BYZANTINE NAVAL POWER AND TRADE:
THE COLLAPSE OF THE WESTERN FRONTIER

A Thesis
by
MICHAEL PHILLIP SCAFURI

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

May 2002

Major Subject: Anthropology
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May 2002

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ABSTRACT

Byzantine Naval Power and Trade:

The Collapse of the Western Frontier. (May 2002)

Michael Phillip Scafuri, B.A., Pennsylvania State University

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In the eleventh century A.D., the Byzantine Empire witnessed a number of military and political disasters. One of the most significant of these was the collapse of the western frontier and final loss of southern Italy in 1071. However, the failures of the Byzantine Empire in the West by the eleventh century were simply the end result of much earlier problems. Following the expansion of Islam in the seventh and eighth centuries, Byzantium became more defensive and entrenched in her approach to the rest of the Mediterranean world. This took the form of an increased restriction and regulation of all trade within her borders. The closing of maritime trade routes hurt her own merchants more than anything else and contributed to the rising prosperity of the nominally Byzantine city-states of Italy along the western frontier. The merchants of these cities, as semi-independent Byzantine subjects, began to dominate the lucrative East-West trading networks of the Mediterranean. This was to weaken the Byzantine merchant marine and, as a consequence, the Byzantine navy in the West. Moreover, the Byzantine state's rigid and entrenched position prevented her from adapting to the new ideas of commerce developing in the West and from exploiting fully the emerging
commercial revolution of the tenth and eleventh centuries. As a result, Byzantium's inflexibility and antiquated views began to both weaken her military strength and undermine her authority in the West. As other, more dynamic political alternatives emerged in southern Italy by the eleventh century, Byzantium was to find herself increasingly unable to enforce her political and economic will in the West. It was only a matter of time then before Byzantine authority was disregarded and eventually replaced by new powers in the regions of southern Italy.
To my mother, father, and family.

You made this possible.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It goes without saying that the completion of a project such as this cannot be accomplished without the assistance and support of many people. Unfortunately, there are so many individuals who have helped me along the way that I could not hope to name them all. To everyone, mentioned here or not, I am extremely grateful.

I would like to acknowledge, first and foremost, the efforts of my entire advisory committee. They have been extremely patient and understanding in my efforts to complete this thesis and their willingness to work with me under changing circumstances during the past several months of this process is to their credit. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. George F. Bass for his careful and timely review and editing of my work. I would also like to thank Dr. Frederick H. van Doorninck, Jr., who, although not officially a member of my committee, volunteered his expertise on Byzantine history and naval matters. I am also much indebted to Dr. Frederick M. Hocker, who was my principal advisor during my graduate studies and a great mentor to me over the years. His comprehensive knowledge of all things nautical was truly an inspiration to my younger self and he was the motivation behind this thesis. Dr. Hocker was the chairman of my committee throughout most of this process, but his current position and obligations overseas prevented him, for administrative reasons, from remaining as chairman during the last stages of my degree. Regardless, I still consider him to have been the principal advisor for this thesis. Lastly, I owe a great debt of gratitude to Dr. Donny L. Hamilton. Dr. Hamilton worked tirelessly to help me meet the various
administrative deadlines of the Graduate Studies office and provided me with indispensable guidance as I tried to complete my thesis while out of state. He also generously offered to chair my advisory committee at the last minute when my previous chairman could no longer remain in that position. I am very grateful for his help.

I should not forget some of the other people whose friendship, support, and encouragement helped me get through my days and nights in College Station. I would like to thank: Rich Wills and James Coggeshall for inspiration (good and bad); Clive Chapman, Mason McDaniel, Colin O'Bannon, and Taras Pevny, for breaking me in to BCS way back when; Ayse Atanuz, Debbie and John Carlson, Chris Cook, Mathew Harpster, Pete and Molly Hitchcock, Greg Gidden, Glenn Greico, Troy Nowak, Asaf Oron, T. R., Taras Pevny (again), Charlotte Donald, Zane Wharton, Kendra Quinn, and everyone else who I forgot to mention for being there and keeping me sane; Susan Shulze for her emotional support and experience in this difficult process; and Keith Traynor and Laurel Maw for reminding me that there is a real world out there. Lastly, I cannot forget to thank Jana Gober Cichowski and Mark Feulner for running around campus, dropping off forms, returning books, paying late fees, and generally doing all the things that I could not do in absentia. I really could not have done it without them.

Finally, I think I need to reserve the biggest thanks for my family. Their unwavering support over the years enabled me to keep going no matter what. To my father, my uncle Bill, my sister Gina, and especially my mother, I give my sincerest and most heartfelt thanks and appreciation. Without your love and encouragement, this could not have happened.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I  INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Brief Discussion of the Sources</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II BYZANTINE CONTROL IN THE MEDITERRANEAN:</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE ROOTS OF WEAKNESS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Control and Byzantine Defense</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naval Enforcement and the Changing Nature of Trade</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III TRADE REGULATION AND THE BYZANTINE STATE</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Regulation and the Guilds of Constantinople</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphoras and Standardization</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Treaties and the Regulation of Foreign Trade</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byzantine Concept of Trade: The Anti-Entrepreneurial Ideology</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV AMALFI, VENICE, AND THE ITALIAN CITY-STATES</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lawless Roads of the Mediterranean</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byzantine Trade and the Italian City-States</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of Muslim Markets</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences for Amalfi and Venice</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V THE BYZANTINE ECONOMY AND THE COMMERCIAL REVOLUTION OF THE TENTH AND ELEVENTH CENTURIES</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Byzantine Economy</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Development and the Commercial Revolution</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing Influence of the Middle Class</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI COLLAPSE OF THE WESTERN FRONTIER: THE END OF BYZANTINE ITALY</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byzantine Influence and Control of Southern Italy</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Resurgence of the Tenth Century</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerging Instability</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Alternatives</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The Mediterranean region at the end of the tenth century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Map of southern Italy and the extent of Byzantine territory, ca. A.D. 980</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AJA</td>
<td><em>The American Journal of Archaeology</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>BAR</td>
<td>British Archaeological Reports</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOP</td>
<td><em>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LJNA</td>
<td><em>The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM</td>
<td><em>The Mariner's Mirror</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In A.D. 1071 the Byzantine Empire had the distinction of suffering two separate but equally monumental defeats. In the eastern regions of Anatolia, near a place called Manzikert, the Imperial army was routed by Selçuk Turks in a battle that would ultimately decide the fate of Byzantine Asia Minor. In that same year, the southern Italian city of Bari, the last stronghold of Byzantine sovereignty in Italy, fell to the Normans after a three-year siege. While the latter event effectively marked the end of Byzantine control on the Italian peninsula, it also served as the final act in the long and gradual erosion of the empire’s position in the central Mediterranean.

The Byzantine Empire, before the twelfth century, was essentially a naval empire. Most of her trade and commerce, all of her major cities, and the majority of her defensive concerns existed in a predominantly maritime context. At the height of her territorial control during the reign of Justinian I, the Byzantine Empire ringed the seas of the Mediterranean basin. The rulers of Constantinople must have known instinctively that the key to trade, communication, and their ability to deploy military forces around their empire depended on their supremacy at sea. Unlike the Roman Empire, whose eventual mastery of the Mediterranean was in large measure the result of the conquest of the lands and peoples around its shores, Byzantium faced a host of hostile and determined enemies who continually challenged the control and sovereignty of her

This thesis follows the style and format of the American Journal of Archaeology.
coastal frontier. The manner in which she reacted to this threat, and the actions taken to counter it, would ultimately determine the success or failure of the empire. As Bréhier puts it, “Les époques de sa puissance sont celles où il possède la maîtrise de la mer et c'est lorsqu'il l'a perdue, que commencent ses revers.”

**Hypothesis**

The collapse of the western frontier of the Byzantine state in the eleventh century was the result of much earlier problems. While the lack of military and naval strength certainly contributed to the loss of Sicily and southern Italy, these were just the outward manifestations of deeper and much more damaging factors precipitating Byzantium’s failures in the West. In response to the expansion of Islam in the seventh century, the Byzantine Empire adopted a rigid and entrenched approach to the outside world. With perceived threats on all sides, Byzantium, in a way, went on the defensive. Specifically, the rulers of Byzantium began to implement a more stringent policy of economic control and trade regulation, designed to preserve their own position and hinder their enemies. While this may have helped the state survive the upheavals of the period, the long term effects were more detrimental. More to the point, trade control and economic inflexibility served only to strengthen the commercial role of Byzantium’s allies and neighbors, particularly in the West, at the expense of the Byzantine merchant marine. This undercut the empire’s influence in its western provinces while at the same time

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1 "The epochs of its dominion are those when it held control of the sea, and it was when it lost it that its reverse began." L. Bréhier, "La marine de Byzance du VIIIe au XIe siècle," *Byzantion* 19 (1949) 1.
concentrating both economic and naval power in the border areas that it was least able to control. By following a system of commercial passivity, the Byzantine state, in effect, gave away control of the Mediterranean trading networks along the border to her dependencies along the periphery of the Empire.

In addition, political decisions and policies of the Byzantine state in their administration of the western frontier regions contributed to a general weakening of the empire’s claim to suzerainty. Their inability to control the western frontier economically eventually undercut their political influence as well. In many ways, Byzantine authority became increasingly marginalized along its western frontier as various foreign powers with regional economic and political influence began to assert their interests. In particular, the emerging nations and city-states of the West served to provide an alternative focus of unity to the traditional western prostration to and acknowledgment of eastern rulers, whether Byzantine or Arab. Consequently, it was only a matter of time before the increasingly powerful and independent-minded western regions did away altogether with their allegiance to the Byzantine Empire (fig. 1).
A Brief Discussion of the Sources

Any discussion of a particular historical period is always dependent on the availability and quality of source material, both primary and secondary. Unfortunately, it would be safe to say that we do not have a great wealth of primary source material concerning the Middle Byzantine period. This is especially true for the period leading up to the eleventh century. The single largest collection of Byzantine documents prior to 1025, found at the monasteries of Mount Athos in northern Greece, contains only around 75 documents total. This is an incredible paucity of material in comparison to the thousands of surviving records from western Europe during the same period. Indeed, this is especially unfortunate considering the immense number of documents that the bureaucratic administration of the Byzantine state must have produced throughout the medieval period. There are over 40,000 lead seals, used to close and validate official documents, preserved in collections from the Byzantine period. A great many were recovered from the shores of Constantinople near the area of the imperial palace. Even if none of these seals were reused, this still presumably represents only a fraction of the material stored in the imperial archives and elsewhere throughout the empire. Almost all of this great wealth of recorded information has been lost to us over time.

What we do have comes from fragments of material in literary works, letters,

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2 I have no intention here of engaging in an extensive historiographical review. The amount of scholarly work produced concerning the major points of this thesis is indeed vast and any attempt to include all of it in this study would be rather pointless. Rather, I will attempt to mention some of the more important or significant source material for the period, especially with regard to naval matters and trade.


4 Whittow (supra n. 3) 1-3.
church records, chronicles, and several valuable handbooks. Some of the most frequently cited works being Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus’ *De Administrando Imperio*, describing the politics, foreign affairs, and geography of the tenth century, and his *De ceremoniis*, recounting court ceremonial and official pay lists among other things. As an historical document composed between 948 and 952, *De Administrando Imperio* provides some valuable insights into the mentality behind the foreign policy and diplomacy of the Imperial court. Both of these important documents, produced as manuscript collections from the imperial archives, give us an idea of what the archives, now gone, must have once contained. Furthermore, the extent to which scholars continue to refer to them highlights the continuing absence of other significant primary source material. Several sources do provide additional reporting of historical events, but not with the same reliability or depth of commentary.

For Byzantine naval matters, and tactics in particular, we have some good material. The essential work is the compilation of naval material in Dain’s *Naumachica*. Dain has gathered naval excerpts from Byzantine military treatises and

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6 Constantine addressed *DAI* to his son Romanus I and intended it as an instructive guide on kingship. See Const. Porph., *DAI* (supra n. 5) 7-14, for the general introduction of R. Jenkins.


8 A. Dain, *Naumachica*, (Paris 1943). This work is also available in an unpublished English translation by F. van Doorminck, Jr., in the library of the Nautical Archeology Program at Texas A&M University. Also see V. Christides, “Naval Warfare in the Eastern Mediterranean (6th-14th Centuries): An
commentaries into a single collection. This includes chapter 19 of the Tactica of Leo VI (886-912), the Naumachiae of Syryanos Magistros, the Tactica of Nicephorus Ouranos, and chapters 44 and 45 of De ceremoniis concerning the invasion fleet for the tenth century assault on Crete.\(^9\) Also useful are the Strategicon of the eleventh-century soldier Cecaumenus and the Liber de re militari, an anonymous tenth-century military treatise, for Byzantine military organization and tactics.\(^10\)

For commercial records and the documentation of the economic life of Byzantium, the situation is less than adequate. Lopez and Raymond, in their Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World, have collected together a number of useful commercial documents, but most date to the eleventh century or later.\(^11\) As Lopez puts it, "the sources for medieval trade before the tenth century are poverty itself."\(^12\) We do get a glimpse of Byzantine trade regulation from the early tenth century Book of the Eparch.\(^13\) This source is valuable and applicable throughout the period,\(^14\) but it directly

\(^9\) Const. Porph., De ceremoniis (supra n. 5) II. 44-45.

\(^10\) Cecaumenus, Strategicon, B. Wassiliewsky and V. Jernstedt eds. (Amsterdam 1965); Liber de re militari, in R. Vari ed., Incerti scriptoris byzantini saeculi X (Leipzig 1901).


\(^12\) Lopez and Raymond (supra n. 11) 18.


\(^14\) Hendy (infra n. 69) 257-58. Hendy contends that the regulations contained in the Book of the Eparch were in use as late as the twelfth century.
pertains only to Constantinople. A source of wider scope is the Rhodian Sea-Law.\textsuperscript{15} While not specifically relevant to the present study, this manuscript of Byzantine maritime law was copied extensively and used in the Mediterranean right up to the fifteenth century. According to Ashburner, since the Sea-law, in spite of numerous renditions, seems to stay essentially the same from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries, one can conclude that “the circumstances with which it dealt did not materially change from the time of its original composition until near the time when it ceased to be copied.”\textsuperscript{16} The commentary of Ashburner is certainly dated, and we can reasonably assume that commerce and navigation did change somewhat in the stated six centuries, but the lack of more comparative material is noteworthy.

Additional information must necessarily be gleaned from non-Byzantine sources. For the development of the papacy in relation to Byzantium, one can turn to the \textit{Liber pontificalis}.\textsuperscript{17} Liudprand of Cremona’s accounts of his embassies to Constantinople tell us much about Imperial attitudes of the time.\textsuperscript{18} However, Liudprand’s negative bias against the Byzantine emperor and state as well as the overtly glowing praise for the German emperor (his patron and principle reader) cannot be overlooked. The \textit{Russian Primary Chronicle} reports on the military and commercial relationship between

\begin{flushright}

\textsuperscript{16} Ashburner (supra n. 15) xlvii - l, esp. l.


\end{flushright}
Byzantium and the Kievan Rus, but is often suspect for specifics.\textsuperscript{19} Goitein has given a
tremendous contribution to the understanding of Mediterranean trade with his study of
the documents of the Cairo Geniza.\textsuperscript{20} These documents reveal the nature of commerce
and trading contacts in the Muslim world from the ninth through the eleventh centuries.
Unfortunately, they are less revealing for Byzantine regions. Additional Islamic material
is available in Vasiliev’s Byzance et les Arabes, providing a useful collection of Arabic
source material in French translation.\textsuperscript{21} Again, there is nothing comparable to this, that I
know of, from the Byzantine Empire.

Even the archaeological record is rather limited at the present time. While the
days of digging through the upper medieval layers of a site to get to the “good stuff”
from the Classical period are over, Byzantine terrestrial archaeology is still in its infancy.
Considering the lack of historical documentation, this is the best avenue for future
material. Clive Foss has produced some valuable work for the major sites of Byzantine
Asia Minor,\textsuperscript{22} but the lack of corroborative material makes in-depth comparisons and
larger generalizations difficult. While excavations have taken place in the larger cities of
the Byzantine Empire, there are many sites in the countryside that are virtually

\textsuperscript{19} The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text, S. H. Cross and O. P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor

\textsuperscript{20} S. D. Goitein, A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as
Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza, I (Berkeley 1967).

\textsuperscript{21} A. Vasiliev, Byzance et les Arabes, I, II (Bruxelles 1968).

\textsuperscript{22} See C. Foss, “Archaeology and the ‘Twenty Cities’ of Byzantine Asia,” AJA 81 (1977) 469-86,
for an early general survey. See also Chapter V below.
untouched.\textsuperscript{23} There is a great deal more to be done.

Similarly, examined shipwrecks of the Middle Byzantine period are few and far between. One of the most recently excavated wrecks is that of a ninth-century ship, found near the town of Bozburun along the southwest coast of Turkey.\textsuperscript{24} The Bozburun ship was a small Byzantine merchantman whose principle cargo of wine was carried in approximately 900 amphoras. The analysis of this shipwreck is only just beginning, but may provide some much needed clues to maritime trade in the ninth century. Another important and more thoroughly studied wreck from the period is the Serçe Limanı shipwreck.\textsuperscript{25} This wreck is located in Serçe Limanı harbor along the southern Turkish coast directly opposite the island of Rhodes and has been dated to the third decade of the eleventh century. The significance of this single ship illustrates the degree to which other as yet untouched shipwrecks could provide to medieval scholarship. For example, the ship’s cargo of glass cullet represents the largest single collection of medieval

\textsuperscript{23} This was apparent from my own preliminary examination of some of the smaller fortifications along the southwestern coast of modern Turkey in 1996 and 1997.


