade for a time. Yet, the guild system, like so many other parts to Byzantine state control, was retarded in its efforts to stay competitive with its Italian contemporaries. The Byzantine guild system was a strictly urban phenomenon and did not play out in the rural areas.⁸⁴ It had “lent stability and legitimacy to trade, which the Byzantines had always regarded, sometimes with reason, as a risky and slightly disreputable way of making a living.”⁸⁵ The Byzantine guild system was limited in its capacity to ensure a lucrative and active merchant class as well as a thriving and self-generating economic system in which to trade. As with everything else involving stimulation of the market, the central government in Constantinople tightly regulated the system creating a stagnant environment in which to do business.

The regulation of the guilds was “controlled by the eparch of Constantinople and, as is shown by the so-called *Book of the Eparch*, in the tenth century, [this control was far-reaching in the extreme.]”⁸⁶ The eparch or the Prefect of Constantinople, was a high ranking official, who directed the economy under the watchful eyes of the central authorities.⁸⁷ In his translation of the *Book of the Eparch*, the Byzantine historian A.E.R.

⁸⁴ Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine*, 129. Laiou and Morrisson, using research conducted by Oikonomides state that, “there is no evidence that strict controls or such a guild structure (encountered by the *Book of the Eparch*) existed in the provincial industry.” See N. Oikonomides *Social and Economic Life in Byzantium* ed. Elizabeth Zachariadou (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2004).

⁸⁵ Treadgold, *The Byzantine*, 42.

⁸⁶ Ostrogorsky, *History of*, 253.

⁸⁷ A.E.R. Boak, “The Book of the Eparch,” *Journal of Economic and Business History* Vol.1 (1929):598. The Prefect was top-economic regulator in the Byzantine Empire and controlled all aspects of guild determination and trading in the City. All economic activities were mandated by his authority.

Boak describes the role of the Eparch and the reasons behind the crafting of the *Book*. Boak is quick to point out that the *Book* was not representative of each guild but only the ones which dealt with the most important and lucrative trading in the city. Boak also states that “these ordinances were issued by the state for the guilds and not by the guilds themselves or their respective leaders.”⁸⁸ Treadgold describes the Byzantine guild system (in comparison to its counterparts in Western Europe) as “pointlessly restrictive to modern businessmen.”⁸⁹ He also states that membership in the guilds “had some privileges, but most of those advantages were simply penalties for outsiders.”⁹⁰ On the other hand, Laiou and Morriison have a brighter regard for the stringent role of the government in Byzantine trade policies stressing that, “in macroeconomic terms, it provided the framework for the functioning of the economy as a whole, thus making it possible for us to speak of the *Byzantine* [their emphasis] economy, that is, the economy of a unit that was contained within the borders of the state.”⁹¹

The role of the central Byzantine government thus performed a major inhibiting role in its own trading revenue collecting and expansion of the markets around the Mediterranean. These facts combined with the geographic distances encountered in such

⁸⁸ Boak, “The Book,” 598. Boak also discusses what we have understood up to this point in regards to the strict control of the emperor and his government over the economic apparatus of the Empire. “The reasons for the interference of the state in such matters are, first, that the state assumed the responsibility for maintaining the economic welfare of the city and providing the needs of the people and the court, and, secondly, that the guilds were under the obligation of performing certain services (*munera* or liturgies) for the court and state.”

⁸⁹ Treadgold, *The Byzantine*, 42.

⁹⁰ Treadgold, *A History of*, 574.

⁹¹ Laiou and Morriison, *The Byzantine*, 54

a large empire meant that proliferation of trading that should have been dominated by Byzantine merchants was instead consumed, directed and overwhelmed by outside influences notably the Italian maritime states.

Byzantine Problems Lead to Venetian Benefits

The list of trading problems associated with Byzantine trade in comparison to Venice and the rest of the Italian maritime traders are wide reaching. Venice and its trading rivals Genoa, Pisa and Amalfi were under no strict regulations in trade by the sea. In fact, their entire existence revolved around building up a maritime empire through their use of trade routes back and forth along the Mediterranean trading hubs. Venetian sea trade could be found in every corner of the Eastern Empire and eventually, it could be found in parts further south among the cities of the Latin crusader kingdom. As we have seen, Venetian sea merchants and their continued deferment to papal authority prohibited them from trading with Muslim partners but this prohibition was easily countered by trading with partners who were hostile to Constantinople regardless of how many clauses in chrysobulls discouraged and forbade such actions.

State control over Byzantine merchants and their merchandise did not affect Venetian traders or their Italian opponents. While Byzantine merchants struggled against oppressive levies and regulations forced upon them by their own government, Venetian merchants had successfully exempted themselves from these trading penalties over centuries of service to the imperial throne. Thus the fantastic wealth and exotic goods

pouring into Constantinople were able to be purchased and traded at fantastic profit margins and shipped back to Italy and the west.

Money lending or loaning was considered disreputable in Byzantine society and more often than not, it was the government and the aristocracy which provided loans to Byzantine merchants. The government found that by lending money at higher rates it was assured of a steady and valuable cash flow from the rate of trade which continuously moved through Constantinople to the West. “This tendency toward an increase [in rates] was already vaguely apparent at the end of the ninth century: the ceiling on interest rates increased officially by 4.1 percent; by the eleventh century, rates changed to a different, much higher scale, 16.66 percent for maritime loans.”⁹² While maritime trade was lucrative and the Empire made great wealth from this activity, the continued steep rates of loans prohibited a flourishing Byzantine merchant class from exercising real authority until well into the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This was in contrast to the Venetians understanding that economic dominance did not come from debilitating interest rates. Money lending was considered an act of sin in the eyes of Roman Catholic Church yet that formality did not dissuade traders from getting the loans they needed. Jews were often the targets of persecution but money lending was one of the few methods of business open to them. The Jewish populations, though small, were often the sole money lenders in an area and the Venetians used their services like most others. This situation worked out well for them in contrast to money loaned to Byzantine merchants, which had to be returned at a higher interest rate. A shipwreck or poor investment could

⁹² Oikonomides, “Entrepreneurs,” 152.

sink a Byzantine trader for good. A loan from a Jew in Venice or elsewhere was the best of both worlds; lower rate loans and the knowledge that repayment was never a foregone conclusion. In fact, repayment could be sidestepped by finding other arrangements for the Jewish moneylender. Jews involved in trading “tended to confine their financial activities to petty money lending,” even if, “they [native merchants] grouped them [Jews] together and excluded them from many areas of business; their rates of interest established by the municipal government.”⁹³

Venice itself was not above seeking a good deal and establishing loans in return for future dividends. In the beginning years of the thirteenth century, the large force comprising the bulk of the Fourth Crusade required a huge number of ships and massive amounts of provisions for their journey to the Holy Land. Venice was willing to provide these things at a price. “The cost would be four silver marks for each knight and each horse and two marks for each squire and foot soldier, for a total of 94,000 silver marks. This was a reasonable price, well in keeping with the ongoing rate at other ports.”⁹⁴ The Venetians received their payment in full and then some at the expense of the Eastern Empire. It is clear that with the rate of interest on loans and the hardships that Byzantine merchants encountered when seeking them, Byzantine trade was not able to fully counter Venetian and Italian maritime trading at a level which was required to avoid complete economic dominance by the city-states.

⁹³ Robert S. Lopez, “Jews and Christians in Trade and Money Lending” in *Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World* trans. by Robert Lopez and Irving W. Raymond (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 103-104.

⁹⁴ Madden, *Enrico Dandolo*, 124.

The rise of Venice and its merchants directly correlated to its command of shipping routes and the supply of valuable goods that it brought back to Western Europe. Merchants and their shipping formed the core facets of Venetian culture well into the post medieval age in Europe. By the late twelfth century, Venetian merchants had successfully formed partnerships with all participants in the Mediterranean trade economy. They had also developed, strengthened, maintained and enhanced their previous and current trade treaties with the other powerful empires in the region including and most importantly, with Byzantium. In just under 500 years, the merchant culture of Venice and their sea-faring forefathers had carved out an economic empire to rival that of the two major empires it found itself between geographically. Venice as a land controlling empire never came close to the domains of the Holy Roman or Eastern Empires yet its trading mastery put it into a position of extreme importance politically, militarily and economically. The merchant class of Venice in the Middle Ages was *the* class.

Venetian traders were able to partake in loans which were readily available from numerous sources. These sources: bankers, other wealthy merchants, the Jewish population and others were united in the cultural investment of things that continued the expansion of Venetian trading power and money making. Rates were set and duties were levied on all merchandise yet the windfall of profit that accompanied the return of exotic goods from the east to the rest of Europe ensured that the risks involved were well worth the price of sea trading. The Venetians had no cultural stigma about money lending and the causes for making money and expanding trade were good ones. Venetian merchants

did not have to rely solely upon one class with extravagant wealth in order to embark on trading ventures. Byzantine merchants were constrained by a social stigma as well as the inability to receive preemptive and easily repayable loans at non-profitable rates. Due to the lack of banking opportunities for Byzantine merchants by the mid fourteenth century, “the Byzantine aristocracy, increasingly deprived of its lands, began to engage in commerce and banking.”⁹⁵ As a result of such a small portion of the Byzantine population belonging to the aristocracy, Byzantine merchants suffered from a dearth in the availability of affordable and easy to obtain loans; a problem that did not affect the Venetians to any such degree.