Islamic glassware found anywhere in the world and the amphorae from the Serçe Limanı shipwreck have provided some groundbreaking insights into Byzantine standardization. In the West, along the southern coast of France, we have the so-called “Saracen” wrecks dating from the late ninth to the early eleventh centuries. These shipwrecks, the Agay, Le Bataiguier, and Plane C, have been less well studied but are significant nonetheless for what they may tell us about Islamic trade in the central and western Mediterranean. These few shipwrecks comprise the bulk of the archaeological evidence concerning maritime trade during the Middle Byzantine period. Clearly, more material (and work) is needed.

Because of this limitation with regards to primary sources and material, the secondary literature has been similarly deficient in its depth of coverage. An in-depth analysis of the secondary literature is well beyond the scope of this thesis, but a number of scholars have commented on this fact and it is worth repeating. While extensive work has been done for the periods prior to 602 and after 1261, the 650 year gap in between

26 See Chapter III below.

has received less attention. The few works that have addressed this period "usually provide insufficient background to show their period’s significance."²⁸ It is unfortunate but true that the Middle Byzantine period in particular seems to have been overlooked by many modern scholars. As Treadgold summarizes the situation, "hardly a single book surveying any part of the period between 867 and 1081 can be recommended without reservation."²⁹

While I would not presume to be so critical, it is significant that many scholars do not feel the period has been covered effectively at this time. I do not think this necessarily reflects poor scholarship, but rather a desire to reach significant conclusions without the benefit of a comprehensive body of primary material. This, of course, doesn’t mean that conclusions can’t be made. It simply suggests that these conclusions are often pieced together from disparate scraps of information gleaned from various obscure sources. The result is that many conclusions are later proven flawed or simply incorrect. Having said that, I will admit that the conclusions of this thesis could be subjected to similar criticism. The attempt here has been to gather these various pieces of the picture, often studied separately by various scholars, and formulate a more concise presentation of the factors behind Byzantium’s problems in the West by the eleventh century.

²⁸ W. Treadgold, Why Write a New History of Byzantium?, Canadian Institute of Balkan Studies (Toronto 1997) 15.

CHAPTER II

BYZANTINE CONTROL IN THE MEDITERRANEAN:

THE ROOTS OF WEAKNESS

In the seventh century A.D., Islam exploded into the Mediterranean world. In 634, Muslim fighters led by Caliph Omar attacked Byzantine Syria in force, completely routing the Byzantine army at Yarmûk and seizing the city of Antioch.\(^{30}\) Thereafter, Byzantine possessions in the East fell with startling rapidity. By 650, the former Byzantine territories of Syria, Upper Mesopotamia, Palestine, Egypt, and a portion of North Africa were all under Arab control.\(^{31}\) It was also at this time that the Arabs first took to the sea in the Mediterranean. Under the Syrian governor Mu‘awiyah, Arab fleets attacked Rhodes, Cyprus, Crete, Sicily, and the Aegean coasts. Emboldened by their successes, in 654 Mu‘awiyah led an expedition against Constantinople itself.\(^{32}\) Though unsuccessful, this attempt to strike at the heart of Byzantium was only the beginning. In 674, a large Arab flotilla arrived before the walls of Constantinople to begin a five-year siege of the Byzantine capital. Arabs raids continued and the city of Constantinople was once again besieged in 717.\(^{33}\) It wasn’t until 747, when the Byzantine Kibyrrhaeot fleet cornered and destroyed an Arab armada of some 1,000 vessels off Cyprus, that the


\(^{32}\) Const. Porph., *DAI* (supra n. 5) 20.

\(^{33}\) Theophanes, (supra n. 7) 85. For Arab attacks on Constantinople, see Ostrogorsky (supra n. 30) 124, 156-7, and Lewis (infra n. 40) 60-67.
Byzantine state was able to restore a measure of security to her coasts and borders.\textsuperscript{34}

With the rapid conquest of the southern half of the Mediterranean by the forces of Islam, the Byzantine state faced a difficult situation. The Mediterranean represented a highway to almost every major city in the empire, as well as to an overwhelmingly hostile enemy. The threat posed to the very existence of the Byzantine state was abundantly clear. The results of this period of conflict were two-fold. On the one hand, the aggressiveness and determination of the Arab assaults demonstrated the need for a more proactive defense of the Empire’s borders and a re-structuring of the Byzantine military system. On the other hand, in the struggle for the survival of the state, a new resolve to fight the enemy on every front, militarily and economically, was born. To this end, the Byzantine state vigorously applied a policy of economic control against her Muslim adversaries: the use of strict trade controls and regulations designed to deny strategic materials to her enemies. Trade regulation was nothing new in the medieval world, and it did, for a time, limit the transference of materials to Byzantium’s Arab foes. However, as one would imagine, this policy was not always successful. More importantly, the determination of the Byzantine administration to continue to enforce trade regulations would, over time, begin to undermine the economic strength and flexibility of the Empire. This development occurred to the advantage of Byzantium’s neighbors, friend and foe alike, and at the expense of her own merchant class. As new patterns of commercial activity emerged in the Mediterranean, entrenched Byzantium would find itself falling further and further behind.

\textsuperscript{34} Theophanes (supra n. 7) 113. The region of the Kibyrrhaeotai encompassed the southwestern corner of Asia Minor. For a fuller description of the naval situation, see Lewis (infra n. 40) 69.
Economic Control and Byzantine Defense

Henri Pirenne, in his noted work, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*,³⁵ suggested that it was the Arab invasions of the seventh century that caused the final break in the old Roman continuity between the Mediterranean East and West. The disruptions caused by the advance of Islam deprived Europe of its Mediterranean traditions of antiquity, as well as its political and commercial connections to the East. Pirenne argued that by the eighth century, the economic continuity of the Mediterranean had been irretrievably lost. "The sea was closed. Commerce had disappeared. We perceive an empire whose only wealth was soil, and in which the circulation of merchandise was reduced to the minimum."³⁶ Scholars have since refuted many of the conclusions of the 'Pirenne Thesis', arguing that the decline in Mediterranean commerce and society was already well underway by the seventh century and that economic relations, for the most part, had in fact recovered by the eighth century.³⁷ However, Pirenne was right on one point. The Arab advance into the Mediterranean, while not the principle cause for the end of Antiquity, did certainly change the nature of trade between East and West, forever altering the way the Byzantine state dealt with the outside world.

The emergence of Muslim power essentially divided the Mediterranean into two approximately equivalent regions. Faced with a determined enemy to the south, the


³⁶ Pirenne (supra n. 35) 236.

³⁷ D. Whitehouse, "Archaeology and the Pirenne Thesis," in C. Redman ed., *Medieval Archaeology* 60 (New York 1989) 3-21. Archaeological evidence indicates that the collapse of Mediterranean civilization had already occurred in some areas by the time of the Arab invasions. In addition, Whitehouse has shown that Carolingian growth was the result, in part, of economic stimulus from the Abbasid caliphate.
Byzantine Empire went on the defensive. As early as the seventh century, the rulers of Constantinople took the first steps in this direction by inaugurating a wholesale reorganization of the Byzantine military. They did away with the old Roman-based system of mobile regional armies in favor of smaller and more defensible themata or themes.\(^{38}\) Soldiers in the Byzantine army were settled in these themes providing the various districts with stronger local defenses and a more rapid response force. Similarly, the Byzantine fleet was divided into a central Imperial fleet and the provincial forces of the themes.\(^{39}\) While the Imperial fleet would respond in major campaigns and for the defense of Constantinople, the thematic fleets were principally responsible for regional defense and policing the sea lanes. This change enabled the Byzantine state to more effectively control its borders and enforce its policies and regulations in a much more rigorous manner. The deciding factor in the success of these policies would be, of course, the strength of the fleets.

The defensive stance adopted by the Byzantine state in response to the events of the seventh century led, in part, to the renewed practice of economic control in the Mediterranean.\(^{40}\) While engaged in often continuous hostilities against her Muslim adversaries, the Imperial government sought ways to interfere with or disrupt their

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\(^{39}\) Bréhier (supra n. 2) 3-7.

\(^{40}\) One of the best summaries of naval matters and the economic and political ramifications thereof can be found in A. Lewis, *Naval Power and Trade in the Mediterranean: A.D. 500 to 1100* (Princeton 1951). Although now somewhat dated, Lewis provides one of the few comprehensive looks at the role that trade control played in the much discussed problem of Byzantine decline by the eleventh century.
economic prosperity. The control of certain exports to and from these regions was one way to do this. In an attempt to deny strategic materials (e.g., iron, timber, slaves, and olive oil) to the Umayyad state, Muslim Syrian and Egyptian merchants were banned from the western Mediterranean and all trade with the East was channeled through specific Byzantine-controlled points.\textsuperscript{41} The routes of this practice extend back to the late Roman period where commercial outposts in the cities along the Persian borders were established to handle foreign merchants. "A law of the early fifth century forbade Roman citizens to go farther than these cities, or to receive there foreign merchants without the knowledge of the Count of the Commerces per Orientum, 'lest the aliens may spy into the secrets of the state.'"\textsuperscript{42} With the transformation of the later Roman Empire into the Byzantine Empire, this complex system of trade regulation and oversight was again needed to control overseas trade. The Counts of the Commerces were replaced by the \textit{kommerkiarioi}, and the \textit{apothekai} took over the function of the border outposts.\textsuperscript{43} These border posts made the process of controlling both the import of black market goods and the export of forbidden materials much easier for Imperial officials. The end result was that the trade with Persia, Armenia, and Mesopotamia became

\textsuperscript{41} W. Heyd, \textit{Histoire du commerce du Levant au moyen-\oe ge}, I (Amsterdam 1983) 52-53; Lewis (supra n. 40) 93-94, 112-113. Trebizond on the Black Sea was the most important for eastern imports, but Cherson, and of course Constantinople, were also significant.

\textsuperscript{42} Lopez (infra n. 65) 25-26; \textit{Codex Justinianus}, in P. Krueger et al. eds., \textit{Corpus juris civilis}, II (Berlin 1954) IV, 63, 6; Ammianus Marcellinus, XIV, 3 and XXIII, 3.

\textsuperscript{43} Lopez (infra n. 65) 27.
centered on the markets of Trebizond. In the West, similar trade portals existed for eastern wares in Italy at Naples, Gaeta, Amalfi, Salerno, and Venice. The merchants of these cities were able to sell their eastern products at the great fair at Pavia in northern Italy and from there, presumably, to all of western Europe.

The consequences of this policy were many. By forcing the flow of goods through specific, controlled entrepots, the Byzantine state effectively changed the intermediaries who handled trade in the Mediterranean between East and West. Clearly, the division of the Mediterranean into Christian and Muslim halves, as portrayed by Pirenne, played a role in this process, but the situation was exacerbated by subsequent Byzantine policies. Prior to the eighth century, the preponderance of East-West trade in the Mediterranean was handled by Greeks, Jews, Syrians, and Egyptians. Thereafter, the economic controls of the Byzantine state effectively excluded most of these Levantine merchants from their trade networks. More importantly, by the end of the eighth century, the Greek merchants of Constantinople, the Aegean, and Asia Minor had all but disappeared from the trade routes of the West. The reasons for this are obvious. By designating specific cities through which trade had to pass, Byzantium not only limited the freedom of her own Greek merchant class, but also effectively “gave a monopoly of

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44 Lopez (infra n. 65) 29. According to Lopez, most of the trade with the Muslim East took place along eastern border posts, and principally the city of Trebizond. He cites the writings of al-Istakhri as stating that “Trebizond is the border [city] of the Greeks where all our merchants go.”

45 Lewis (supra n. 40) 113;


distribution of her valued products, particularly silks and spices, to the merchants of those entry points themselves or to those who came there to trade." In the West, traders from the Italian city-states of Amalfi, Naples, Bari, and Venice exploited this through their commercial networks to Europe and the western Mediterranean basin. Native (non-Italian) Byzantine merchants could hardly compete with these foreign merchants when they could not themselves travel beyond the distribution centers of this trade. In particular, the traders of the privileged Italian entrepots had a tremendous advantage over their Greek counterparts who were, at best, reduced to carrying some of the trade from Constantinople and, at worst, to mere cabotage. Italian merchants could not only redistribute eastern goods further west, but as Byzantine subjects, they could also freely traverse the sea lanes of the Empire as well. It would not take long for the merchants of these increasingly wealthy trading centers in the West to realize the economic advantage of becoming the carriers, as well as the distributors, of this trade.

48 Lewis (supra n. 40) 120. Lewis mentions the trade of the Khazars from Cherson to Russia, the Arab and Armenian merchants at Trebizond, and the traders of Venice, Amalfi, Naples, and Gaeta in the West.

49 A. Lewis, "Mediterranean Maritime Commerce: A. D. 300-1100 Shipping and Trade," in La navigazione mediterranea nell’alto medioevo, Settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo, XXV, II (Spoleto 1978) 498, mentions how the Italian cities of Venice, Amalfi, Naples, nominally subject to Byzantium, were able to trade freely in both Byzantine and Islamic markets.

50 Lewis (supra n. 40) 121, gives a more modern parallel. In the late sixteenth century, the Portuguese imported spices from the East but were unwilling to sell it beyond Lisbon. The Dutch, purchasing these goods in Lisbon, were able to establish a monopoly as the middle-men in the distribution of spices to western Europe. By the seventeenth century, they began to bypass the Portuguese and sail directly to the eastern source of these goods, thereby gaining control over both the shipping and distribution of spices in Europe.
Naval Enforcement and the Changing Nature of Trade

The most damaging aspect of the Byzantine state’s policy of economic control was in its varied and fluctuating enforcement of such policies. Where the thematic fleets could reach, they "...could intercept trade ships or oblige these ships to bring their cargoes into ports under Byzantine control in southern Italy and the Adriatic, not to mention Constantinople and the Greek Byzantine ports." Naturally, the strength of the fleets was dependent on the degree of control that the Byzantine empire held over one region or another. While Sicily, Crete, and Cyprus remained in Byzantine hands, enforcement could be effective. As one would suspect, this was not always the case in the border areas, particularly in the West, where allegiance to Constantinople fluctuated and was often nominal at best. We know that in the late eighth century the Venetians were purchasing slaves in Rome and selling them in Muslim North Africa. By the ninth century, Venetian merchants seem to have been so flagrant in violating Byzantine policies against trading in slaves and timber to the Arabs that Leo V (813-820) issued an edict against all trading with Syria and Egypt by his subjects and the Venetians in particular. This was apparently not very effective, as it was a group of Venetian


52 The difficulties this could cause to (unwanted) maritime transport is emphasized by the case of the famous elephant Abu-Abbas given as a gift to Charlemagne by the Abbasid ruler Harun-al-Rashid in 801. Because of concern over Byzantine patrols, the elephant had to travel by land from Egypt to North Africa before embarking on a ship for the final trip to Luni and the Frankish court. Lewis (supra n. 40) 115.

53 Liber Pontificalis (supra n. 17) 433.

54 A. Dandolo, Chronica per extensum, in L. A. Muratori ed., Rerum italicarum scriptores, Raccolta degli storici italiani dal cinquecento al millecinquecento, XII, 1 (Bologna 1942) 167.
merchants again who stole the relics of St. Mark from Alexandria in 827/828.\textsuperscript{55} They apparently knew the route and the city well enough to successfully carry out the theft.

In contrast, the merchants affected most by the Byzantine policy of economic control were the ones most subject to its application: the Greeks. Lewis has suggested that the enforcement of this policy had a deleterious effect not only on commercial activity, but also on the prosperity of Byzantine maritime cities and regions themselves.\textsuperscript{56} During the revolt of Thomas the Slav (821-823), the thematic fleets of the Aegean joined the revolt, along with support from the Syrian fleet supplied by Caliph al-Mamun of Baghdad. The rebellious fleet sailed on Constantinople where it was subsequently defeated by the Imperial fleet using Greek fire.\textsuperscript{57} Lewis proposes that the thematic fleets were inclined to support Thomas since Constantinople’s trade policies were “ruining the prosperity of the very maritime districts upon which the thematic fleets were based.”\textsuperscript{58}

The dispersal and destruction of the thematic fleets had disastrous consequences for the Empire. In 827, Spanish Muslims from Alexandria were able to capture Crete virtually unopposed and, in the same year, the Aghlabids of North Africa landed an expeditionary force at Mazara, Sicily. The ease with which the Muslims took Crete can possibly be attributed to the absence of the Byzantine provincial fleet, destroyed in the

\textsuperscript{55} Liber pontificalis (supra n. 17) II, 1-34; Dandolo (supra n. 54) 170.

\textsuperscript{56} Lewis (supra n. 40) 116.