Ship building and the role of ships as a powerful tool in warfare and trade was an integral element in the cultural composition of Venice. Venetians had escaped the collapse of the Western Roman Empire and the barbarian invasions by seeking refuge on their small chain of islands. Belonging to the sea and seeking a future from seafaring had always been a vital element in Venice’s prosperity and the continued survival of the city. By the ninth century, Venice had secured itself as the main proponent of seafaring power in the Adriatic and to a lesser extent, the region around southern Italy and western Greece. By the 860s, “the Venetians alone connected fully to all four of the main trading regions of early medieval Italy, even as they sailed to the Muslim world.”⁹⁶ As we have

⁹⁵ Laiou and Morriison, *The Byzantine*, 199. The period is obviously well past the timeline that has been discussed. However, it shows that by this point in the Empire’s history (after the Fall of Constantinople in 1204) its people were still trying to regain a foothold of its former economic glory. By the 1350s, the relaxing of the state controlled economy was just “too little, too late.” The Empire only had a century left to exist.

⁹⁶ McCormick, *The Origins*, 637.

seen, Venetian naval superiority in Mediterranean politics led to their indispensability as a partner in all regards whether militarily or economically. The Byzantines had to make use of Venetian navies as early as the ninth century and, as we have seen, Emperor Alexius I desperately sought their help against the Normans in the late eleventh century. By the first years of the thirteenth century, Venetian shipping signaled the end of the Byzantine Empire as a true economic and military power in the Mediterranean. Venice relied on their naval power as an extension of its economic and political will and entered into wars for the purpose of establishing, sustaining and dominating the sources of the Mediterranean, maritime economy. As Lane states, “the Venetians sought sea power, not territorial possessions from which to draw their tribute.”⁹⁷ By the late twelfth century, the idea of solidifying, maintaining or expanding into any regions bordering the Mediterranean region was unthinkable without direct participation by ships from Venice. “Worse disintegration set in [of the Empire by the late twelfth century], Manuel I was attracted to Western ideas, and he began to rely upon Western arms, particularly on the ships of the Italian republics but this naval support meant more commercial concession; and concessions given to Venice were demanded and secured by Genoa and Pisa.”⁹⁸

By the last part of the eleventh century, the Byzantines were in the habit of being generous with title delegation.⁹⁹ As stipulated, titles did not pass on from generation to

⁹⁷ Lane, *Venice*, 27.

⁹⁸ Runciman, *Byzantine Civilisation*, 55.

⁹⁹ Ostrogorsky, *History of*, 367. Alexius I was in a precarious position early in his reign. The rewarding of titles and the raising of members of ruling families to the level of aristocracy meant that

generation and this was evident in the low regards to which Byzantine merchants were held. The wealth and attractive trappings of government passed on in Venetian society and sons benefited greatly from their fathers' past economical and political exploits. Venice established a republic as early as the seventh century yet nepotism and familial connection ensured that prominent families kept positions of power. Since power in Venice was tied to the sea, merchant families grew to fill roles in all of the parts of Venetian government including that of doge. The conferring of titles and the wealth and power which accompanied them signified a stark contrast between the merchant classes of Constantinople and Venice.

Venetian guilds in Constantinople and their counterparts in Venice enjoyed a free hand in trading activities due to the concessions granted in the treaties. More merchants led to greater profits. The creation of guilds and their benefit in the expansion of trade gave Venice and her Italian rivals a leg-up in the trade competition against Byzantine merchants. In contrast, Byzantine guilds were tightly controlled by the Byzantine government under the direct supervision of the Prefect. As the twelfth century wore on, Venetian guilds and merchants in Constantinople were obligated to a lesser degree to Byzantine authority. They were, in effect, a separate trading power in a foreign land, controlled by their own laws and duties. As time went on, they found themselves decreasingly under the authority of the Eastern Empire. The Venetian Quarter granted to the Venetians after the Chrysobull of 1082, was created along an avenue running close to

Alexius had supporters in his consolidation of power as well as help in which to combat first the Norman and then the Crusader menace. Titles ensured support.

the Golden Horn. It was a small piece of land yet from such an inauspicious start the Venetians prospered and their guilds, shops, quays and warehouses began to spring up all along the area.¹⁰⁰ By 1203, one year before the fateful conquest of the city by Latin Crusaders and Venetian forces, the Quarter had expanded to territory outside of the sea-walls and the length of the Quarter had been extended.¹⁰¹ The Venetians and their Italian counterparts had a direct influence on the Byzantine merchants and their style of business especially in the way they organized and conducted their guilds. “Each trade seems to have been organized into a western-styled guild, with a leader who was empowered to represent all the members before the authorities.”¹⁰² Guilds were present in Constantinople and Venice yet the constrictive nature of government regulation against Byzantine guilds and not their Venetian counterparts ensured a continued dominance of most of the manufacturing and trade in the imperial city by Venice.

By the eleventh century, Venetian sea routes had expanded to all centers of major trading regions. Their ships could be found in every primary and secondary economic hub along the Eastern Mediterranean as well as in the Black Sea. Cairo, Antioch, Thessalonica, Corinth, Athens, Jerusalem, Tyre, Alexandria and of course,

¹⁰⁰ Brown, “The Venetians,” 75. Brown describes the length of the Quarter as being very small “only 385 paces, or about a third of a mile.”