\textsuperscript{57} Vasiliev (supra n. 21) 22-49

\textsuperscript{58} Lewis (supra n. 40) 116. In my opinion Lewis does not give enough credit to the aversion amongst the general population to the Iconoclast views of the Imperial court, which may have been equally significant towards provoking revolt.
revolt of Thomas the Slav, and to the iconodule sympathy of the islanders. Likewise, the Aghlabid assault on Sicily was aided in part by the defection of the admiral Euphemios along with the entire Sicilian fleet following a failed revolt around 826/827. Euphemios’ revolt has been described by Bury as a symptom of naval neglect that “showed how important it was, in view of the Saracen danger, to keep the direction of the outlying Western provinces in close touch with the central administration.” This was a two-fold problem, with the dissatisfaction and neglect of the provincial fleets and their maritime districts leading to a general decline in Byzantine naval preparedness and to a correspondingly greater reliance on their allied city-states in the West. This required the Imperial administration to seek military help from its western dependencies, and Venice in particular. Constantinople was forced to request Venetian naval assistance against the Muslims in Sicily in 827, 828, and 838, in spite of the dispatch of large portions of the eastern thematic fleet to the area. Although the last stronghold in Sicily didn’t fall to the Muslims until 902, the year 827 was the beginning of the end for Byzantine Sicily. Likewise, for the rest of the ninth and well into the tenth century, Byzantium effectively lost control over much of the Mediterranean.

The results of this changing situation were dramatic. The weakening of Byzantine control at sea, in many ways, led to a flowering of international trade and

59 Vasiliev (supra n. 21) 287; Lewis (supra n. 19) 108-9, 132-35.
60 Vasiliev (supra n. 21) 66-72;
61 J. Bury, “The Naval Policy of the Roman Empire in Relation to the Western Provinces from the 7th to the 9th Century,” Centenario della Nascita di Michele Amari, II (Palermo 1910) 26-27.
62 Dandolo (supra n. 54) 170.
commerce in the Mediterranean outside of the orbit of Byzantine control. In the West, both Italian and Muslim North African merchants were able to prosper in contrast to the Greek and Levantine merchants of the East. They were able to renew their links to eastern regions and the “African hinterland via caravan routes to the Sudan and sea-lanes to East African shores,” prompting a re- invigoration of the economic life of the Islamic Mediterranean. Moreover, the events of the eighth and ninth centuries were, in a sense, the roots of the empire’s weakness in later periods. Certainly, the thematic reorganization of the military and the attempted economic blockade of her enemies helped the Byzantine state survive the upheavals of the day. However, the rigid and entrenched approach to the rest of the world that this engendered may have caused more long-term problems. While Byzantium remained on the defensive, the merchant marine continued to lose ground; ground that was, as we shall see, increasingly taken up by their fellow “Byzantine” subjects in the West.

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63 Lewis (supra n. 49) 495.

64 The Muslim threat to the Byzantine state seems to have caused a general re-evaluation of the state’s weaknesses, internally and externally. The early eighth-century rise in Iconoclasm, and the terrible consequences that this brought, seems to have been an attempt to appease the divine wrath that was, in their eyes, the cause of Byzantium’s troubles. See Treadgold (supra n. 38) 350.
CHAPTER III

TRADE REGULATION AND THE BYZANTINE STATE

The rigid and defensive stand of the Empire throughout much of the Medieval period was, in a way, mirrored by more internal policies of trade regulation. These policies, and the inflexible attitudes behind them, restricted Byzantine merchants and further undermined the ability of the state to respond to the changing circumstances of trade in the Mediterranean. The government also attempted to monopolize the exchange of certain valuable products and to regulate trade of all kinds. On the one hand, this was done to maximize tax revenue to the state through customs duties for the purpose of increasing the Imperial treasury. By strictly controlling the transport and trade of various commodities through Byzantine entrepots, they could maintain and profit from their position as a distribution center for eastern wares. On the other hand, they intended to use their position of control over these goods as both a symbol of their authority and as an extension of foreign policy. This was, in large measure, the result of an attitude towards trade and commerce that reflected again their rigid and defensive view of the outside world. This anti-entrepreneurial view of commerce, upheld by Byzantine emperors until well into the eleventh century, did nothing more than restrict the development of their own merchant classes and undermine their own economic stability. Unfortunately, the attitudes of the Imperial court and the ruling elite were such that they were unable to recognize the limitations of their policies until it was too late.
Trade Regulation and the Guilds of Constantinople

One of the best studies of Byzantine trade regulation and the control of valuable products is found in Lopez’s “Silk Industry in the Byzantine Empire.”\footnote{R. Lopez, “Silk Industry in the Byzantine Empire,” Speculum 20 (1945).} Lopez examines the silk industry and the institutional regulation of trade in Byzantium through the operation of the Imperial and private guilds of Constantinople. The Imperial guilds produced the expensive silk and precious textiles for the Emperor and the state. These were the valuable goods and symbols of authority that the state and Emperor used for diplomatic and political gifts and were understandably kept strictly within Imperial control. “...the Byzantine Emperors ...controlled the supply of silk, purple, and gold embroidery. These precious textiles were among the paramount articles of international trade... By releasing silk, purple, and gold embroidery for export, the Basileis could secure a considerable revenue from customs duties, and stimulate a flow of foreign gold into their states.”\footnote{Lopez (supra n. 65) 1.} However, the state placed heavy restrictions on the amount and quality of precious cloth that could be released for export, seeking to reserve the most valuable items for the Imperial court.\footnote{Heyd (supra n. 41) 54-55.} To prevent any unauthorized export or smuggling, the Byzantine emperors “...tightened their surveillance of production, trade, and export, so that the barbarian might not steal by cunning what he could not grab by force.”\footnote{Lopez (supra n. 65) 3.} This kind of prohibition was, in fact, enforced by customs officials, as the
unfortunate experience of Liudprand of Cremona illustrates. In this manner, the regulatory system of the Imperial guilds and the vigilance of customs officials functioned to control both silk production and export.

What we know of the private guild system, at least in Constantinople, comes from a series of edicts, issued by the Emperor Leo VI (886-912) to the eparch of the city, preserved in the early tenth century Book of the Eparch. The eparch or prefect of Constantinople had supreme authority over all trade and industry in the city, second only to the Emperor himself. One of his primary responsibilities was to control and regulate the private guilds, which manufactured and traded goods for the public and for foreign trade. The members of private guilds, in contrast to the Imperial guilds, were often independent merchants and craftsmen from a number of different backgrounds. These would have been the Byzantine middle-class, essential for the economy, but not favored or encouraged by any means. Although initially prohibited, the private guilds by the late ninth century were allowed to manufacture and sell some silk and second-class textiles to the public. The remaining restriction was confined to a prohibition on the manufacture and sale of purple cloth. In the Book of the Eparch, private guilds were forbidden to dye raw silk with purple, but they could use purple for cloth, as long as they did not make some type of forbidden textiles and fabrics reserved for the imperial

69 M. F. Hendy, Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy, c. 300-1450 (Cambridge 1985) 258. In 968, German emperor Otto I sent his ambassador Bishop Liudprand of Cremona to the Byzantine court. The final indignity of his failed mission was to have his most valuable silk cloths, acquired in Constantinople, taken from him by Byzantine customs officials as their export was forbidden.

70 Book of the Eparch (supra n. 13) 207-8.

71 Lopez (supra n. 65) 8-9.
house.\textsuperscript{72} The trade in precious textiles, as illustrated by Lopez, represents well the restrictions placed upon trade by the Byzantine authorities.

The reasons behind these restrictions were again tied to the preservation and control of the state’s monopoly in the trade of valuable goods. These restrictions were not, however, placed only upon the silk and textile industries. All valuable commodities, including prestige items and gold, were controlled by the Imperial administration. Precious metals in particular were prohibited from export. This was formally established in a law preserved in the \textit{Codex Justinianus}, dated 374-75, that forbade the supply of gold to the ‘barbarians’ and proscribed punishment for merchants who exchanged gold for goods during mercantile transactions with the barbarians.\textsuperscript{73} These provisions were repeated in the tenth century \textit{Basilika} of Leo VI, as well as in the \textit{Book of the Eparch}, suggesting their continual application at least until the twelfth century.\textsuperscript{74} “When a goldsmith is appraised that a woman [citizen] is offering for sale objects made of gold or silver, pearls or precious stones, he must warn the eparch lest these articles are exported to strangers.”\textsuperscript{75} In many ways, the regulations found in the \textit{Book of the Eparch} were designed to limit competition between and within the guilds, to maintain an inexpensive supply of goods, and to maintain the closely guarded secrets of production. The “...underlying principles of guild legislation were stability, control, and sharing of

\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Book of the Eparch} (supra n. 13) VIII.4; Lopez (supra n. 65) 14-15.

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Codex Justinianus} (supra n. 42) IV.63.2.

\textsuperscript{74} Leo VI, \textit{Basilika} LVI. I. 20, cited in Hendy (supra n. 69) 257-58. Hendy suggests that the regulations for the guilds of Constantinople in the \textit{Book of the Eparch} may have been utilized as late as the mid-twelfth century.

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Book of the Eparch} (supra n. 13) II.4.
business opportunity, rather than expansion, initiative, and concentration of industry and trade.” This would have hindered both the private guilds and the independent traders within the Empire serving only to restrict the evolution of a truly capitalistic industry.\textsuperscript{76} It also added more regulatory burdens, designed to bring more gold into the state’s coffers, that would have affected the production and trade in guild commodities at every level. The long-term results of this system may have damaged the Byzantine commercial economy in truly unforeseen ways.

**Amphoras and Standardization**

Additional evidence for the Byzantine state’s control of the trade and commerce within its borders comes from some recent studies of amphora assemblages. The work of van Doorninck on the amphoras from the eleventh century Serçe Limanı shipwreck,\textsuperscript{77} in particular, has provided significant insights on the issue of trade regulation. He has proposed that Byzantine amphoras, as cargo carriers, were highly standardized. According to van Doorninck, the 89 piriform amphoras from the Serçe Limanı shipwreck show a precise system of volume and weight capacity based on the Byzantine *litra*.\textsuperscript{78} His calculations are based on the fact that the Byzantines measured goods such as wine in terms of their weight, and not by their volume. This is made clear in Leo VI’s

\textsuperscript{76} Lopez (supra n. 65) 18.

\textsuperscript{77} Supra n. 25.

\textsuperscript{78} F. H. van Doorninck, Jr., “Giving Good Weight in Eleventh-Century Byzantium: The Metrology of the Glass Wreck Amphoras,” *INA Quarterly*, 20.2 (1993) 8-12. The Byzantine *litra* was equivalent to about 320 g.
instructions to the innkeepers of Constantinople. Wine importation, like the
importation of many other commodities described in this source, was strictly regulated
by the Byzantine state. The price of the wine from any shipment was fixed by the eparch
and innkeepers were compelled to sell their wine in accordance with the specified price
and in specific measures which "...shall contain 30 litres and what is called the mina, 3
litres." This 30-litrai measure was known as the thalassion metron or 'sea measure,'
and was the most common Byzantine weight measure for liquids and, in this case, for the
wine trade.

Using the proscribed measures of the thalassion metron and the mina, van
Doorninck has determined that the Serçe Limanı amphoras, which can be divided into
several types and subtypes, each adhered to one of two different but regular and
interrelated weight capacity systems. All of the piriform amphoras in fact hold capacities
of wine that correlate to 3 or 5 litra intervals. This is rather remarkable considering
that these amphoras were coarseware jars, produced at different times, in various places,
and presumably by different potters. Moreover, the Serçe Limanı assemblage contained
amphoras of different types from many earlier shipments, with clear indications of

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79 Book of the Eparch (supra n. 13) XIX.1.4.

80 Book of the Eparch (supra n. 13) XIX.1. In this passage 'litres' should be taken to mean
Byzantine litrai, the litra being a weight measure equivalent to around 320 g. and not the modern volume
measure.

81 E. Schilbach, Byzantinische Metrologie (Munich 1970) 112.

82 F. H. van Doorninck, Jr., "The Piriform Amphoras from the 11th-Century Shipwreck at Serçe
and personal communication. Amphoras of the 3-litrai system have capacities that include 27, 30, 33, 36,
39, 42, 45, 48, 52, 54, and 60 litrai. Amphoras of the 5-litrai system have capacities of 25, 30, 35, 40, 45,
and 60 litrai.
damage and graffiti from reuse.\textsuperscript{83} That such a divers group of amphoras, randomly gathered on a single ship, could share similar capacities is very telling. Clearly, these amphoras were produced according to a system of standardization that required the strict adherence to precise capacity measures. As van Doorninck points out, “such capacity systems could not have been practical unless potters were able to produce over and over again jars that were virtually identical in terms of shape, dimensions, and the amount and composition of the clay used to make them.”\textsuperscript{84}

It seems that Byzantine potters did just this. Van Doorninck has found an additional degree of standardization in the dimensions of the amphoras themselves. For example, amphoras of the 3-\textit{litrai} system tended to have diameters at 0.5-\textit{daktyloi} intervals while amphoras of the 5-\textit{litrai} system had maximum diameters in multiples of 1.0 \textit{daktylos}.\textsuperscript{85} Even the dimensions of the amphora mouths were made to a specific standard. All but two of the piriform amphoras with intact rims found on the Serçe Limanı shipwreck had mouth dimensions of 3.5 \textit{daktyloi}.\textsuperscript{86} This would have made the production of stoppers much easier and facilitated the reuse of many of the amphoras over time. Not surprisingly, standardization also appears in the dry weight of the amphoras, where incremental increases in weight capacity were accompanied by a


\textsuperscript{84} van Doorninck (supra n. 82) 185.

\textsuperscript{85} The Byzantine inch, or \textit{daktylos}, was equivalent to 1.95 cm. 16 \textit{daktyloi} made up a Byzantine foot. See Schilbach (supra n. 81) 16; van Doorninck (supra n. 78) 8; van Doorninck (supra n. 82) 185.

\textsuperscript{86} van Doorninck (supra n. 82) 187.
regular increase in amphora weight. Thus, the most common type of piriform amphora following the 3-litrai system had 0.5-litrai increase in weight for each 3-litrai increase in capacity while the amphoras of the 5-litrai system showed a 2-litrai increase in weight for every 5-litrai capacity increase.\textsuperscript{87}

The type of standardization evident from the Serçe Limanı amphoras is remarkable in that it differs from what is known about amphoras from the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Potters from these periods apparently produced amphoras of standard sizes, but with considerable variation in dimensions and volume capacity from one jar to the next.\textsuperscript{88} This resulted in a dispersal pattern for amphora capacities that varied from region to region and was dependent on amphora sizes for classification. Liquid capacity was not in and of itself a factor of this standardization. This situation had changed by the Byzantine period. Metrological evidence from the amphoras found on the seventh century Yassi Ada shipwreck suggests the beginning of a system of volume-weight capacity standardization.\textsuperscript{89} In van Alfens’s study of 71 of the 103 cylindrical amphoras from the Yassi Ada assemblage, correlations to the capacity standardization system evident on the Serçe Limant amphoras were found. It would seem that, at least by the seventh century, potters trading within the Empire were attempting to follow a new standard of amphora regulation based upon Byzantine litra.

\textsuperscript{87} van Doorninck (supra n. 82) 185-87.


The most important aspect of the apparent standardization of amphora design evident from both the Serçe Limanı and Yassi Ada shipwrecks, is not in the specifics of their adherence to one *litra* weight capacity system or another. Rather, it is the fact that they were made in accordance with such a standardized system at all that is most striking and relevant here. How and, more importantly, why would potters produce amphorae, for example, with the capacities of 21, 27, 30, 33, 36, 39, 42, 45, 48, 51, 54, and 60 *litrai*, as they apparently did on the assemblage from the Serçe Limanı ship? Obviously, when initially produced, a group of amphorae would have a single capacity for a specific shipment. However, even over time and distance, multiple but regular capacity intervals were followed. Given the unavoidable difficulties of this practice, would it not be more logical for potters to make their amphorae adhere to a few, widely dispersed, weight capacities, including the 30 and 3 measure proscribed in the *Book of the Eparch*?

The answer seems to lie in the policies of trade control and regulation of the Byzantine state. The facilitation of trade by their merchants was simply not their concern. Instead, the restriction of commodity trading to certain measures, evident in this case with amphorae, may have been a way to regulate trade for more efficient taxation. Van Doorninck has suggested that the various standard amphora sizes would have allowed for “the calculation of customs and freight charges and, more importantly, the marketing of Byzantine wine...”90 This is a reasonable assumption, although one could question the value of so many different sizes from a distribution point of view. The difficulty of producing many sizes of amphora does not seem worth the trouble from

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90 van Doorninck (supra n. 82) 188.
the potter’s perspective, regardless of the marketing advantages to consumers. That the
two Byzantine amphora assemblages studied for standardization, which show a similar
pattern of multiple but standard measures, are separated by some 400 years, suggests an
impetus for regulation less dependent on changing market forces. Instead, the primary
influence must have been the most consistent and pervasive force affecting commerce
through at least the eleventh century: the Byzantine government. It is likely that the
taxation and regulation of amphora capacities, based upon the mina and the thalassion
metron standards, would have been more than sufficient to compel potters to match these
guidelines. The often draconian restrictions applied to trade goods, as indicated in the
Book of the Eparch, would support this assertion. “When wine arrives in the city let the
masters of the guild of inn-holders go at once to warn the eparch so that he may fix the
sale price.” The agent of the eparch “...shall receive an order directly to compel inn-
holders to settle their measures and vessels which they use for selling the wine in
consonance with the price for which they have bought it...An inn-holder who uses
vessels, which do not bear the regulation stamp, for the purpose of selling wine, shall be
flogged, shaved and expelled from the guild.”91

Clearly, the state endeavored to control not only the sale of wine, but also the
amphoras themselves. The adverse affects of such a pervasive system of trade control
and the difficulties this caused to amphora makers and traders can only be guessed at. It
is sufficient to note that if the capacity system delineated by van Doominck, with its

91 Book of the Eparch (supra n. 13) XIX, 1-4. The prevalence and significance of stamps on
Byzantine amphoras is beyond the scope of this study, but would be interesting and helpful to the issue of
amphora standardization.
necessary precision and regulation, was widespread throughout the Byzantine Empire, the internal trade and commerce of the state would have been hindered. The economic consequences of this type of over-regulation would have been only one more difficulty for Byzantine traders in an increasingly competitive commercial world.