¹⁰¹ Madden, *Enrico Dandolo*, 162. “Half of the Venetian Quarter in 1203 was outside of the city’s sea walls, where residences and shops fronted a central road, and farther toward the shore stood landing stages for merchant vessels.” Madden describes the joy of the Venetian Quarter “most of the Venetian residents of the city loved there” upon the arrival of the crusading army in 1203. Many still remembered the debacle of Manuel I’s arrest of the Venetian citizenry in 1171 and the mass slaughter perpetrated by the Byzantines against all Latin residents in 1182.

¹⁰² Oikonomides, “Entrepreneurs,” 169.

Constantinople were all frequented and to a large degree, dominated by Venetian trading authority. The distances and geographic extremes of these places were not an obstacle for Venetian sea travel and by the eleventh and into the twelfth century, Venetian trading power had in effect gained control over all of the aforementioned areas; cornering the markets on goods and shipping them back to trading centers in Italy and Western Europe. “The large, west European markets were closed to them [Byzantine merchants] by their Italian competitors,” and “long-distance Byzantine trade was thus limited and played a subsidiary role as compared to that of the Italians.”¹⁰³ Loss of their Italian possessions and the domination of Arab lands in the south, combined with the untrusting nature of the Crusader states along the Levant towards them, Byzantine overseas traders were forced to reconcile themselves with Black Sea and localized Greek island trading. The Venetian economy was thrived by importing and shipping vast amounts of previously unknown goods back to Western European markets. There was no port or stretch of water where Venetian influence could not be found. Their continued political role as the transportation for major military endeavors and supplier for Western Europe gave Venice a stranglehold on all aspects of Mediterranean commerce. The only competition came from a minority Genoese and Pisan merchant system but their impact was minimal. Most geographic possessions of any trading value which once belonged to the Empire were eventually gobbled up by Venice. These former Byzantine possessions were lost in varying ways: conquest, gradual replacement of Byzantine culture by a Venetian one or

¹⁰³ Oikonomides, “Entrepreneurs,” 169.

by simply being given away by the emperors as last ditch efforts to prolong the dying Empire.

The permanent loss of Italy to the Eastern Empire cut out a lucrative market for Constantinople by the lessened degree of Byzantine political influence there. The distances were just too great and, as ever, successive emperors had other problems to deal with. In the years immediately preceding the turn of the thirteenth century, the Empire was no longer in no position to make another play at recovering their former possessions. Other powers had stepped into the vacuum that the Normans had opened in southern Italy and from then onward; they guided the direction of the region. The days of Byzantine hegemony in the region were past and the former, tiny island possession of the Empire on the Rialto had stepped in to forever change the economic future of Italy and Western Europe.

IV

Byzantine Diplomacy: The Empire's Greatest Weapon and its Protracted Weakness

For the tragedy was final. On May the twenty-ninth, 1453, a civilization was wiped out irrevocably. It had left a glorious legacy in learning and in art; it had raised whole countries from barbarism and had given refinement to others; its strength and its intelligence for centuries had been the protection of Christendom. For eleven centuries Constantinople had been the centre of the world of light. The quick brilliance, the interest and the æstheticism of the Greek, the proud stability and the administrative competence of the Roman, the transcendental intensity of the Christian from the East, welded together into a fluid mass, were put now to sleep.¹⁰⁴

The final chapter documents the inherent weaknesses and strengths of Byzantine diplomatic strategies. Successive emperors had attempted to use the tricks and time-honored strategies of Byzantine diplomacy but discovered that cultural misapprehension and mistrust clouded cooperation between themselves and Western Europe. The chapter describes how the Chrysobull of 1082 opened up a trading empire for Venice whose trading power would never be relinquished back to Constantinople. The weaknesses of Byzantine diplomacy against the strong kingdoms in Western Europe are detailed as is the opening of Western Europe to a flourishing trade from the East. This trade was provided by Venice and the other maritime Italian city-states. The chapter concludes with Byzantine diplomatic strategies as having played an integral role in the cultural history of the Empire yet failed it with the granting of the Chrysobull of 1082.

Byzantine Diplomatic Culture and the Mistrust of the West

Relations between Western Europe and the Eastern Empire were often stressed and at times, hostility arose between the them. The schism of the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches in 1054 exacerbated feelings of cultural mistrust. The First Crusade was the start of legitimate militaristic, cultural, economic and geo-political contact between the majority of Western Europe and the Eastern Empire. Past relations between the two were fleeting and limited exchanges had occurred, yet the First Crusade began the dramatic shift of contact between the two. This event, in conjunction with the later crusades, accentuated an animosity which had slowly built up over the preceding centuries. After it had been undertaken, the situation continued to spiral out of control. The meeting of these two sets of people with vastly different and competing cultures signaled a new era in European politics; one that saw the flourishing of Western Europe as the Middle Ages came to an end and another that saw its ancient customs and old glories eventually decay. The First Crusade introduced two cultures to one another who shared a belief in Christ yet could not cooperate on how that belief should be interpreted.