**Commercial Treaties and the Regulation of Foreign Trade**

Unfortunately, the Byzantine state’s policies of trade regulation and economic control were not the only hindrance placed upon her merchants and commerce within the Empire. As we have already seen, part of the Byzantine strategy of trade regulation was to control the specific trading centers where imported goods could be bought and sold. This was true particularly in the case of restricted or valuable products that the government wished to monopolize and tax to the fullest extent. For reasons of ‘security’ and monitoring, foreign merchants coming to these trading centers began to be segregated into separate quarters. As trading groups, these merchants were the representatives of foreign nations or regions shipping specific valuable commodities into the Empire. The Byzantine state began to use trade privileges through treaties for the merchants of these foreign nations as a means to further their political goals. Not surprisingly, the advantages that this policy gave to foreign merchants, while often politically useful, further isolated and damaged the viability of the Byzantine merchant classes.

By the tenth century, as foreign merchants had been allowed to operate within the Empire, the Byzantine state “...found it more convenient to concentrate them in
Constantinople, whenever that was possible." This allowed the Byzantine authorities to monitor and control their activities. For this purpose, special lodging houses known as the mitata were established where foreign merchants were permitted to reside and from which to operate. These merchants did, however, have to work under a number of restrictions. For example, foreign merchants were limited to a residence of no more than three months in the mitata within which to conduct their business, barring any special treaty privileges. "If he was caught tarrying beyond the time set, the full weight of the Byzantine punishment fell upon him: he was scourged, shaved, deprived of his goods, and expelled from the city. He met the same punishment if he was caught trying to export kekolymena, forbidden wares." Furthermore, foreign merchants were required to hold a passport, to provide a list of all goods brought into the city for trade, and a list of all goods planned for export. These goods were inspected, on import and export, and every cloth and textile manufacturer was required to report what was sold to foreign merchants to the eparch of the city.

The restrictions placed upon foreign traders did not necessarily discourage trade. On the contrary, the establishment of separate quarters within Constantinople would have provided foreign merchants with a secure location to warehouse goods, return to

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92 Lopez (supra n. 65) 27.

93 Const. Porph., De ceremoniis (supra n. 5) 1. 87.

94 Lopez (supra n. 65) 28; Book of the Eparch (supra n. 13) XX. 1-3, V. 5. Supervising the merchants and their activity was the obligation of the Legatarios or Deputy of the Eparch.

95 Many officials cooperated in this task including the legatarios, kommerktarioi, and the Eparch himself. Lopez (supra n. 65) 28; Book of the Eparch (supra n. 13) XX.1-3; IV. 4, 8, V. 2, VIII. 5, IX. 6, X. 2.
over many seasons, and make valuable contacts for future trading ventures. Over time, these foreign quarters would become virtually independent from the political control of Byzantine authorities. One of the reasons for this was the willingness of the Imperial court to grant trading privileges and commercial treaties with foreign nations for diplomatic ends. Although seemingly contradictory in light of the goals of the state’s trade restrictions, this practice was not without precedent. For example, while continuing throughout the Medieval period to effectively prohibit the exportation of precious metals, Byzantium frequently used the disbursement of coin wealth to diplomatic friends and enemies alike as a consistent principle of foreign policy.\footnote{Hendy (supra n. 69) 663.}

Commercial treaties were often used in the same way.

The Byzantine state enacted numerous commercial treaties with foreign nations over the course of time. These treaties were implemented in many cases for the purpose of conferring prestige or to improve diplomatic relations. The more valuable the relationship was, the more significant the privileges were. Thus, we see that traders from Muslim nations were often granted greater privileges since Byzantine rulers “regarded the Caliphs almost as their equals, both as the heirs of the Achaemenid and Sasanian(sp.) Basileis and as the sovereigns of the most civilized nations outside the Byzantine Empire.”\footnote{Lopez (supra n. 65) 29. Their status was also backed by the strong argument of a powerful army.} Arabs also had the advantage of being the principle importers of the valuable materials that the Byzantine state regarded as forbidden to foreigners. Silk cloth from Syria and Mesopotamia, along with perfumes and spices, were the most important Arab
imports into the Empire and were essential to two of the guilds of Constantinople: the prandiopratai (importers of silk fabric) and the myrepsoi (importers of perfumes and spices). It is not surprising then that Syrian merchants received a number of special privileges. The Book of the Eparch states that Syrian perfume merchants and importers of eastern textiles brought their wares directly to Constantinople, had the sale of their goods guaranteed, and could, after 10 years, join the Greek prandiopratai in the purchase of Syrian goods. Lopez suggests that these ‘extraordinary’ privileges may have been a part of a reciprocal arrangement in which Byzantine merchants received similar conditions in Syria.

In other situations, Byzantium would extend trading privileges through treaties with often hostile neighbors in exchange for peace. This seems to have been the case in the late ninth/early tenth century as contact increased following the Rus expedition (unsuccessful) against Constantinople in 860. According to the Russian Primary Chronicle, in 907, a ‘formal treaty’ was drafted that made Rus merchants more privileged than all other foreign merchants, with the exception of the Syrians. The text states that “whosoever come as merchants shall receive supplies for six months…” and that the Byzantines agreed that, with regard to Rus merchants, “such Russes as arrive here shall dwell in the St. Mamas quarter. Our government will send officers to record their names, and they shall receive their monthly allowance... They may conduct

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98 Book of the Eparch (supra n. 13) V. 1-5, IX. 6, X. 2; Lopez (supra n. 65) 29.

99 Book of the Eparch (supra n. 13) V. 1-5

100 Lopez (supra n. 65) 30.
business according to their requirements without payment of taxes."101 These are exceptional privileges, allowing Rus merchants to remain in Constantinople for six months (twice as long as all others), to receive a stipend, and requiring them to pay no customs duties.102

However, this agreement appears in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* following a supposed successful attack on Constantinople by the Varangian Rus in 907. The validity of this expedition of the Rus has been questioned by several scholars because of its lack of corroborative evidence in Greek or other sources.103 Furthermore, the *Russian Primary Chronicle* states that "Oleg gave orders that sails of brocade should be made for the Russes and silken ones for the Slavs, and his demand was satisfied."104 That the Byzantine emperor would agree to such an outrageous demand is somewhat difficult to believe. Lopez points out that the *Book of the Eparch*, issued possibly around 911 or 912, mentions no treaties with the Rus from 907 or 911, failing even to refer to the Rus at all. As a result, he suggests that if these treaty agreements were in fact true, they may not have been enforced.105

Following the attack on Constantinople in 941 by Prince Igor, a new, less

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101 *RPC* (supra n. 19) 65.

102 Lopez (supra n. 65) 34.


104 *RPC* (supra n. 19) 65.

105 Lopez (supra n. 65) 34.
advantageous treaty was signed in 944.\textsuperscript{106} According to the terms of this treaty, all agents and merchants were to be declared in a certificate to the Byzantine state prior to coming to Constantinople, where they would again be permitted to reside in the vicinity of the church of St. Mamas. Once they were cleared by Byzantine officials, merchants were given their monthly allowance and provided with provisions for the return trip.\textsuperscript{107} While they posed a threat, or represented a useful ally, Byzantium was apparently willing to make trade concessions with the Rus. Once their cooperation became less significant in the 940's, many of their privileges were simply not continued. Interestingly enough, Lopez makes the point that even according to the terms of the new treaty of 944, the Rus were still permitted to buy precious cloth five times more valuable than that permitted to the provincial Greeks.\textsuperscript{108}

It does seem that trade and commercial privileges were viewed by the Byzantine state as a tool of foreign policy and diplomacy, issued often at the expense of native Greek merchants. This was certainly the case, as we shall see, with the Byzantine state's relations with the West. Rather than as a means to foster and encourage their own merchant class, various emperors saw their application of commercial treaties and their monopoly of valuable goods as a tool in their relations with foreign nations. The progress and success of their own traders and merchants was simply not their concern.

\textsuperscript{106} Lopez (supra n. 65) 35.

\textsuperscript{107} RPC (supra n. 19) 74-75.

\textsuperscript{108} RPC (supra n. 19) 161; Lopez (supra n. 65) 35.
Byzantine Concept of Trade: The Anti-Entrepreneurial Ideology

The rulers of Byzantium did little to encourage trade. In fact, the regulations of the Imperial system did more to hinder commerce than to promote or expand it. The varied and specific stipulations of the Book of the Eparch are a testament to this. It appears that emperors took a dim view of profit at the expense of tax revenue. Certainly, the financial and political gains of the state through the regulation of trade were considered more important than any possible assistance for Byzantine merchants or traders. The underlying reasons for this may stem from a general aversion by the Imperial court and senatorial class for all things commercial. Toynbee’s description of an episode involving the emperor Theóphilos is particularly telling.

There is a story that the emperor Theóphilos (829-42), watching a particularly fine merchant-ship coming into port in the Golden Horn, inquired who the owner was and was horrified to learn that the ship and its cargo belonged to his wife. By going into the shipping business the Empress Theodora had compromised the dignity of the Imperial office. ‘God’, Theóphilos is reported to have exclaimed, ‘has made me an Emperor, and my consort the Avghoústa has turned me into a shipowner... Who has ever seen an Emperor of the Romans and his wife engaging in trade?’ The outraged Emperor gave orders that the ship and its cargo were to be burned.109

The reasons for this pejorative view of mercantile affairs is unclear. The general distrust and misunderstanding of merchants by the landed aristocratic class, going back to Antiquity, may have something to do with it. Both the state and the large landowners, as self-sufficient entities, would have seen the position of commercial middle-men as

unnecessary and somewhat alien. As Hendy argues, "Whether or not the state and the
dominant class feared the mercantile classes economically or politically, they certainly
despised them socially."\textsuperscript{10} In this respect, Late Roman emperors thought to pass
legislation restricting merchants from holding positions of public service or honor. In
436, Theodosius II decreed that if any person engaged in commerce of any sort was
found to hold public office, he was to be to be removed from his station "so that in this
way every honour and position of public service may be isolated from contagion."\textsuperscript{11} Members of the nobility and upper classes were also similarly prohibited from engaging
in mercantile activity. Hendy cites how the western emperor Honorius in 408 “forbade
the nobles, office-holders, and wealthy by inheritance to indulge in trade, which was
harmful to the cities and their inhabitants and merchants, as a general principle.”\textsuperscript{12} This
is in marked contrast to the attitude prevalent in the West at this time, illustrated by the
will of Doge Giustiniano Partecipazio of Venice. The document, composed in 829,
states the Doge’s wealth to include not only property, spices, and precious metals, but
also investments in overseas trading ventures.\textsuperscript{13}

The emperors of Byzantium were far too important for such things. They saw
themselves as the inheritors (and in many cases the direct descendants) of the Roman
Empire. This Empire had encompassed the world and would do so again, in their view,

\textsuperscript{10} Hendy (supra n. 69) 569.

\textsuperscript{11} Codex Justinianus (supra n. 42) XII.57.12, trans. in Hendy (supra n. 69) 242.

\textsuperscript{12} Codex Justinianus (supra n. 42) IV.63.3; Hendy (supra n. 69) 247.

\textsuperscript{13} R. S. Lopez, and I.W. Raymond (supra n. 11) 38-41. One cannot imagine a member of the
Byzantine aristocracy, let alone the emperor, participating in such activity.
once the will of God was made manifest to those who opposed them. Consequently, the emperors in Constantinople felt that the traditional preoccupation of the Byzantine state should be what it always had been: protecting the true faith, expanding the empire, and civilizing the barbarians. To engage in more mundane and bourgeois affairs such as trade and commerce was simply beneath them. As Leo VI (886-912) wrote, “Economic profit is not Our Majesty’s objective in seeking to subjugate Our opponents.”

The rulers of Byzantium failed to realize something that is well understood and accepted today: namely that economic power is, in the long run, political power. Moreover, economic power does not always come from a full treasury. The concept of the trade imbalance is relevant here. Having the world come to your docks is all well and good, but that is no guarantee that they will continue to do so. Although you may grow wealthy through taxing valuable commodities, if you cannot guarantee the arrival of these commodities, your situation becomes precarious. The Byzantine state’s failure to realize this was significant in the long run.

Clearly, from its earliest beginnings the Byzantine state and the ruling class did not support or associate itself with commercial activity. Merchants themselves were largely left to their own devices, as long as they followed the Imperial system of regulation. The restrictive and damaging affects of such regulations are self evident. In many ways, this was the result of an antiquated view of mercantile activity that led them to freely apply economic treaties as a means of coercion or diplomacy. The consequences of this were beyond their understanding. Trade regulation of this kind would have

114 Leo VI, Taktika 15, 39, cited and translated in Toynbee (supra n. 109) 40.
affected the commercial activity throughout the empire. It also did not allow the Byzantine state to respond to changing economic conditions or to adapt to, or even understand, new ideas of trade and commerce. While Byzantine emperors enjoyed the availability of precious goods in Constantinople and liked to use them as exotic gifts to foreign rulers, they failed to understand the great advantage they could have gained by taking a more active role in providing these goods to other nations. As Heyd remarks "Leur orgueil se complaisait à voir les vaisseaux marchands des diverses nations de l'Europe entrer dans le port de Constantinople, et 'la reine des villes' devenir le centre du commerce de l'Occident." Unfortunately, they were by and large content to leave the risks of long distance trade to foreigners.

115 "They enjoyed watching the merchant vessels of the various nations of Europe entering the port of Constantinople, and the 'queen of cities' becoming the center of commerce of the West." Heyd (supra n. 41) 56.
CHAPTER IV
AMALFI, VENICE, AND THE ITALIAN CITY-STATES

The economic attitudes and policies of the Byzantine state played a significant role in the fortunes of the West. By restricting the outward flow of goods to specific trading entrepots along the frontier, the state gave a distinct advantage to the merchants of these border cities (see Chapter II). In the West, these were the cities of Byzantine Italy. Moreover, the restrictions that they placed upon their own internal commercial system, while technically applying to their Byzantine vassals in Italy as well, worked most effectively on their own merchants closer to home (see Chapter III). This was in no small part due to the ability of Italian cities to maintain commercial contacts to the Muslim world as well. As a result, from the ninth through the eleventh centuries, the city-states of Italy prospered, growing wealthy as the primary intermediaries in East-West trade. With this wealth came strength, power, and the commercial revolution of Middle Ages. Byzantium continued to prosper, after a fashion, but was no longer in control of the trade within its own borders.

The Lawless Roads of the Mediterranean

With the loss of Crete and Sicily, beginning in 827, Byzantium could no longer claim to control the Mediterranean. These two strategic islands, now under the control of the Muslims, served as forward bases for Arab incursions and raids into the heart of the Empire. From the early ninth to well into the tenth century, "Byzantine territory was harassed, and the sea lanes rendered unsafe, from Sicily and southern Italy to
Thessalonica and Constantinople itself." 116 From their bases on Crete, the Arabs conducted raids throughout the Aegean attacking Corinth, Koroni, Methone, Pylos, and Mt. Athos among others. 117 Many of these raids were so severe and repeated that some Aegean islands were left practically uninhabited. 118 In addition, the Muslims did not always content themselves with simple ‘razzias’ of the Byzantine coasts. In many cases, they were after nothing less than the conquest and occupation of Byzantine territory. 119 To this end, Muslim fleets attacked the Byzantine fortress on the island of Euboea in 875, the island of Samos in 893, Demetrias in Thessaly in 896, and Lemnos in 903. 120 The most significant blow came in 904 when Leo of Tripoli captured and sacked Thessaloniki, arguably the second most important city in the empire. 121 The situation in the West was similar. In 838, Muslim forces captured the city of Brindisi and a Venetian fleet of 60 vessels sent to relieve the city was largely destroyed in the Gulf of


118 Setton (supra n. 116) 313-14. Arabs raids left the island of Paros a “wilderness” and the people of Aegina were forced to abandon their island in 896 “because the Moslems descended too frequently upon them.”

119 V. Christides, “The Raids of the Moslems of Crete in the Aegean Sea: Piracy and Conquest (800-961 A.D.),” _Byzantion_ 51 (1981) 77. Christides suggests that Moslem naval attacks in the Aegean and elsewhere were not always random acts of pillage. He argues that their activities are properly understood in terms of “the jihad of the Moslems in their efforts to expand the Dar al-Islam,” and their war of attrition against the Byzantine state.

120 Vasiliev (supra n. 21) II, 56, 134-36; Setton (supra n. 116) 313; Christides (supra n. 119) 94.

121 Vasiliev (supra n. 21) II, 141-53; Lewis (supra n. 40) 142; Setton (supra n. 116) 313. The Syrian admiral Leo of Tripoli was, along with Damianus, the Emir of Tyre, a converted Christian and a persistent adversary in the naval struggles of the period.
Tarentum.\textsuperscript{122} Then in 841 Muslim pirates plundered the port cities of Bari and Taranto, inaugurating an increased period of aggression in the region. By 847 they had captured both Bari and Taranto, thereby opening up the Adriatic to further Arab raids.\textsuperscript{123} Bari became a semi-autonomous emirate and remained in Muslim hands for over 30 years. It was not until 871, when, after some 20 years of campaigning, the Carolingian monarch Louis II succeeded in retaking the city.\textsuperscript{124} The final capture of the city seems to have occurred only through the support of Byzantine naval contingents sent from Dalmatia.\textsuperscript{125} Apparently, no other local naval forces were available to aid Louis until this time. On the western shores of Italy, the Arabs were equally successful. In 843, an Islamic fleet captured the city of Messina and control over the straits between Italy and Sicily.\textsuperscript{126} Thereafter, Muslim attacks along the Tyrrhenian coast proved devastating, even reaching the outskirts of Rome, and sacking St. Peter's basilica, in 846.\textsuperscript{127} In 861, a Muslim fleet from Africa raided Byzantine southern Italy. Malta fell in 870 and in 878 a large Muslim land and sea force captured Syracuse.\textsuperscript{128} Much of Campania, Calabria, and Apulia continued to be terrorized throughout the century, as Muslim raiders operated freely from

\textsuperscript{122} Dandolo (supra n. 54) 150.

\textsuperscript{123} Vasiliev (supra n. 21) I, 209-12; Lewis (supra n. 40) 134; Setton (supra n. 116) 312.

\textsuperscript{124} Whittow (supra n. 3) 307-8. Louis II interests in stopping Arab incursions into southern Italy may have come from his desire to reassert his political authority in the south as much as anything else.

\textsuperscript{125} Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De thematibus, A. Petrusi ed. (Rome 1952) 97-98; Const. Porph., DAI (supra n. 5) 29. 128-32; Whittow (supra n. 3) 308.

\textsuperscript{126} Lewis (supra n. 40) 134. There were no local Byzantine naval forces available to prevent this.

\textsuperscript{127} Liber pontificalis (supra n. 17) II. 99-101.

\textsuperscript{128} Lewis (supra n. 40) 137.
their bases in Sicily. Their Sicilian endeavors culminated in the final conquest of Taormina in 902, the last Byzantine stronghold on the island. In spite of Byzantine resistance, a combined land and sea assault, including naval elements from Africa, brought Byzantine authority in Sicily to an end. By the early tenth century, with the Byzantine-Arab struggle for Sicily over, naval clashes diminished as Muslim attention became focused on the emerging conflict between the Fatimids and Aghlabids in North Africa.

The significance of this period is not that the Muslims states controlled the Mediterranean: far from it. With the advent of Muslim naval strength, particularly in Crete and Sicily, the central Mediterranean became contested ground. Despite fluctuations, neither Byzantium nor the Muslim states could adequately enforce their will at sea. Moreover, the Muslim states fought amongst themselves almost as much as they attacked Christian states. During the ninth century, the Umayyads of Spain were hostile to the Aghlabids of North Africa and later with the Fatimids as well. For Mediterranean trade and commerce, this was tremendously significant. The reality was

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131 Eickhoff (supra n. 129) 247-48.

132 B. Kreutz, “Ships, Shipping, and the Implications of Change,” Viator 7 (1976) 87, n.35. Kreutz recounts Ibn Khaldun as saying that “under the Fatimids and Umayyads, the fleets of [Africa] and Spain constantly attacked each other’s countries.”
that, with military conflict raging, no one policed the sea lanes.\textsuperscript{133} This was particularly true in the West, as Byzantine forces were preoccupied with defending their remaining possessions in Italy and with continuing hostilities closer to home. As Kreutz points out, "the more serious threat to shipping came not from formal hostilities but from the disappearance of any dividing line between ‘legitimate’ naval operations and piracy. With no one in total control, with so many separate powers, great and small, sea-raiders terrorized the Mediterranean to a degree unknown since Pompey wiped out the Cilician pirate fleet in the first century B.C."\textsuperscript{134}

It is important to note that this piracy, occurring throughout the Mediterranean, was not confined to one specific group. Certainly, the activities of the Cretan and Sicilian raiders were tolerated by the Muslim regimes as part of their war against Byzantium.\textsuperscript{135} However, the chaos and disruption on the high seas would have also encouraged more opportunistic ‘freebooters,’ less concerned with any ideological power struggles. Lewis argues that Islamic border fleets from Sicily, Crete, and elsewhere operated as "...somewhat informal semi-pirate fleets manned very largely by Moslem adventurers or even Christian renegades whose primary interest was booty and plunder."\textsuperscript{136} In addition to the pirate bases at Bari and Monte Garigliano in southern Italy, towards the end of the ninth century, Spanish Umayyad Muslims established

\textsuperscript{133} H. Ahrweiler, Byzance et la mer (Paris 1966) 97; Kreutz (supra n. 132) 88, n. 36. In the ninth century, Byzantium established two more naval themes in the eastern Mediterranean to attempt to check piracy and raiding. This measure was only temporarily successful.

\textsuperscript{134} Kreutz (supra n. 132) 88.

\textsuperscript{135} See again Christides (supra n. 119).

\textsuperscript{136} Lewis (supra n. 40) 154.
raiding centers at Fraxinetum on the coast of Provence and in the Baleric.\textsuperscript{137} Obviously, the Spanish pirates were not participating in the Aghlabid campaigns against Byzantine territory. We know that Slav pirates operated in the Adriatic as well, seizing papal legates returning from Constantinople in 870.\textsuperscript{138} One can assume that Christian pirates also traveled the sea lanes. Kreutz suggests that the Italian cities must have been participants in this lucrative activity, stating that “before the Arab conquest of Sicily, Sicilian ‘Rum’ had been attacking Muslim shipping.”\textsuperscript{139}

The ninth and early tenth centuries are significant in that they marked a turning point in the relationship between Byzantium and the cities of ‘Byzantine’ Italy. As Muslim raids and attacks continued, it was becoming obvious that the Byzantine navy was not “likely to come to save anyone in the western Mediterranean.”\textsuperscript{140} Indeed, Byzantium was often forced to rely on her western allies to defend her own domains. In 812, the Byzantine governor of Sicily had to request help from the Tyrrenhian cities of Gaeta and Amalfi against Spanish Muslim raiders,\textsuperscript{141} and a Venetian fleet was summoned in 838 for the failed defense of Brindisium and Tarentum.\textsuperscript{142} More and more, as Byzantium became preoccupied with troubles in the east, the western regions of the

\textsuperscript{137} Lewis (supra n. 40) 147.

\textsuperscript{138} Liber pontificalis (supra n. 17) II,184.


\textsuperscript{140} Kreutz (supra n. 132) 92.

\textsuperscript{141} Kreutz (supra n. 132) 93.

\textsuperscript{142} Dandolo (supra n. 54) 150.
empire were required to look for assistance much closer to home. In the 840s, the fleets of the Campanian cities of Naples, Gaeta, and Amalfi came to the aid of Rome against an Arab fleet that was expanding on its raid of 846.\textsuperscript{143} Byzantine naval strength in the West was simply not sufficient. To have any success at all, Constantinople most often had to send the eastern fleet to the West. This occurred during the defense of Syracuse in 858 and again in 868.\textsuperscript{144} Naval reinforcements were sent in 870 for the re-conquest of Bari, and contingents of the Imperial fleet were sent to defend Calabria in 888.\textsuperscript{145} In spite of these measures Sicily was lost (for good) in 902. By the tenth century however, Byzantium and her allies had managed to restore some measure of security to the region.

\textbf{Byzantine Trade and the Italian City-States}

The single most important factor in the development and prosperity of the Italian city-states until the twelfth century was their relationship with the Byzantine Empire. Venice and the cities of Campania all nominally recognized the sovereignty and supremacy of the Byzantine Empire. As a result, they enjoyed the privileges of Byzantine citizenship while acting as \textit{de facto} independent states. According to Lopez, "the lack of a commercial \textit{modus vivendi} was one of the main causes of the economic isolation of Western Europe, and contributed to making the fortune of Venice and other Italian cities, nominally subject to the Byzantine Empire."\textsuperscript{146} Because of their subject

\textsuperscript{143} \textit{Liber pontificalis}, (supra n. 17) II, 99-101; Kreutz (supra n. 132) 93.

\textsuperscript{144} Lewis (supra n. 40) 136-37.

\textsuperscript{145} Amari (supra n. 130) I, 520-23, 568.

\textsuperscript{146} Lopez (supra n. 65) 36.
status, they were able to prosper as the western trading centers in the distribution of Oriental goods to the West. As the Byzantine state attempted to regulate foreign trade by channeling it through specific controlled entrepots, they chose their Italian dependencies as their trading centers. This had many benefits for the merchants of these Italian cities. The early ninth century pacta between the western rulers of Europe and Venice gave rights for citizens of both sovereignties to trade and travel within each others domains. This agreement with Venice, an autonomous city of Byzantium, enabled the rulers of Europe to gain access to trade with the East, without dealing directly with the Byzantine administration. Venice, and the other “Byzantine” cities of Italy, thereby gained a measure of distinction and independence from Byzantium.

Furthermore, the cities of Byzantine Italy had the right to import silk goods from Constantinople to the same extent as the native Greek merchants. With this privilege, the merchants of Venice, Gaeta, Amalfi, and Salerno could sell Byzantine silk, spices, and eastern fabrics at the great bi-annual fairs held in Pavia - under the supervision of the financial minister of the Italian kingdom of course. In the tenth century, Liudprand of Cremona stated that “practically the only channels for the supply of silk cloth and other Byzantine wares to Western Europe were Venice, Amalfi, and the other Italian cities

147 F. Thiriet, La Romanie vénitienne au moyen âge (Paris 1959) 33.

148 Lopez (supra n. 65) 36-37. The Carolingian rulers in particular where prevented from making treaties with Byzantium because of their unwillingness to give up their Imperial claims.

149 Heyd (supra n. 41) 98-104; Lopez (supra n. 65) 38.

150 Lopez and Raymond (supra n. 11) 56-60.
which recognized Byzantine overlordship.” With these advantages, it is no wonder that the Italian city states began to grow more and more prosperous as “Byzantine” cities.

By the late ninth century, the old Roman pattern of commercial traffic had disappeared to be replaced by a new network of trade. Cities such as Amalfi, Venice, Tunis, Bari, Otranto, Luni, Gaeta, Palermo, Trani, and others had taken the place of many of the ports of antiquity. Until the ninth century, Venice had remained largely limited in its commercial endeavors to the rivers and coasts of the northern Adriatic. However, with the development of their relationship with Byzantium, they began to dominate the East-West trade within the Empire. These new centers of commerce in Italy had, until 827, benefitted from the protection of the Byzantine navy in the Tyrrhenian Sea and from the Byzantine governor of Sicily. Thereafter, in spite of the increasing strength of the Muslims in the Mediterranean, shipping and commerce did continue. This was, in many ways, a direct result of the trade connections that the Italian city-states also shared with numerous Muslim ports in the Mediterranean.

151 Lopez (supra n. 65) 38. Paraphrase of Liudprand by Lopez.


153 Thiriet (supra n. 147) 33.


155 Liber pontificalis (supra n. 17) II.1-34; The Liber pontificalis describes the lavish nature of Papal gifts to Italian churches from the eighth to eleventh centuries suggesting that the popes continued to have access to significant long-distance trade. Also see Heyd (supra n. 41) 94 and Kreutz (supra n. 132) 90.
Significance of Muslim Markets

While trade with the Byzantine Empire was essential to the development of her Italian protectorates, it was the trade connections with the Muslim states that enabled the cities of Italy to truly prosper. Trade between Egypt, the Maghreb, Sicily, and Italy seems to have been re-established by the eighth century. In spite of Byzantine prohibitions against such trade, we have every reason to believe that commercial contacts continued between Italy, Sicily, and Muslim North Africa. Citarella has suggested that the maritime cities of southern Italy seem to have generally abided by the policies of the Byzantine empire toward the Muslim states of North Africa prior to the Arab conquest of Sicily. However, with the fall of Sicily and the subsequent decline of Byzantine power in southern Italy, the Italian maritime cities were able to follow a more independent course in dealing with the Arabs.

Unlike the Byzantine Empire, the Muslim controlled Mediterranean was never a unified political entity. The various Muslim states, whether Aghlabid, Umayyad, or Fatimid, competed with each other as much as with Christendom. There was, therefore, never any attempt to regulate trade to the degree evident in Byzantium. Documents from

156 Lewis (supra n. 40) 113; Citarella (supra n. 152) 244. Of additional interest is a plague described by Theophanes in 746/7 that “sprang from Sicily and Calabria and...came to Monemvasia, Greece, and...reached the imperial city in the fifteenth indiction.” This path represent the probable trade route of merchants, presumably Venetians or Amalfitans. See Theophanes (supra n. 7) 423.

157 Kreutz (supra n. 132) 90; Liber Pontificalis (supra n. 17) 1.433, for Venetian merchants buying slaves in Rome to sell in Africa and Liber Pontificalis (supra n. 17) 1.35, for Venetian theft of relics of St. Mark from Alexandria in the 820s. Also see Chapter II above.

the eleventh-century Cairo Geniza in fact hold very few references to embargoes on
the export of goods, and none on the prohibition of certain imports. Considering the
generally unrestricted travel in the Geniza texts, Goitein says that with “all the evidence
available from the Geniza records taken together, it seems admissible to characterize the
Mediterranean area in the period under discussion as a free-trade community.” Part of
the reason for this may have been the Muslim dependence on international trade for its
basic resources. While the Christian shores of the Mediterranean were fairly self-
sufficient in raw materials, the Islamic regions to the south were not. Most
importantly, the states of the Maghreb in North Africa and especially Egypt all suffered a
chronic deficiency of shipbuilding timber. The necessity of timber for naval construction
meant that the merchants of Venice and southern Italy were always well received in the
ports of Muslim North Africa. In fact, the Cairo Geniza records that timber was
carried to Egypt in Venetian, Genoese, and Amalfian boats and that it was primarily
“Rûm” traders who purchased goods in the markets of Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, and
Sicily. The presence of Christian traders in the Muslim ports suggests the permanency
of their commercial contacts.

159 Goitein (supra n. 20) 60.

160 Goitein (supra n. 20) 59-62; Lewis (supra n. 40) 497. This was certainly true, at least in the
Muslim world, but probably not reflective of trade within the Byzantine orbit.

161 Lewis (supra n. 40) 296-97.

162 For Muslim difficulties in acquiring timber, especially for the Fatimids in Egypt, see Lev
(supra n. 130) 245. For further discussion on timber availability see M. Lombard, Espaces et réseaux du
haut Moyen Age (Paris 1972) 107-177, especially 126-128, 173-74. Also see J. Gay, L’Italie méridionale
et l’empire byzantin (867-1071), I (Rome 1904) 249, for the use of southern Italian timber for the arsenals
of Amalfi, Gaeta, and Muslim Sicily.

163 Goitein (supra n. 20) 211. Rûm was a general term applied to all Christians in this period.
That this trade was important to Muslim rulers is obvious. They were even willing to extend protections to the merchants of the cities involved in these crucial imports.\textsuperscript{164} Citarella states that because of the significance and importance of this trade, there were also specific agreements and treaties between the Muslims and the Italian maritime states, over and above agreements with Byzantium.\textsuperscript{165} We have evidence that the Islamic authorities did, in fact, take measures to protect Christian shipping that they considered vital from their own marauders. The Muslim raiders, operating under the aegis of \textit{jihad}, were still limited by certain conditions with regards to the merchants of the West.\textsuperscript{166} A ninth-century document from Kairouan makes this clear. “It has been established: Concerning the ships of Christians captured both in proximity of our ports or on high sea, one must distinguish between two different cases. If they are merchantmen known to trade with Moslems their capture is not legal, except if it takes place within the waters of their country and they are sailing toward non-Islamic ports. In the second case, if they are not ships publicly recognized to specialize in the commerce with Moslems, then their capture is legal.”\textsuperscript{167} Clearly, because of the importance of this trade, Muslim rulers were willing to overlook religious and political differences in favor of good relations. They were even willing to allow the establishment of permanent merchant

\textsuperscript{164} Amari (supra n. 130) 1.357. Amari records the protections given to merchants in Sicily and North Africa by two early ninth century treaties between the Byzantine administration of Sicily and the Aghlabid emirate in Tunisia.

\textsuperscript{165} Citarella (supra n. 158) 302-303.

\textsuperscript{166} Citarella (supra n. 152) 251.

lodgings for the traders from the West. The Geniza documents reveal that a market for
the Rûm existed in Fustat (Old Cairo) around 959.\textsuperscript{168} The Amalfitians, because of their
friendship with the Fatimids, were also able to establish themselves as merchants in large
numbers in Cairo by 996\textsuperscript{169} and later in Palestine, Jerusalem, and Antioch.\textsuperscript{170} By ca.
1040 the Amalfitians even had a church and hostels in Jerusalem, indicative of their long
relations with rulers of Egypt.\textsuperscript{171}

It would be safe to say that the developing commercial relationships between the
Italian city-states and the Muslim nations did not please the rulers of Byzantium. While
now largely dependent on these subject states for long-distance trade,\textsuperscript{172} they were less
inclined to permit the sale of forbidden materials to their Muslim adversaries. The
various prohibitions and edicts issued to the Italians concerning such trade are an
indication both of their displeasure and of their inability to restrict this commerce. The
Byzantine state was still willing to interfere whenever possible. In 880, a large fleet was
sent to patrol the waters off Sicily in response to increasing Muslim attacks on the
western coasts of Italy. Apparently, this fleet was also empowered to interrupt shipping
between Muslim Sicily and the cities of southern Italy. Lewis reports that the fleet

\textsuperscript{168} Goitein (supra n. 20) I.44; Kreutz (supra n. 132) 91.

\textsuperscript{169} Citarella (supra n. 158) 310.

\textsuperscript{170} Heyd (supra n. 41) 104-106.

\textsuperscript{171} Citarella (supra n. 152) 253.