The interplay between the Byzantine Empire and the West was a confrontation marked in mistrust, animosity and cultural misunderstandings. Even as early as the sixth century, misgivings about hostility between the two led the Emperor Maurice to make mention of the Latins and how to properly defeat them in battle.¹⁰⁵ The First Crusade, in

¹⁰⁵ Maurice I Augustus, *Strategikon* trans. George T. Dennis (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1984), 119-120. The Emperor Maurice advocates that full-scale contact should be avoided with western armies due to their ferocity and brute force. Instead, hit and run tactics, ambushes and sneak attacks should be implemented. His advice of “delay things and ruin opportunities,” and

the eyes of the West, was seen less as a joint religious undertaking and more as a pathway to Heaven. Salvation and the return of the Holy Land was more of a forceful argument for the Crusaders than was rescuing fellow Christians in the Eastern Empire from the Muslim advance. When Alexius I sent emissaries to Rome to seek reconciliation between the two Christian churches, his aim was also to “obtain facilities for levying troops among the Western knights whose courage and warlike spirit he admired.”¹⁰⁶ The reaction to this request was sudden and extreme and the inherent disdain of the Eastern Empire was universal. The Crusade that was preached was met with acclaim and excitement and the Byzantines were made to look like an empire struggling in its weakness to defend Christianity against the Muslim invasion. The appeal to all Christian kingdoms was an “unprecedented movement” and Alexius I’s ambassadors were styled in the west as “begging for the help of all Christians to assist him in defense of the Church and in repelling the pagans established practically against the walls of Constantinople.”¹⁰⁷ Alexius was looking for knights to act as mercenaries to help restore the “glory of Byzantium,” not the multitude of Christian humanity which answered the call to restore the Holy Land. “Thus between Byzantium and the crusaders there lay a gulf of misunderstanding engendering hatred and irreconcilable hostility which did great damage to Christianity.”¹⁰⁸ As early as 1101, just two years after the Fall of Jerusalem to the

“pretend to come to agreements with them,” did little in the way of fostering a relationship of trust and empathy for the relationship between the two peoples’.

¹⁰⁶ Bréhier, *The Life*, 214.

¹⁰⁷ Bréhier, *The Life*, 214.

¹⁰⁸ Bréhier, *The Life*, 215.

crusaders, the fragile peace made between the two Christian powers had been ignored. Alexius I's main adversary, Bohemond traveled back to Europe to fund his campaign against both the Turks and the Byzantines, all the while trumpeting the fight against both Greek and Turk alike. "As he journeyed through Italy and France recruiting help he was responsible more than anyone else for spreading the story that the Byzantine Emperor had betrayed the crusaders."¹⁰⁹

The mistrust and dislike between the Latins and Byzantines was aggravated by the misconception regarding one another's cultures. Christianity, the one force which should have been a symbol of unification between them, was a major point of contention and enduring strife. Theological differences prevented each party from reconciling against their common foe; the Muslims.

The weakness of Byzantine diplomacy against the increased militaristic, economic and cultural incursions of the West after the First Crusade was apparent. Up until that date Byzantine diplomatic stratagems had been used on barbarians and against cultures which understood the practicality of making peace and avoiding war when it best suited their need. The western powers were driven by a culture bred on warfare, violence and the undeniable idea that entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven could be obtained through the forced conversion or slaughter of those who did not follow the teachings of Christ as interpreted by Rome. Conversion was out of the question. Titles, tribute and land only sufficed when the emperor saw a benefit from extending these generous grants in accordance to his vision of the Empire's ultimate course. Marriage alliances were

¹⁰⁹ Ostrogorsky, *History of*, 365.

granted, yet the cultural distances between the two were too much to bridge in one marriage or even a hundred such marriages.

The Crusades created a long-lasting problem from which the Empire could not truly recover. The militancy of Western Europe under the guiding hand of the Roman Church forever opened the concept of the Holy Land to the West. The ideology of a Byzantine Empire which was inherently weak, culturally bankrupt and hopelessly mired in the past continued to permeate Western thought. Byzantine diplomacy had encountered a problem which it could not manage or stop. Instead of unifying and opening relations between east and west, the Crusades served to permanently sever the only hope that the Eastern Empire had of surviving Islamic expansion. Cultural mistrust and continued political backstabbing by both parties set in motion the events of the early thirteenth century, as well as, the final dissolution of the Empire in 1453.