\textsuperscript{172} Goitein (supra n. 20) 214, does acknowledge some small traffic between Egypt and the
southern coast of Asia Minor and Cyprus from a document describing two ships from Attaleia captured by
Muslim pirates around 1028. Another letter describes a ship traveling from Egypt to Amalfi via
Constantinople and Crete, but Goitein states that it "...seems likewise to imply that the itinerary was not
common."
“captured so much olive oil ...that the price of this commodity fell markedly in the markets of Constantinople. By the tenth century, however, as Byzantine naval strength declined, such enforcement activities were no longer possible. The simple fact of the matter was that the fleets of the Italian cities were more likely to be patrolling the western seas than anything Byzantium had available.

Consequences for Amalfi and Venice

For the city of Amalfi, the prohibitions of the Byzantine state were less significant. The rise in her power and preeminence as a commercial city was more closely linked to the period of Arab power in the western Mediterranean. In a way, it was Amalfi’s good relations with the Muslims that enabled her traders to become established in Sicily, Tunisia, Egypt, and Palestine, long before other Italian cities did the same. The Muslim geographer Ibn Hawqal, writing in the later tenth century, described Amalfi as “the most prosperous town in Lombardy,” “the most affluent and opulent,” and even more important than Naples. For this reason, Citarella has even suggested that Amalfi’s success was due more to its trade with the Arabs than with Byzantium. This is probably an overstatement since the cities of Byzantine Italy prospered because of the protection afforded them as dependencies of Byzantium. Still, Amalfi was somewhat less restricted by Byzantium than others in southern Italy in terms

173 Lewis (supra n. 40) 138.


175 Lopez and Raymond (supra n. 11) 54.

176 Citarella (supra n. 158) 300.
of its relations with the Muslims. As a result the city was very prosperous. She was able
to exploit Muslim markets in Sicily and North Africa and, most especially, the trade
route to Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean to their fullest extent. All of this was, of
course, dependent on peaceful relations with the Arab states, which became an absolute
necessity for the citizens of Amalfi. This fact defined the relations of Amalfi with the
Arabs from the ninth to eleventh centuries.\textsuperscript{177}

The situation with Venice was somewhat different. Venice had a long
relationship with Byzantium, and had many political and cultural links to the Byzantine
state. Many Venetian churches were dedicated to Greek saints and even adopted Greek
practices.\textsuperscript{178} The Venetians saw themselves as full members of the Byzantine political
system and intended to remain a part of the Byzantine world. In the period between 807
and 991, at least twelve embassies passed between Venice and Constantinople.\textsuperscript{179} The
reasons for this close association are clear. Venice, like Amalfi, benefitted from its
allegiance to the Byzantine empire through the exploitation of its trading position
between East and West. Moreover, the Venetians shared with Constantinople a mutual
interest in keeping the Adriatic clear of pirates, invasion, foreign influence, etc.

For the same reasons, Byzantium was dependent on the support and allegiance of the city

\textsuperscript{177} Citarella (supra n. 158) 303.

\textsuperscript{178} Dandolo (supra n. 54) 142.

\textsuperscript{179} M. Martin, "The Venetians in the Byzantine Empire before 1204," in J. D. Howard-Johnston
ed., Byzantium and the West c.850-c.1200, Proceedings of the Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies,
of Venice and conferred privileges to retain it.\textsuperscript{180} Throughout much of the High Middle Ages, Venetian ships also aided the Byzantines against the Muslims, ferried troops across the Adriatic, and even carried people and mail between the Byzantine empire and the West.\textsuperscript{181} For example, we know that in the mid-tenth century, Liudprand of Cremona traveled both legs of his embassy to Constantinople on Venetian ships.\textsuperscript{182} The relationship gave Venice tremendously lucrative trading networks, while Byzantium gained support in the West.

However, Venice found that its trade with the Muslim east and North Africa to be so profitable that its merchants often went against the wishes of the Byzantine and Venetian authorities alike to continue it. This was particularly the case with the illicit trade in timber, wool, and slaves to Muslim harbors.\textsuperscript{183} In the mid-tenth century, the Macedonian emperors ordered a stricter enforcement of their decrees against illegal trade as a part of their campaigns against the Arabs.\textsuperscript{184} As a result, in 960 Doge Peter Candian IV, with Byzantine pressure, took measures against the smuggling of Christian slaves and the interference with the mail service from Constantinople.\textsuperscript{185} Again in 971

\textsuperscript{180} Martin (supra n. 179) 202, mentions how the embassies between Byzantium and Venice "...afforded an opportunity to confer a new and more portentous title on the doge - Hypatus, Spatharius, Protospatharius, Patricius."


\textsuperscript{182} Martin (supra n. 179) 204.

\textsuperscript{183} Thiriet (supra n. 147) 33.

\textsuperscript{184} Lopez (supra n. 65) 39.

Venetian Doge Peter Candian IV promulgated a decree of the emperor John Tzimiskes (969-976) prohibiting the export of arms, iron, and wood which could be used in naval construction.\textsuperscript{186} This was such an unpopular decree that the Doge was murdered 5 years later (976) in a popular uprising, following which the name of the Byzantine emperor was no longer placed at the head of Venetian state documents.\textsuperscript{187} When, in 983, the western emperor Otto II forced Venice to acknowledge his overlordship, their commercial connection to Byzantium was officially severed. The Byzantine state withdrew the Venetian status of citizenship, and their trade privileges. This meant that Venetian merchants had to submit to customs inspection by the \textit{kommerkiarioi}, and pay the same customs dues, as all other foreigners.\textsuperscript{188} This could have been a complete disaster for the Venetians, dependent as they were on, at least, the commercial support of Constantinople, to say nothing of the political situation. However, in 992, a new Doge, Peter Orseolo II, took power in Venice and attempted to reverse this situation. In the same year, Basil II issued a chrysobull, restoring the trading privileges of the Venetians, who then resumed their obligation to provide naval assistance to the Byzantines.\textsuperscript{189}

The chrysobull of 992 is significant in that it gives us a glimpse into the provisions of the Venetian trading privileges, at least by the end of the tenth century. According to the bull, the customs duties charged to Venetian ships arriving at Abydos

\textsuperscript{186} Tafel and Thomas (supra n. 185) 25-28.

\textsuperscript{187} Lopez (supra n. 65) 39.

\textsuperscript{188} Lopez (supra n. 65) 39.

\textsuperscript{189} Tafel and Thomas (supra n. 185) 36-39; Heyd (supra n. 41) 112-116.
on the Dardanelles en route to Constantinople were reduced from more than 30 nomismata per ship to 2 nomismata, with an additional 15 nomismata charge upon departure.  Thiriet has seen this as nothing more than the restoration of former levels of payment. There is some dispute concerning this, but the significant increase in the toll, prior to the bull, is noteworthy. As Martin notes, this may simply reflect the practice of customs officials exacting tolls that were higher than what was officially sanctioned, mentioned by both Procopius and in an edict of Anastasius I. The second part of the bull provides that the Venetians should answer only to the logothetes tou dromou, thereby simplifying their tolls and jurisdiction. The overall commercial impact of this bull is not known, but it does seem clear that the Venetians would have gained (or reacquired) a tremendous advantage in terms of their ability to profit on the trade routes to Constantinople.

The restoration of trading privileges for Venice was equally important to the Byzantine state. Byzantium was to need Venetian military assistance in the future and “Venetian ships were an essential element in the Greek defense system at times when the Greek navy was non-existent.” In the eleventh century, Venice continued to work

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190 Tafel and Thomas (supra n. 186) 36-39; Martin (supra n. 179) 204-206.

191 Thiriet (supra n. 147) 34.

192 Martin (supra n. 179) 205.

193 Procopius, Anecdota, XXV, 5-6. For Anastasius, see H. Antonidas-Bibicou, Recherches sur les Douanes à Byzance (Paris 1963) 76-78.

194 Martin (supra n. 179) 206.

195 Ciggaar (supra n. 181) 264.
closely with the Byzantine Empire, but gradually moved away from its position of vassalage. This culminated in the 1082 chrysobull of Alexios I,\textsuperscript{196} which gave the Venetians total exemption from customs duties and inspections, and also transferred to them the taxes collected from the merchants of Amalfi. Furthermore, by the middle of the eleventh century, both Venetian and Amalfitian merchants had the right to reside permanently in Constantinople. The \textit{mitata} of Constantinople, the temporary merchant’s quarters, became foreign settlements for merchants that had exemption from Byzantine duties, law, and taxation within these colonies. According to Lopez, “this was the beginning of the end” for the Byzantine Empire.\textsuperscript{197}

The period of Byzantine naval weakness in the ninth and early tenth centuries was the turning point in her control of the western frontier. Even though the Byzantine state was able to partly recover her military and naval strength in the tenth and early eleventh centuries, the damage had been done. The Italian city-states, particularly those with ties to Byzantium, emerged in the ninth and tenth centuries as the primary intermediaries in the East-West trade in the Mediterranean. Lewis contends that as the Italians became the carriers of trade, they supplanted the function of the Greek merchant marine, which was the foundation of the naval contingents.\textsuperscript{198} This therefore is the reason for the weakness in the provincial fleets of the West by the ninth century. Venice, Sicily, and the Campanian cities, by nominally recognizing the sovereignty of the

\textsuperscript{196} Lopez (supra n. 65) 40.

\textsuperscript{197} Lopez (supra n. 65) 40.

\textsuperscript{198} Lewis (supra n. 40) 122. Also see n.107: “Naval weakness then is the result of the economic passivity of Byzantium in the eighth century...”
Byzantine empire, developed a class of merchant-sailors who, because of their position between the Arab and Byzantine worlds, "...were able to gain a place of favor in the trade of precious textiles, jewels and objects d’art in Constantinople without giving up their lucrative traffic with the Arabs in Tunisia, later in Egypt, and even in Spain." 199 As Citarella says, "the continuity of these exchanges overcame the prohibitions of Byzantium, the long struggle of the Arab conquest of Sicily, the murderous campaigns of Arab marauders in Campania and Latium, the Norman reconquest and even the Crusades. All this speaks volumes for the interests that were at stake on both sides." 200 Over time, as Byzantium relinquished her trade routes and became less effective as a military force in the West, the prosperous city-states of Italy would find other, more valuable relationships to develop. The period when this happens, as we shall see, is the period of the collapse of Byzantine control in Italy.

199 Citarella (supra n. 152) 245.

200 Citarella (supra n. 152) 250.
CHAPTER V

THE BYZANTINE ECONOMY AND THE COMMERCIAL REVOLUTION OF
THE TENTH AND ELEVENTH CENTURIES

As we have noted above, the Byzantine Empire adopted a policy of economic
control and strict trade regulation beginning in the eighth century and lasting, as far as
can be determined, well into the eleventh century. The consequences of this were many,
not the least of which was the prosperity of the traders and commercial centers of
Byzantine Italy in lieu of, and often at the expense of, Byzantine Greek merchants. By
attempting to prohibit trade with the Muslim states to the south and east, the Byzantine
state limited the development of her own Greek merchant marine and the native Greek
merchant class. The evidence for this is, admittedly, negative for the most part, but with
the increasingly widespread appearance of Italian merchants and colonies in the
Mediterranean, and the conspicuous absence of the Greeks, it is hard to come to any
other conclusion. In addition, we cannot ignore the fact that Byzantine rulers had a
strong grip on internal trade and applied regulations excessively, at least until the
eleventh century. This, and their adversarial view of commerce, must have contributed
to the difficulties of Greek traders. The result was that the preponderance of the
lucrative long-distance trade in the Mediterranean fell into the hands of the West.
Inevitably, the merchants of the Italian city-states, because of their advantageous position
on the frontier and their strategic location between Byzantium, the Muslim littoral, and
western Europe, were able to continually avoid Byzantine prohibitions and become
wealthy in this profitable East-West trade.
There is some question as to the significance of these developments for Byzantium and the Byzantine economy. The growing prosperity of the West beginning in the tenth century did not, as has sometimes been asserted, lead to a decline in the economy of the Byzantine state as a whole. This issue is crucial to the arguments of this thesis. Instead, the Italian city-states and their merchants in many ways led to a *renewatio* of trade and commerce in the Mediterranean that has been called the ‘Commercial Revolution’ of the Middle Ages. The Byzantine state was to benefit from this as much as anyone else. The recovery of many of the cities of the Mediterranean during the tenth and eleventh centuries bears this assertion out. In a very direct way, Byzantium played a significant role in this process. With the concentration of commercial power in the western provinces of Italy, and the inadvertent removal of Greek and Levantine competition from the East, Byzantium in effect created a new political entity in the Mediterranean world: the commercial city-state. The cities of Byzantine Italy were the forerunners of this development. While benefitting for a time in the economic revival of the period, the problems for Byzantium would later arise from her eventual lack of control over this process more than anything else.

**The Byzantine Economy**

The traditional explanation for Byzantium’s military and political problems beginning in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, from the defeat at Manzikert and the fall of Bari in 1071 to the sack of Constantinople in 1204, have largely focused on economic and social decline. Arguments for this period of ‘decay’ from the high point of the ninth and tenth centuries have been espoused by such eminent scholars as Ostrogorsky,
Toynbee, Runciman, and Mango. According to the orthodox view, the Byzantine Empire, prior to the eleventh century, was economically stable because of an agricultural system based upon landed free peasants, control of internal and external trade, and vibrant urban development. It has been concluded that the rise of a powerful landholding aristocracy and the loss of trade control to the Italian merchant cities, to name the most prominent causes, led to the economic ruin of the Empire. The reduction in the number of landed free peasants, who traditionally formed the backbone of Byzantine provincial defense, undermined the ability of the Empire both to resist upheaval and to generate tax revenue. The subsequent loss of income to the Imperial treasury resulted in the debasement of coinage and the further downward spiral of the Byzantine economy. The inevitable result was political chaos and military defeat.

More recent scholarship has followed the lead of M. Hendy in challenging this traditional picture of Byzantine economic weakness in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. While acknowledging that many of the conditions used to justify the weakness of the Byzantine state are for the most part accurate, Hendy discounts the conclusions and inferences that many scholars make in their economic analysis. One of the main problems, not surprisingly, in the study of the Byzantine economy is the overall

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201 Ostrogorsky (supra n. 30) 316-358. Ostrogorsky entitles chapter IV of his book, covering the period 843-1025, as “The Golden Age of the Byzantine Empire”; C. M. Mango, Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome (New York 1980) 58; See Toynbee (supra n. 109) 36-38, for discussion of some contrary views; Runciman (supra n. 46) 167-68, says in no uncertain terms that “the Eleventh Century began the decline in Byzantine commerce.”

lack of sufficient historical documentation. This limitation of sources, he argues, has often led to a reliance on chance references and a misunderstanding or oversimplification of changes during this period. This is a good point. By looking at a wider range of material, including archaeological and demographic studies, a clearer picture of the development of Byzantine economy by the eleventh century can be discerned.

During the course of the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, Arab raids and invasions of Byzantine territory devastated both the population and urban life of the empire. These incursions, often penetrating deep into Asia Minor, ruined the countryside and killed or enslaved thousands. This had implications for the Byzantine economy. By the end of the eighth century, many of the cities in Asia Minor and on the Aegean coast had been destroyed repeatedly and whole regions denuded of their populations. The effects were devastating. One ninth-century Arab source records that “in the days of old cities were numerous in Rûm, but now they have become few. Most of the districts are prosperous and pleasant, and have (each) an extremely strong fortress, on account of the frequency of the raids which the fighters for the faith direct upon them.”

As Hendy envisions it, prior to the tenth century, Byzantine urban life

203 Hendy (supra n. 202) 32, remarks that works addressing the economic health of the empire are often based on “...the occasional reference in chronicles, hagiographies, legal codes, a few monastic archives and descriptions by foreign travelers.” This is not unusual.


205 Charanis (supra n. 204) 456; Cedrenus (supra n. 109) 34.

consisted of "a small number of mainly coastal cities (such as Trebizond, Smyrna and Attalia) and a large one of fortresses or fortified townlets, each the focal point of a relatively restricted rural area."\textsuperscript{207}

This view is supported by the work of Clive Foss, who has demonstrated that between the seventh and ninth centuries, cities in Asia Minor were diminished in size and had become more fortified and defensible. The city of Ephesus, for example, the great open city of Late Antiquity, saw a drastic reduction in its size and the construction of new fortification walls.\textsuperscript{208} Much of the ancient Ephesus, including the Agora and the Embolos, was simply abandoned and left outside the new city wall construction. It was at this time that Ephesus became, in essence, a two-part city that included what remained of the old harbor city and a fortification on the hill of Ayasuluk.\textsuperscript{209} Similar reductions occurred at Sardis, Pergamum, and Magnesia.\textsuperscript{210} Clearly, this is not a system capable of a great deal of commercial and economic activity.

**Economic Development and the Commercial Revolution**

In his "Emporia, Monasteries and the Economic Foundation of Medieval Europe," R. Hodges has concluded that the origins of the European landscape lie in the

\textsuperscript{207} Hendy (supra n. 202) 36.

\textsuperscript{208} C. Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity: A Late Antique Byzantine and Turkish City* (Cambridge 1979) 106.

\textsuperscript{209} Foss (supra n. 208) 107, 113. Evidence for the abandonment of the Agora and the Embolos comes in part from the coin sequence which virtually stops during this period.