Diplomatic Servitude to Venice, Trade Concessions and the Opening of the Mediterranean to Western Europe

As has been argued, tenants of Byzantine diplomacy were based upon the use of strategies that effectively delayed problems which could be dealt with more effectually at later dates. The culture which helped shape Byzantine diplomacy understood the necessities of encountering enemies on beneficial terms. Created from the glories of the original Roman Empire, the Eastern Empire and the men (and a few women) who ruled it

depended upon the diplomatic stratagems which had successfully worked for centuries. Understanding Byzantine diplomacy meant understanding the ways in which an inherently Greek (not Latin) culture dealt with other cultures that were essentially foreign, hostile and outside of the Byzantine cultural sphere of influence. Byzantine diplomacy, in its numerous meetings with *the other* was forced to envelop and master a problem using quick thinking, policy making. Byzantine diplomatic policy grew to fulfill a role which placed it squarely at odds with the Romanized, Latin cultures in the West. Over the centuries, Byzantine culture itself, in the eyes of Western Europe slowly transformed into *the other*; representing to the West exactly what the Byzantines had combated against for almost a millennia. The oikoumene of which the Byzantines had so long found themselves a part was seen as foreign and sinful in the eyes of the West.¹¹⁰ The Byzantines considered themselves as maintaining the central role in the oikoumene with all others occupying its periphery. To the Latin west, the Greeks were the archetype of things distrustful, lurid and un-Christian.

Byzantine diplomacy played a major role in this inevitable confrontation. As we have seen, diplomacy in Byzantine politics was a major weapon in dealing with enemies which beset the Empire on all sides. Byzantine diplomacy, in all of its facets, ensured the continued survival of the Empire upon encountering all types of threats. The one threat

¹¹⁰ Ostrogorsky, *History of*, 28. Ostrogorsky is referencing the gradual yet consistent viewpoint accepted by first Romans living in the Eastern Empire then Byzantines that their cultural sphere of influence was the, in essence, the world. Outside peoples and uneducated barbarian tribes were part of the *darkness* of uncultured *otherness*. Ostrogorsky describes a post fourth century, Roman world guided and constructed under Christian motifs. The cultural xenophobia remained the same while the integral reasoning behind it slowly changed. The apexes of cultural dominance were found in both Rome and Constantinople because of Greek and Roman cultural hegemony *and* because these were the centers of Christian political and theological power.

which Byzantine diplomatic strategies could not successfully defeat was time.

Throughout the periods previously detailed, Byzantine diplomacy had thwarted each menace it encountered. Gradually, change occurred which exacerbated the limitations of Byzantine diplomacy. By the twelfth century, Western Europe and Venice, were wholly unlike anything the Byzantines had encountered in their ancient past. Western Europe, for all of its incessant, petty warfare and inescapable violence was not a simple confederation of barbarian tribes. It was formed into numerous yet culturally connected kingdoms which were molded from the remaining vestiges of Roman imperial law, including Latin custom and a Christian religion based upon Catholic principles. The kingdoms of Western Europe were connected and dominated by a distinct and powerful feudal class of nobles. This western nobility, regardless of differences in language or location, united around a solidified and powerful Church under the guiding hand of papal authority. By the ninth century the Byzantines found themselves dealing, not with a horde of barbarians that could be placated with trinkets but with members of a distinct cultural ethos centered around warfare, feudal right and Rome. Centuries of geographic isolation for the majority of the Empire destined Constantinople to problems with their former Christian brethren. The culture of Constantinople was Greek and not Latin. Warfare was not encouraged and the Byzantine aristocracy did not mold itself along the lines of continuous martial conflict and redemption through religious violence as did its Latin counterparts.

One of the great methods of Byzantine diplomacy, Christian conversion, was thus lost in negotiations with the Latins and more importantly, the Venetians. The strategy

was completely ineffectual as the Venetians and the west were already members of the Christian faith. The problems which Alexius I and successive emperors experienced with the crusaders and the west were only temporarily and unsatisfactorily concluded through the use of titles, tribute and land. This feature of Byzantine diplomacy was predetermined on the context of having something to offer an enemy that had not experienced its like before. It had worked against multitudes of barbarian hordes but meant little against organized Latins who had their own series of titles. The crusaders were happy to take gold from Constantinople and accept baseless titles and lands under nominal Muslim control granted to them by the emperors. They added these to others they already possessed but it did not stop them from countering Byzantine efforts to re-take the Levant. It also did not dissuade them from actively campaigning against the Eastern Empire politically, economically and militaristically.

Other aspects of Byzantine diplomacy were equally futile against an adversary that could not be easily manipulated. Byzantine emperors could play an active role as a father to the Latins but the crusaders only begrudgingly accepted Alexius I as a titular head of the household and ignored the relationships entirely with his successors.¹¹¹ Imperial marriages between porphyrogenitus and the West were still rare by the eleventh and twelfth centuries but even an important marriage between a ruling Latin and a member of the Byzantine aristocracy did not dissuade the West (especially Venice) from seeking and actively participating in campaigns against Byzantine territories.

¹¹¹ Bréhier, *The Life*, 216.