\textsuperscript{210} Foss (supra n. 208) 115. For additional archaeological evidence of this consistent pattern, see C. Foss, (supra n. 22) 469-86; C. Foss, *Byzantine and Turkish Sardis* (Cambridge 1976); C. Foss, "The Fort at Dereâgztî" in J. Morganstern ed.,*The Fort at Dereâgztî and Other Material Remains in its Vicinity: from Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (Tübingen 1993) 5-24.
ninth and tenth centuries - not earlier. This conclusion was made through his study of the beginning of the commercial revolution and the competitive market system. As he sees it, agricultural intensification and the emergence of local markets led to increased production and exchange of agricultural goods. The resultant population growth and "excavations in countless European towns have given material expression to a 10th- or 11th-century commercial revolution." Additionally, it was not just the development of urban centers that was so important, but the changing nature of the population during this period was equally significant. Unlike many Roman towns, cities of the Medieval period "played a greater role in commercial development because an ever-growing proportion of the population was made up of craftsmen ... as well as producers."

For Byzantium, and the changing nature of the Byzantine economy, a similar pattern of demographic and urban expansion can be seen. In the city of Corinth, there is a notable economic development beginning in the late ninth and tenth centuries. This is evidenced by the increasing numbers of coin hoards, belonging to Romanos I (920-944) and John Tzimisces (969-976). Industry seems to have also recovered at this time. Pottery was found in large quantities throughout the excavation areas as well as indications of increasing industrial production of all kinds including silk or silk dying.


212 Hodges (supra n. 211) 58.

213 Lopez and Raymond (supra n. 11) 52.

paper, arms, and glass. By the eleventh century, there is building expansion into open spaces and greater congestion in the city center. Scranton concludes that the opening of the port to Venice in 1082 stimulated trade and industry, attracting new tradesmen and artisans, but this must have begun somewhat earlier. Athens too in the eleventh century saw the appearance of dense settlements and the construction of a new wall near the Acropolis, and the city of Ephesus had become a prosperous local port, on the seaway for pilgrims to the Holy Land, with a significant population of foreigners.

Hendy has also argued that the rise of the powerful landed aristocracy, beginning in the tenth century, represents a clear indication of a “general and continuing demographic growth extending up to and throughout the twelfth century.” Similarly, he suggests that Byzantine attempts to limit magnate expansion can be seen as a means to retain fiscal control over the stratiotika ktēmata, or lands carrying an obligation of military service, in the face of an increasing population. Regardless, there is certainly good evidence for the increase in both the rural population and land exploitation by the

\[215\] Scranton (supra n. 214) 82-83.


\[217\] Foss (supra n. 208) 120-21, n.18. The foreign population apparently included Jews, Bulgars, Armenians, and Christian Arabs.


eleventh century.\textsuperscript{220} This is presumably indicative of the improving economic situation of the period.

It should come as no surprise that cities and towns of Byzantine Italy also seem to grow and prosper in the tenth century. This development was not confined only to the cities of Amalfi and Venice, although they certainly were centers of growth. Constantine VI Porphyrogenitus refers to the city of Torcello near Venice as a “great trading station” and one of several in the region.\textsuperscript{221} In southern Italy, in the region of Calabria, Guillou has suggested that evidence for the investment in silk production is a clear indication of the region’s economic expansion and demographic growth in the tenth and eleventh centuries.\textsuperscript{222} In addition, the large number of cities founded under Byzantine rule and the general increase in building activity and expansion speaks to a period of economic and demographic growth.\textsuperscript{223} In central Italy, archaeological surveys of the San Vincenzo monastery to the northwest of Monte Cassino show no signs of increased agricultural activity before the tenth century. However, by the late tenth century, the monastery improved its land cultivation, along with an apparent population increase and re-fortification at nearby Colle Castellano.\textsuperscript{224} These are just a few


\textsuperscript{221} Const. Porph., \textit{DAI} (supra n. 5) 27. 118-19

\textsuperscript{222} A. Guillou, “Production and Profits in the Byzantine Provence of Italy (Tenth to Eleventh Centuries),” \textit{DOP}, XXVIII (1974) 95.

\textsuperscript{223} Guillou (supra n. 222) 96. The cities that were founded include Civitae, Dragonara, Fiorentino, Troia, Mottola, and Oppido.

\textsuperscript{224} Hodges (supra n. 211) 69.
examples, but indicative of the general growth in the prosperity of Byzantine Italy, and of the Empire as a whole, in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

**Increasing Influence of the Middle Class**

One of the most significant aspects of the 'Commercial Revolution' was the social and political changes that it served to bring about. Most notable of these changes was the increasing political power and influence of the middle class, characterized by Mango as "the growth of a petty bourgeoisie."[225] The development of this middle class is no surprise considering the increasing wealth that these groups brought to their cities. Amalfi in particular seems to have had a merchant class that wielded considerable influence in the affairs of the city government. "Among her citizens the merchants formed the largest and most influential group in city politics. Commercial interests overrode all other considerations and imposed a foreign policy of a directness and consistency truly remarkable."[226] By the eleventh century, the Byzantine middle class was also gaining ground. In fact, even several emperors during the period came from less than noble backgrounds. Michael IV (1034-41) had previously been a money-changer by profession[227] and Michael V's (1041-42) father had been a ship’s caulkers - hence the surname "Kalaphates" or caulkers.[228] However, it was not until nearly the middle of eleventh century that the middle-class population of Constantinople and the

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[225] Mango (supra n. 201) 82.

[226] Citarella (supra n. 158) 303.


[228] Psellus (supra n. 7) IV. 26.
private guilds began to exert more political influence in the affairs of the state. The growing power of this new bourgeois was evident in the deposition of emperor Michael V by “those from the workshops” and “the people of the agora” in 1042. Hendy attributes the rising influence of the Byzantine merchant classes to several factors. First, beginning with the reign of Constantine IX (1042-55), the criteria of distinguished birth or noble descent, the cursus honorum, for entrance into the formerly restricted senatorial class was abolished. Secondly, Hendy remarks that “there seems little doubt... that the increasing social and political role allotted to or assumed by the popular masses and the members of the guilds was itself a reflection of a corresponding increase in their economic base.” Harvey has also demonstrated that by the middle of the eleventh century, Byzantine landowners and monasteries were also receiving maritime privileges equivalent to the Italians. This is reflective of the “strengthening of the economic situation of the aristocracy,” and monastic centers producing goods for the state.

Clearly, Byzantium was benefitting from and participating in the economic growth of the Mediterranean. Unfortunately, the Byzantine state, while aided by the economic development of the period, was still unable to adapt to the new way of conducting trade and commerce that emerged in the tenth century. Similarly, the rise of the Byzantine merchant class in the mid-eleventh century came much too late to make a

229 Psellus (supra n. 7) V. 16, 25, 26, trans. in Hendy (supra n. 69) 573.

230 Hendy (supra n. 69) 574.

231 Hendy (supra n. 69) 580.

232 Harvey (supra n. 220) 238-43.

233 Harvey (supra n. 220) 238-39.
difference. The emerging power of the middle class in Constantinople was clearly not appreciated by the status quo and it is reasonable to assume that their influence was more restricted in other less cosmopolitan cities of the Empire. Moreover, these developments were halted in 1081 by the reimposition of constraints following the military seizure of power led by Alexius I Comnenus and were not to be relaxed before 1181. The antiquated and inflexible attitudes of the aristocracy still had life in them it seems.

Economic development in the Byzantine Empire occurred in spite of the policies of the state and the contrast to the social and political changes occurring in the West is noteworthy. The Byzantine state was developing and changing along with the rest of the medieval world, but this did not begin fully until the eleventh century. By then, the relevance of Byzantine rule, particularly in southern Italy, could be called into question.
CHAPTER VI

COLLAPSE OF THE WESTERN FRONTIER: THE END OF BYZANTINE ITALY

The Byzantine state’s problems in the West by the eleventh century were not simply an issue of economic or military strength. The Byzantine state was certainly participating, if in a somewhat limited way, in the economic upsurge of the ‘Commercial Revolution.’ However, the significant weakness of the Byzantine Empire by this time was in its inability to recognize the changing economic, political, and social conditions of the western frontier. More and more, Byzantium can be seen as a backward-looking relic of Antiquity that was far too slow to respond to new ideas of political organization and economic development. This was never more true than in Byzantine Italy, where the rising power of the Italian city-states, combined with the turbulent nature of the region, would undercut the authority of Byzantium and, more importantly, its ability to enforce that authority. Not surprisingly, the inability of the Byzantine state to exert its political will, and its military and naval protection, would further alienate its dependencies. This would be its greatest failing and the reason behind the collapse of the Byzantine western frontier in the eleventh century, symbolized by the loss of Byzantine Italy. The Norman conquest of Byzantine southern Italy in the mid-eleventh century was, by then, almost unavoidable (fig. 2).
Fig. 2. Map of southern Italy and the extent of Byzantine territory, ca. A.D. 980. (After Kreutz, Barbara M., Before the Normans: Southern Italy in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries [Philadelphia 1991] map 2, xvi.)
Byzantine Influence and Control of Southern Italy

Throughout most of the tenth century, southern Italy was divided into several competing, and often confusing, authorities. The Byzantine Empire’s direct control extended from Calabria in the southwest to Apulia along the eastern shore as far north as Siponto and the Gulf of Manfredonia. This area was broken up into the two themes of Calabria in the south and Longobardia in the north. Added to this were the nominally Byzantine city-states of Amalfi, Naples, and Gaeta on the Campanian coast to the west and, of course, Venice in the northern Adriatic. Directly to the north and west of Byzantine territory were the Lombard principalities of Capua-Benevento and Salerno respectively. Byzantine emperors had varying degrees of influence and control on these principalities, but always considered the Lombard territories to be theirs as client states.234 In a way, Byzantium never gave up its claims or desire for suzerainty over southern Italy. “Dreams of a re-united and restored imperium romanum persisted among the main parties involved in Italian politics: the papacy, the German emperors, the Byzantine emperors of the Macedonian and Comnenian dynasties, and later the Norman rulers of the south.”235 Byzantine emperors in particular felt that they were the rightful rulers of Italy and their influence was felt to varying degrees throughout the peninsula. This was especially true in the south where Greek culture, traditions, and the classical heritage went back to Roman times.236 By the tenth century, much of Calabria and


235 Gay (supra n. 162) I, 146-50; Ciggaar (supra n. 181) 246.

236 Ciggaar (supra n. 181) 248.
southern Apulia were Byzantine in religion, language, and culture.\textsuperscript{237} The south had a large Greek population and Greek rite churches, monasteries, and Byzantine art were prevalent.\textsuperscript{238} Still, the region was not uniformly Byzantine by any means. Latin cultural and religious overlaps abounded, with extensive trade and travel between the Byzantine provinces, the Lombard principalities, Rome, Constantinople, and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{239} The more important aspect of Byzantine southern Italy was one of diversity and the cultural mixing of many different traditions. It was truly the crossroads between East and West.

The Byzantine administration of southern Italy was handled by the provincial governors, or \textit{strategoi}, of each theme. These \textit{strategoi} were the local representatives of the Byzantine emperors, generals of the themal military forces, and responsible for the awarding of privileges to local leaders, churches, and monasteries.\textsuperscript{240} Byzantine governors also had responsibility for provincial building and construction, including the fortification of towns and cities within their administration.\textsuperscript{241} In many ways, the Byzantine \textit{strategoi} of Italy gained political capital from such contributions to the local region. Similarly, maintaining the allegiance and friendship of the influential ecclesiastical institutions through the granting of gifts and support was also important.

\textsuperscript{237} Ciggaar (supra n. 181) 276-77.


\textsuperscript{239} Ciggaar (supra n. 181) 248-54. Large communities of Italians lived throughout the Byzantine Empire and Italian monks were welcome at the Greek monastery on Mount Athos.

\textsuperscript{240} von Falkenhausen (supra n. 234) 211.

\textsuperscript{241} For example, Basil Boioannes (1017-1028) founded and fortified several cities in Apulia, including Troia, Castel Fiorentino, Civitae, and Dragonara. See V. von Falkenhausen, \textit{La dominazione bizantina nell’Italia meridionale dal IX all’XI secolo} (Bari 1978) 57, cited in von Falkenhausen (supra n. 234) 213-14.
In 950, the famous Benedictine abbey of Monte Cassino was renewed with the aid of the Byzantine governor, having been laid waste after Saracen depredations in 883. This was not just an act of spiritual piety. Monte Cassino was located in the Lombard principality of Capua and Benevento, where the territorial ambitions of the Papacy, the Germans, and Byzantium overlapped. The spiritual (and political) support of the monks could be decisive.

Byzantine southern Italy was therefore only partly Byzantine. On the one hand, Byzantine influences were strong and frequent interaction with the larger Empire made them more so. On the other hand, southern Italy was a unique culture and society in and of itself. The Byzantine state could not claim the kind of long standing ethnic and cultural continuity evident, for example, in the Peloponnese or Anatolia. As a result, the right of Byzantium to assert her sovereignty over southern Italy could be called into question.

**Military Resurgence of the Tenth Century**

By the tenth century, Byzantium was badly in need of some external successes. With the advent of Muslim threats to the safety and security of the Byzantine state, the organization of military strength was modified. This was largely successful for a time in preserving the sovereignty of the empire. Under the Macedonian dynasty (Basil I, 867-886, to Basil II, 963-1025), this period would see the resurgence of Byzantine power and an unprecedented territorial expansion.

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The Byzantine army of the tenth century was composed of two primary divisions. The first group was the themata, or armies based in the provinces or themes. This system of basing armies in the themes existed from the seventh to the eleventh centuries. The themata were commanded by a strategos (general) who was responsible for the recruitment, maintenance, and organization of the army. Persons required to serve were the strateotai. Though paid, the stratiotai were responsible for supplying their own equipment, horses, etc. The cost of this support came from the soldier's property - the stratiotika ktemata. The second group was the tagmata. Created by Constantine V (741-775) in the eighth century, the tagmata were Imperial elite cavalry regiments stationed around Constantinople. By the middle of the tenth century, there were four tagma: Scholai, Exkoubitores, Vigla, and Hikanatoi. John Tzimisces (969-976) created a fifth tagma in 970, the Athanatoi (Immortals). The tagmata were commanded by domestikoi (domestics), the highest ranking of which was the Domestic of the Scholai - the Vigla were led by a droungarios (admiral). The soldiers of the tagmata were supported entirely by the state.

In the mid-tenth century, changes in military organization began under

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244 Haldon (supra n. 219)

Constantine VII (913-959) and were continued by Nicephorus II Phocas (963-969) and later emperors.\textsuperscript{246} First was the creation of small frontier themes in buffer zones and around captured territory - enabling the Byzantine army to have a supply of soldiers close to the borders. During the reign of Romanus II (959-963) the traditional post of overall commander of the Byzantine army held by the Domestic of the \textit{Scholae}, was divided into a western and eastern Domestic corresponding to Europe and Asia Minor respectively. This reform theoretically would enable simultaneous campaigns on both eastern and western fronts.\textsuperscript{247} Up until the mid-tenth century, the \textit{tagmata} had always been stationed in and around the capital. However, with the beginning of a more offensive stance in the 950’s, the Byzantine empire sent detachments of the \textit{tagmata} to the frontiers where they could be easily available for campaign.\textsuperscript{248} “Taken collectively, the reforms and changes to the \textit{themata} and \textit{tagmata} reflect the efforts undertaken by the Byzantines to consolidate their military strength and to consolidate it along the frontiers - policies in which Nikephoros Phokas took a leading role.”\textsuperscript{249} However, these reforms were to have other, less desirable effects.

Similar reforms were enacted with the Byzantine navy, beginning in the late ninth century. With the loss of Crete and Sicily, as well as the continuing destruction of coastal regions at the hands of the Muslims, Basil I (867-886) urgently attempted to

\textsuperscript{246} McGeer (supra n. 243) 199-200.

\textsuperscript{247} Ahrweiler (supra n. 243) 52-67; McGeer (supra n. 243) 201.


\textsuperscript{249} McGeer (supra n. 243) 202.
reorganize the Byzantine navy.\textsuperscript{250} This involved the appointment of a new admiral or 
\textit{droungarios} as the overall commander of the Byzantine navy and the Imperial fleet, as 
well as a general reorganization of the fleet.\textsuperscript{251} Prior to the tenth century, the 
\textit{droungarios} of the Imperial fleet held a lower rank than the themal \textit{strategoi}. However, 
by the middle of the tenth century, "he had become, next to the \textit{domesticus} of the 
\textit{scholae}, the most important military official of the Empire, a clear indication of the 
growing importance of the navy."\textsuperscript{252} In addition, ships of the Imperial fleet were now 
stationed at the mouth of the Hellespont to ward off Cretan pirates, and the new naval 
theme of Samos was added in the Aegean.\textsuperscript{253} These reforms began the modest renewal 
of the Byzantine navy.

By the time of Romanus I Lecapenus (920-944) both the Imperial and provincial 
fleets of the East were strengthened and more effective. In 923, the Imperial fleet 
intercepted and defeated Leo of Tripoli in the Aegean and in 941,\textsuperscript{254} the Byzantine navy 
was able to destroy the large Russian flotilla of Prince Igor of Kiev that was attacking 
Constantinople.\textsuperscript{255} By the mid-tenth century, Byzantium set its sights on the strategic

\textsuperscript{250} Const. Porph., \textit{DAI} (supra n. 5) 50,51. 247-57; Treadgold (supra n. 38) 211; Ahrweiler (supra 
n. 133) 92, 101.

\textsuperscript{251} Lewis (supra n.40) 157.

\textsuperscript{252} Ostrogorsky (supra n. 30) 251.

\textsuperscript{253} Lewis (supra n. 40) 157.