By the late twelfth century, Venice had become the de facto senior partner in its relationship with the Empire. Its position as chief rival to Byzantine trade autonomy had been created along a hard and dangerous road. This road had involved subservience to Byzantine political authority which had lasted for centuries, but had seen a role reversal by the time of the Byzantine-Norman Wars in the late eleventh century. With the Chrysobull of 1082 and the exorbitant trade concessions made, Alexius I had performed the emperor's role in Byzantine diplomacy in the same manner as his predecessors. With that treaty promised and concluded, Alexius had purchased two valuable things to help him defeat his enemies; time and a powerful ally. This agreement and the relationship to Byzantine diplomacy from which it was created was in keeping with what countless Eastern emperors had done through the empire's history; buy time and allies to deal with the problems at hand using promises to be kept at a later date. What the emperor could never have fathomed was the steep price the Empire would have to pay in order to purchase that help. Ostrogorsky paints a vivid picture of Venice as a greedy and exceedingly powerful rival to Byzantine power in the Mediterranean; a rival stopped at nothing to consolidate its power and monopolize all trade flowing from the east to Western Europe. His synopsis of the role that Venice played in the downfall of Constantinople to the western crusaders in 1204 was based upon the increased demands and unfulfilled treaty obligations given to Venice by successive emperors and their chrysobulls. To Ostrogorsky, Venice was a defiant power and their long connected history of cooperation and rapprochement with the Empire had faded into obscurity. By continued agreements, Venice had completely taken control of and dominated Byzantine

trade, cutting off a vital source of revenue and weakening an already feeble Empire by the late twelfth century. He states, “the Byzantines had allowed Venice to seize their maritime supremacy, and now were to lose their Empire to it.”¹¹² For both Lane and Madden, the Sack of Constantinople in 1204 led by the crusaders and the Venetians is the key date in the climatic rise and consolidation of authority by Venice as the preeminent trading power in the Mediterranean. Both historians end chapters in their books on the rise of Venice with the declaration that the capture of Constantinople was the turning point in Venice rise to power. With the privileges afforded to them as allies to the crusaders, Lane states that, “the Fourth Crusade gave the Venetians undisputed maritime preeminence in the eastern Mediterranean.”¹¹³ Madden also echoes this statement in his final descriptions of the period after 1204; a time which saw Venice gain more trading territory that formerly belonged to the Eastern Empire. He ends his book on the greatness of Enrico Dandolo and the rise of Venice with, “Venice’s maritime empire had been born.”¹¹⁴

It is impossible to disagree with how important a date 1204 is in the history of Europe and the rise of Venice as a leading power yet I believe that I have shown how the failure of Byzantine diplomatic theory coinciding with the creation of the Chrysobull in 1082 was a driving factor in the rise of Venice as a economic power. The Chrysobull of 1082 started the Byzantine Empire on a downward spiral of concessions and

¹¹² Ostrogorsky, *History of*, 414.

¹¹³ Lane, *Venice*, 43.

¹¹⁴ Madden, *Enrico Dandolo*, 200.

appeasement. It was an act of diplomacy which had unparalleled consequences which the Empire had never encountered nor could understand. Each re-affirmation of the original trade agreement with the Venetians slowly paralyzed and gradually siphoned off revenue from the struggling Empire; revenue which it could not afford to lose against growing opposition in the form of the crusader kingdoms and the rising power of the Turks. Byzantine diplomacy had trapped the Empire in a vortex of concessions which damaged it militarily and economically past the point of recovery. Efforts to counteract Venetian trade dominance only exacerbated the problems when successive emperors granted generous trade treaties to other Italian merchants such as Genoa and Pisa. Granting these rivals of Venice lucrative trade monopolies did little to stunt the continued Venetian trade cartel and only further sapped the Empire's trade resources. Instead of one dominating trade aggressor in the imperial city, Constantinople grew to have three.

The Chrysobull of 1082 and the subsequent trade treaties which followed were a bloodletting enacted on the Empire through the failed use of Byzantine diplomacy. It weakened the economic strength of Constantinople so that, little over a century after the first chrysobull, the Empire had been partitioned and forever changed; made subservient to outside forces and under the control of Western Europe.

The gradual crumbling of Byzantine power and the rise of Venice as a major trading and economic power had important and far-reaching effects on the history of Western Europe. Trade had existed between Western Europe and the east since the time of the original Roman Empire, yet the two spheres of civilization were disconnected by large distances. A vigorous sea trade (especially in slaves) existed between Sicily and

North Africa after the Muslim conquest of that island in the early ninth century.¹¹⁵ The expansion of Venice and other Italian maritime states as Mediterranean trading powers helped to promote the idea of permanently connecting the resources of the east to Europe. Standing apart from most accounts of the lessening of Byzantine trading power, the historians Laiou and Morriison describe the twelfth through fourteenth centuries as a time of continued Byzantine trading prowess. They explain that even though Venetian trading privileges hurt Byzantine traders, a trading network still existed which was large enough to satisfactorily encompass all parties involved. Yet, even they state that, “in this Europe, the Byzantine economy occupied a peripheral position,” and “in the meantime, Italian merchants had created a Mediterranean trade system.”¹¹⁶

As we have seen, trade was tightly regulated and controlled by the Byzantine state and was not allowed to operate under free market conditions. This prevented a powerful counter to Venetian and Italian maritime expansion. In the world of international trade, the Byzantines were hopelessly outmatched in the face of their Italian rivals. In the ninth century, when trade had expanded by Venetian traders to all points in the eastern and southern Mediterranean, the Byzantines were still relying on agriculture as their main revenue generator. “As always in the Byzantine economy, trade was much less important than agriculture, and the state, rather than commerce, dominated monetary transactions.”¹¹⁷ While Venice expanded outward and ventured into uncharted territory

¹¹⁵ McCormick, *The Origins*, 768.

¹¹⁶ Laiou and Morriison, *The Byzantine*, 246.

¹¹⁷ Treadgold, *The Byzantine*, 366.

to tap into unlimited supplies of trading wealth, the Byzantines relied on their vast land area and taxation to fill the royal coffers. “Agriculture appears to have expanded rather more quickly than trade at this time (ninth century),” and “overregulation of Byzantine commerce was surely one reason that freer merchants from Venice, Naples, and Amalfi began to dominate the Empire’s overseas trade with Italy, and to take over much of its trade with the caliphate.”¹¹⁸ Thus when the eleventh and twelfth centuries arrived and the problems associated with them confronted the Eastern Empire, their trading networks were ill prepared to challenge the robust trading capabilities of the Italian cities.

Expansion of trade in the Mediterranean and Western Europe was a culmination of many factors including the inherent weakness of Byzantine diplomacy in relation to the rise of Venice and the west. Diplomacy that had served the emperors over the centuries had created problems which further diplomacy could only exacerbate. Stratagems such as placation, subterfuge and father-figure diplomacy had helped create the groundwork for the Chrysobull of 1082 which in turn, set the foundation for the rise of Venice and the expansion of the west into the east. All major treaties thereafter were unable to stop the slow decay of Byzantine power and the rise of Italian trading. Alexius I and successive emperors could never have foreseen the dramatic shift in economic power which the Chrysobull of 1082 and Byzantine diplomacy had created. Byzantine diplomacy was a means to an end but it was never intended to eventually signify the end of the Empire itself.

¹¹⁸ Treadgold, *The Byzantine*, 574.

Appendix: Time Line of Byzantine-Venetian Relations

mid sixth century	The first Venetians settle along the sandbars which comprise the Rialto fleeing barbarian incursions into former Western Roman Empire territory
seventh-ninth centuries	Venice is politically and economically answerable to Constantinople
751	The last Exarch of Ravenna is killed
ninth century	Increased trade between Western Europe and Constantinople facilitated by Venetian merchants expanding markets further into lucrative resource areas
late ninth century	Venice dramatically expands trading operations in the Adriatic and Eastern Mediterranean
879	Emperor Basil I sends delegates to Venice to form a treaty of mutual friendship
ninth-tenth centuries	The <i>Book of the Eparch</i> , a manual on Byzantine trading theories, rules and regulations is compiled which stipulates the roles that guilds and the merchant class in Constantinople are expected to adhere to
1005	Emperor Basil II forms a close bond with Doge Pietro Orseolo II of Venice and offers a member of the royal household in marriage to his son
1054	Schism between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches
mid tenth century	Emperor Constantine VII 'Porphyrogenitus' dedicates to his son, Emperor Romanus II, the sum of Byzantine diplomatic and cultural history in the manual <i>De Administrando Imperio</i>
1082	Chrysobull of 1082 is drafted and authorized by Emperor Alexius I granting Venice lucrative trading privileges in Constantinople
1096-1099	Emperor Alexius I entertains and ushers the armies of Western Europe through the Empire as they journey to recover the Holy Land. The First Crusade culminates with the Conquest of Jerusalem in 1099.
1101	The fragile peace made in 1098 between Emperor Alexius I and the members of the First Crusade is largely ignored
mid to late twelfth	Court biographer John Kinnamos writes the <i>Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus</i> describing the problems encountered by both emperors in dealing

century	with the Venetians
1126	Emperor John II attempts but fails in his efforts to check aggressive, Venetian expansion into Constantinople. This expansion is a major after effect created by the limitations of Byzantine diplomatic strategy and the Chrysobull of 1082
mid twelfth century	Princess Anna Comnena, daughter of Alexius I, writes <i>The Alexiad</i> detailing the exploits of her father in his dealings with the Normans, the Crusaders and the Venetians
mid twelfth century	Emperor Manuel I regains former Italian possessions of the Byzantine Empire but they are soon lost
1179	Venice ratifies a treaty with the arch rivals of the Byzantine Empire; the Normans in Southern Italy
late twelfth century	Venice successfully established partnerships and trading rights with most participants in the Mediterranean trading economy
1203	The Venetian Quarter in Constantinople granted to them in the Chrysobull of 1082 had greatly expanded
1204	The Fourth Crusade comprised of western crusaders and their Venetian allies sack Constantinople
1453	The Fall of Constantinople and the end of the Byzantine Empire

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