\textsuperscript{254} Lewis (supra n. 40) 149; Treadgold (supra n. 38) 478.

\textsuperscript{255} Treadgold (supra n. 38) 484; \textit{RPC} (supra n. 19) 74-75.
island of Crete. While earlier expeditions, notably in 911 and again in 944\textsuperscript{256}, had ended in failure, the importance of the island to security in the eastern Mediterranean made its conquest a top priority. In 960, the emperor Romanus II launched a great naval campaign against Crete, including 307 warships, that succeeded in capturing the capital city of Chandax in 961.\textsuperscript{257} Thereafter, Nicephorus Phocas achieved a string of victories with the conquest of Cyprus (963) and northern Syria (Antioch fell in 968). By 1025, Basil II (963-1025)\textsuperscript{258} had extended the Empire’s control over an expanse of territory not seen since Justinian I. Bulgaria, Armenia, and Syria had all been subjugated. Basil II had begun the re-conquest of Arab Sicily, but died before the campaign really started. The strengthened and reformed military and capable leadership of the Macedonians had done much to restore Byzantium’s former glory. Unfortunately, this was to be their last great expansion.

**Emerging Instability**

In spite of the successes of the tenth century, Byzantium still was not militarily strong in the West. In the early tenth century, the emerging navy of the Fatimids began to bring havoc to the central Mediterranean. In 918, Fatimid forces began moving against southern Italy with the capture of Reggio in Calabria.\textsuperscript{259} They attacked Calabria again in 922 and 928, and then the Campanian coast in 929, seizing substantial

\textsuperscript{256} See Const. Porph., *De ceremoniis* (supra n. 5) II. 44 and II.45 for 910 Cretan expeditions of 911 and 949.

\textsuperscript{257} Treadgold (supra n. 38) 495.

\textsuperscript{258} Treadgold (supra n. 38) 513-533.

\textsuperscript{259} Vasiliev (supra n. 21) II, 103.
plunder. In the 950s, the Fatimids again attacked Calabria and defeated a Byzantine fleet off the coast of Messina. Byzantine naval weakness was apparent. In fact, there is very limited evidence for Byzantine naval vessels stationed in Longobardia or Calabria at this time. During the 928 Fatimid raid, the strategos of Calabria only managed to send seven ships, which were defeated, against the Arab forces. Imperial fleets were, however, used to oppose major Arab invasions and in support of Byzantine offensives on Sicily.

It is significant that, while Byzantium was preoccupied with campaigns in the East, the Byzantine provinces of the West were by and large left to fend for themselves. This was to be a persistent problem for the Byzantine subjects of Italy. Particularly in the case of the provincial navies, who were expected to defend western Byzantine possessions, but were not adequately supported. The fact of the matter was that Byzantium gave a low priority to her western provinces. In the accounting of themes in De ceremoniis, those of the West, in the official list of precedence, are listed last behind the eastern provinces. The themes of Italy and Dalmatia also did not receive an annual roga or stipend from the imperial treasury. Their governors were required to support

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260 Lev (supra n. 130) 231-32.

261 Lev (supra n. 130) 234-35.

262 Lev (supra n. 130) 231-32.

263 Ahrweiler (supra n. 133) 112-13; Lev (supra n. 130) 234-35. In 964, after the successful conquest of Crete, Constantinople sent contingents of the Imperial fleet with an expeditionary force against Sicily. The fleet and army were however destroyed the next year.
themselves directly from the themes.\textsuperscript{264} The reasons for this are difficult to pinpoint, but it may be a simple matter of priorities. It is apparent that the West was considered to be more of a strategic asset than an integral part of the Empire.

Byzantium was certainly aware of the fragile situation, but unwilling to take significant action in the West unless faced with a serious threat. The themes of southern Italy were, in effect, on their own. In many cases, Constantinople was more concerned with maintaining control of the coastline than governing the interior. In Apulia during the tenth century, Byzantine authorities did make a considerable effort to fortify all of the ports and population centers.\textsuperscript{265} In Calabria, however, strong defenses were not produced to the same extent. "In practice, and to some extent by imperial design, the towns and population of Calabria acted as buffers or even as decoys, diverting the Moslems from raids further afield into the Adriatic, while also discouraging their permanent installation in Calabria."\textsuperscript{266} The premise that such a practice might be a part of Imperial policy is truly astounding.

More than anything else, the raids and incursions of the Arabs brought insecurity and economic hardship to the people of Byzantine Italy. Continued depredations and the lack of a strong Byzantine defense of the West took their toll. As von Falkenhausen

\textsuperscript{264} Const. Porph., De Ceremoniis (supra n. 5) II. 50; H. Antonidas-Bibicou., Études d’histoire maritime de Byzance a propos du "thème des Caravisiens" (Paris 1966) 91.

\textsuperscript{265} von Falkenhausen (supra n. 234) 148-49. The need to repair ruined fortresses was expressed by Nicholas Mysticus to the governor of Longobardia.

remarks, “two hundred years of Byzantine government may not have been an altogether happy experience for the southern Italian population.”

In those days the Arabians with their armies, with Al Muizz as their commander, overran Italy; they devastated the entire province of Calabria, and reached Oria, on the border of Apulia; they besieged it, defeated all its forces; so that the city was taken in dire distress; its defenders had no power to resist; it was taken by storm; the sword smote it to the very soul. They killed most of its inhabitants, and led the survivors into captivity.

Byzantium was well aware of her own naval weakness. “Having volatile and porous ‘inner’ frontiers in the waters of the Aegean, the Peloponnese, and Macedonia, the Constantinopolitan regime needed to compensate for its lack of mastery of what should have been home ground and home waters.” However, instead of adequately defending the western provinces, the Byzantine state often resorted to diplomacy or bribery in lieu of military intervention to restrict her opponents. This was important in the West as Byzantium sought to neutralize or hinder potentially dangerous alliances. In the early 920's, Symeon of Bulgaria made at least two attempts to acquire the aid of a Muslim fleet for an assault on Constantinople. Only lavish gifts and the pledge of the resumption of tribute payments by Byzantium prevented a Fatimid-Bulgarian alliance. Acting in a more direct way, in order to pacify and stop the continued raids of the Slavs of the interior in Dalmatia, Basil I ordered that all of the payments made by the region to

267 von Falkenhausen (supra n. 234) 224.


269 Shepard (supra n. 266) 76–77.

270 Vasiliev (supra n. 21) II, 253–54; II, 32.

271 Scylitzes (supra n. 227) 264–65; Vasiliev (supra n. 21) II, 251–52.
the governing *strategos* should henceforth be made to the interior Slavs in exchange for peace.\(^{272}\) The Imperial government seems to have been largely indifferent to the fate of the hinterland, so long as the coastal towns were secure.\(^{273}\) Of course this only weakened the Dalmatian theme even more.

Policies such as this only exacerbated the problems of the local population and increased their unhappiness with Byzantine dominion. As disruptions continued, the people of Byzantine Italy had every reason to believe they were not adequately protected. To make matters worse, the burden of paying tribute to the Arabs in exchange for peace was often placed upon the afflicted regions themselves. A treaty concluded sometime between 917 and 918 by the *strategos* Eustasius obliged the cities of Calabria to pay an annual tribute of 20,000 pieces of gold to Muslim raiders. Eustasius’ successor, John Buzalon, was so oppressive in collecting this payment that he was killed in a revolt by the local people near Reggio.\(^{274}\) Even when Byzantium took the offensive, the burdens on the local people and the perceived consequences could provoke trouble. In 965, *strategos* Nicephorus Hexakionites, in preparing a naval campaign against Arab Sicily, ordered the population of the theme of Calabria to build and man the invasion fleet. The people of Rossano in Calabria, possibly fearing Arab retaliation, burnt the ships and killed the captains.\(^{275}\)

\(^{272}\) Const. Porph., *DAI* (supra n. 5) 30. 147.

\(^{273}\) Shepard (supra n. 266) 86.

\(^{274}\) Cedrenus (supra n. 109) II, 202, 354; Amari (supra n. 130) II, 153.

\(^{275}\) von Falkenhausen (supra n. 234) 224.
These events are significant in that they point out the essential flaw in the Byzantine administration of southern Italy. In many ways, Byzantium viewed her western provinces as bases for further ambitions. They simply did not take the welfare of the local people into consideration. In addition, the West, while politically important, did not necessitate the kind of commitment given by the Byzantine state to the East. The campaigns of Basil II are telling in this regard. Byzantium still had the resources to mount successful campaigns along its borders, but only through the employment of Imperial units. Local defenses were never up to the task. After all, the Byzantine provincial navies of the West were practically non-existent. Furthermore, they placed burdens and restrictions on their subject populations that were not equivalent to the protection that the state provided. The advantages of Byzantine citizenship in cosmopolitan southern Italy must have looked less and less worthwhile.

**Political Alternatives**

By the early eleventh century, Byzantium's position in Italy was tenuous at best. The growing disillusionment of the population of southern Italy towards Byzantium was creating a dangerous situation for other powers to exploit. Byzantium was still strong militarily, but her control was increasingly limited to the regions that were subject to the Byzantine army.

The revival of the western Roman Empire in the later tenth century provided the population of southern Italy with a new political alternative. When Otto II came south to
fight the Arabs he received support in both Apulia and Calabria. 276 In 1009, a revolt broke out in Apulia, led by Meles, a nobleman from Bari that was supported by the German court. The uprising was eventually repressed in 1018 by Basil Boioannes, but it is possible that Meles wanted nothing less than to establish an independent Duchy in Apulia, apart from Byzantine control. 277 This revolt is significant in that it represents the first substantial appearance of Norman mercenaries in southern Italy. 278

The situation that the Normans came upon in southern Italy was one of chaos and turmoil. Various powers were engaged in a struggle for dominance in Italy that was increasingly violent. 279 The Normans exploited this situation. The great and much discussed schism between the Papacy and Greek church in 1054 280 created a rift between East and West that was never to heal. From this situation, the Normans were able to gain the support of the Papacy and begin the dismantling of Byzantine Italy. Unfortunately, Byzantium was, by this time, militarily weak as a result of the efforts of Constantine IX

276 Gay (supra n. 162) 330-35.

277 von Falkenhausen (supra n. 234) 224.


280 Cowdrey (supra n. 242) 110-11.
(1042-1055) to curb the Byzantine military and from the increasing naval power of the Italian city-states.\textsuperscript{281} By this point, the Byzantine state could do nothing to stop inevitable. The end of Byzantine Italy, when it came, was almost anti-climactic. On the 16\textsuperscript{th} of April, 1071, the Byzantine city of Bari, last stronghold of the Empire in Italy, fell to the Normans.\textsuperscript{282}

\textsuperscript{281} Lewis (supra n. 40) 231-32.

\textsuperscript{282} For the fall of Bari in 1071, see William of Apulia, \textit{La Geste de Robert Guiscard}, II, 486-570, III, 110-166; D. Douglas, \textit{The Norman Achievement, 1050-1100} (Berkeley 1969) 56.
CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSIONS

The military and political failures of the Byzantine Empire in the eleventh century have long been seen as the first act in the beginning of the end for Byzantium. The reasons for this are apparent. The military disasters and corresponding loss of territory in the latter half of the eleventh century are considered as so thoroughly significant that they must represent the onset of the destruction of the empire. In many ways, this view is the result of hindsight. For example, we know from the advantage of history that the Byzantine Empire was never able to regain the lands lost by 1100. But how important was this? In terms of pure acreage, the territory lost to the empire in the sixth and seventh centuries was much greater than that in the eleventh century. Yet, no one is dating the decline of Byzantium that early. It should be noted that the empire did continue, in one form or another, until the fifteenth century. So what happened?

The roots of the problem seem to come from the nature of the Byzantine state. In many ways, the Byzantine Empire was perfectly suited to a prosperous existence in the Ancient world. The problem inherent in a state steeped in history and tradition is its tendency to rely and refer to that history to the point where it can no longer adapt to new and different situations. The rulers of Byzantium saw themselves as keepers of the Roman tradition, and correct by virtue of the durability of that tradition. They had inherited a system that they doggedly strove to maintain. As a result, they were less inclined to contemplate, much less adopt new ideas.

With the emergence of overwhelmingly hostile and determined powers on the
borders of the state, the Empire became even more rigid and defensive in its position. Byzantium was, in effect, on the front line between the Christian and Islamic portions of the known world and at times fighting for its very existence. As a result, the Byzantine state employed all means necessary to fight their enemies. The prohibition of trade to the Muslim states was one way to do this. While this may have allowed the state to survive the upheavals of the seventh and eighth centuries, the long-term affects were more detrimental. As Byzantium sought to close the trade routes to the Muslim world, she only succeeded in altering the patterns of trade. While protecting the coasts and sea lanes of the Empire, Byzantium only restricted her own merchants from the most lucrative sources of trade and commerce in the Mediterranean. This not only allowed others to take over much of this trade, but also hindered the Byzantine maritime centers and therefore the Byzantine merchant marine. Byzantine naval weakness necessarily followed.

Certainly, the collapse of the Byzantine frontier in the eleventh century cannot be directly tied to policies dating back to the eight century. Instead, the policies of the Byzantine state set in motion a process wherein Greek merchants, hindered on all sides by the state, were slowly forced out of many of the long-distance markets. The defensive attitudes of the state further exacerbated the problem by not allowing for the development of a more entrepreneurial approach to trade and commerce. While other states along her borders actively developed trading networks, Byzantium remained passive and entrenched. It would have very easy for the rulers of Byzantium, sitting as they were on the crossroads of East-West trade, to flood the markets of western Europe.
with eastern goods. They chose otherwise. Their lack of understanding of market forces, combined with an antiquated and negative view of commerce, prevented them from doing anything to assist their own merchants. The end result was the growth and development of a region on the frontier of the Byzantine state: Byzantine Italy.

The rise of the city-states of Italy can be directly tied to their relationship with Byzantium. The cities that gave nominal submission to the Byzantine Empire were able to gain access to Byzantine markets, receive the protection of the Byzantine state, and maintain enough independence to avoid Imperial restrictions and regulations. This was an ideal situation. These cities prospered more dramatically than all other cities in the region. This cannot be just coincidence. It was only later in the eleventh and twelfth centuries that other Italian cities such as Genoa and Pisa, not directly aligned with Byzantium, began to rise in prominence. In addition, their location in the central Mediterranean allowed the merchants of these cities to also establish trading networks to both the Islamic littoral and the fairs of western Europe. In a way, this would have been impossible if they were either under strict Byzantine control or completely independent. Their ambiguous status was their chief advantage.

As the Italians prospered, new political and economic systems began to develop. Hendy has argued for the emergence of "...two fundamentally different political and social structures, each with its own distinct set of dynamics and ideologies." The Byzantine state, much like the Roman Empire, functioned on a system based on land exploitation and the accumulation of surplus. The dominant class was therefore

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283 Hendy (supra n. 69) 599.
antagonistic to trade and attempted to control and regulate those who practiced it. In contrast, the Italian trading cities had limited territorial control and, since they could not base themselves on land, increased their wealth through investments in trading ventures.\textsuperscript{284} This was a significant development. Commerce, and not Imperial pretensions or territorial expansion, dictated politics and foreign policy.

By the tenth century, the growth of the Italian cities, thanks to the passivity of Byzantium, may have sparked the “Commercial Revolution” of the Middle Ages. In addition, as the strength of the Italian merchant marine grew, so did their navies. Byzantium found itself relying more and more on the assistance of the fleets of their Italian allies to defend its possessions in the West. Similarly, as the Byzantine merchant marine declined in importance, so too did the provincial fleets. The Imperial fleet still was strong, but had to be used with greater frequency in lieu of the provincial defenses. Adding to the problem, since Byzantium could not always afford to send military units from Constantinople, the state had to resort to bribery, diplomacy, and alliances to defend some of the more distant regions of the frontier. None of these measures was more than a temporary solution.

It was becoming increasingly apparent that Byzantium had neither the means nor the will to defend adequately its western territories. The Empire was beginning to show its hollow nature. The most aggressive and capable fleets under its dominion were the fleets of the Italian city-states. In exchange for trading privileges and trade access, cities such as Venice took over the role of the Byzantine navy and absent merchant marine;

\textsuperscript{284} Hendy (supra n. 69) 600.
carrying mail, transporting soldiers and supplies, and policing the sea lanes all fell to the sailors of the Italian fleets. The authority of the Byzantine state to govern southern Italy must have become rather tenuous. The population of Byzantine Italy was subject to all the burdens and restrictions of the Byzantine state, but was by and large left to defend itself. The revolts of the tenth and eleventh centuries make it clear that the growing separation between the people of southern Italy and Constantinople would soon come to its eventual conclusion.

By the eleventh century, the fall of Byzantine Italy was inevitable. While it could be argued that the Byzantine state was simply a victim of the geopolitical circumstances of the day, the Empire’s role in bringing about these circumstances should not be forgotten. The collapse of Byzantine Italy could almost be viewed as a picture in miniature of problems to come for the state as a whole. The rising power of the Italian city-states would come to dominate the Mediterranean in later years, largely due to the lucrative connection to Byzantium. It is no accident that the sack of Constantinople in 1204, arguably the Empire’s worst disaster, was in large measure facilitated and carried out by the navies of the Italian city-states. In effect, Byzantium enabled the rise of the cities of Italy, and it was these same cities that would eventually bring her to final ruin.
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“The Bozburun Byzantine Shipwreck Excavation: 1996 Campaign”, with Frederick M.


“Riding a New Wave: Digital Technology and Underwater Archaeology,” with David A.