

An Irrevocable Prejudice: Roman Impressions of Venetians and Normans in Twelfth Century  
Byzantium

by

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Presented to the Department of History  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in History with  
Honors

Washington & Lee University  
Lexington, Virginia

April 12, 2021

### Introduction

In 968 A.D., the Holy Roman Emperor Otto II sought to forge an alliance with the eastern Roman empire through the marriage of his son, the future Otto II, to a Roman princess. Otto II himself had married a niece of the Roman emperor John I, Theophanu, through the arrangement of his father, Otto I. To negotiate the contract, Otto II enlisted Liudprand, the bishop of Cremona, to travel to Constantinople. This diplomatic mission would require the utmost tact; the Romans of the East saw themselves as inhabiting the one true Roman Empire and became indignant at the suggestion of another Roman Empire. When the bishop arrived in the capital city, he did not receive a celebratory welcome. Instead, he had to stand in the rain for hours, and then the Romans housed him in a crumbling castle. When the Romans failed to supply him with a horse or another form of transportation, Liudprand was forced to walk through the muddy streets of Constantinople to the Sacred Palace. When, after weeks of adjuration, Liudprand finally obtained an audience with the emperor, the sovereign castigated Otto II, labeling him a traitor and a scoundrel and condemning his military campaigns in Italy and Greece, perceived Roman territories. Furthermore, the emperor dismissed the archbishop when he suggested the marriage alliance. Even when the supreme ruler finally permitted the bishop to leave, he was not allowed to purchase and transport the city's famed purple cloth since it was considered too precious for barbarians and reserved for the Romans.<sup>1</sup>

Although the Romans' impudence towards the German bishop may appear surprising since the Romans were experts in court protocol and imperial ceremony, the average Roman citizen would have condoned such actions. The Romans nurtured a fierce and abiding prejudice against foreigners and saw themselves as protectors of the ancient Roman civilization, a source

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<sup>1</sup> Guerdan, *Byzantium: Its Triumphs and Tragedy*, 166 - 179.

of spiritual and intellectual light in the dark ages. They considered the outside world to be the home of unnatural and barbaric peoples and constructed myths of the monsters that inhabited this uncharted territory. Such was this prejudice that even when the Romans conducted military alliances with other societies, they maintained an air of superiority. For example, when the Normans and the Romans were allies, the Roman court labeled the Normans as “the barbarians bearing the double-edged sword on their shoulders”, a people that should not be trusted and should be seen as distinctly other.<sup>2</sup>

Twelfth - century Romans regarded their long and celebrated history with pride and a sense of superiority. Although the Roman empire of the west fell in the early centuries after Christ, the eastern empire seated in Constantinople endured. The Romans saw themselves as descendants of the Ancient Romans and labeled themselves as such.<sup>3</sup> Their civilization was a result of the synthesis of Hellenistic Greek culture with that of Christianity, and the Romans referred to Constantinople as the new Rome and new Jerusalem. They believed that they were special people, a center of Christianity that still held the keys to the learnings of antiquity which had been lost in the West.<sup>4 5</sup> Under the reign of the emperor Alexios I (r. 1081 – 1118 C.E.) in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Constantinople was the largest city in Christendom.<sup>6</sup> The Romans’ established superiority greatly influenced how the Romans viewed other civilizations, which possessed one or none of the aforementioned characteristics that distinguished the Roman Empire.

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<sup>2</sup> Ann Wharton Epstein and A. P. (Aleksandr Petrovich) Kazhdan, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage; 7 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 174.

<sup>3</sup> Epstein and Kazhdan, *Change in Roman Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 167.

<sup>4</sup> Geanakoplos, *Interaction of the “Sibling” Roman and Western Cultures in the Middle Ages and Italian Renaissance (330-1600)*, 27.

<sup>5</sup> Epstein and Kazhdan, *Change in Roman Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 167.

<sup>6</sup> *The Oxford History of Byzantium* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2002), 69.

Various historians have theorized on the underlying causes of this cultural prejudice and collective Roman identity, and its political and economic implications. Judith Herrin argues that the empire's deeply inherited structures allowed it to respond to the variety of challenges it faced over its nearly thousand-year life.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the Roman empire's established cultural framework provided a shared sense of belonging and created a flexible heritage able to sustain and enhance the empire through many crises.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to Herrin's perception of an unchanging society, Robert Browning envisions the Roman empire as a state with continuous change and development under its unburied façade.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, he reveals that Romans' view of their own society and the world passed through a series of transformations that were influenced by internal social and economic changes and the different societies that surrounded Byzantium.<sup>10</sup> When discussing the impact of Western culture on Roman society, Michael Angold perceived that opening the empire to Western influence required emperors to attempt to harness the energies and resources of a power which was potentially hostile, creating a new set of conditions.<sup>11</sup> While this confrontation with the West began as feelings of mutual suspicion and ambivalence, Angold argues that it soon developed into outright hostility.<sup>12</sup> The celebrated historian Cyril Mango echoes Browning's conception of the Roman façade, arguing that this presentation served as part of the empire's mystique and created a vision of studied immutability. However, Mango argues, in reality the empire often had to rebuild itself, although labeling this change as innovation was considered subversive and dangerous.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Judith Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Herrin, xvi.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Browning, *The Byzantine Empire* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Browning.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 2nd ed (London; Longman, 1997), 170.

<sup>12</sup> Angold, 10–11.

<sup>13</sup> *The Oxford History of Byzantium*, 9–10.

Deep cultural prejudices dominated Roman relations with the West in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. These feelings are characteristic of the ancient Greek practice of division between the Greeks and barbarians. The writings of court historians during the reign of the Komnenian dynasty reveal these enmities, and also provide detailed and personal political narratives. In addition, through their close connection to the imperial family and the Roman bureaucracy, these writers are able to offer insight into major diplomatic decisions. The three major historians who characterized the Komnenian era were Anna Komnene (1083 – 1150 C.E.), John Kinnamos (1143 – 1185 C.E), and Nicetas Choniates (1150 – 1216 C.E). Anna Komnene, the daughter of the Komnenian dynasty's founder Alexios I, chronicles her father's nearly-forty-year reign in *The Alexiad*. John Kinnamos, an ordinary Roman bureaucrat and privileged confidante of Manuel I, covers the reigns of John II (r. 1118 – 1143 C.E.) and Manuel I (r. 1143 – 1180 C.E.) in his work *Deeds of John and Manuel Komnenos*. Niketas Choniates, a celebrated scholar and judge, begins his history *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates* at the empire's height under Manuel I and concludes his work with the 1204 C.E. sack of Constantinople and the ensuing devastation. Because of their close access to the emperors and insight into the complex negotiations needed to maintain the delicate balance of power in the high middle ages, the writings of Komnena, Kinnamos, and Choniates are especially valuable. In all three of these works, the authors characterize the Westerners as uncouth barbarians. This conviction in the inferiority of Westerners also led the writers to refer to foreign peoples by outdated terms. Their exclusiveness and narrowmindedness may have contributed to the breakdown of relationships between East and West in later centuries.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Harris, *Byzantium and the Crusades*, xv-30.

In their respective histories, the authors also reveal their fundamental and abiding prejudice towards the Normans and the Venetians, labeling these peoples as vulgar, barbaric, uncivilized, inhumane, and consumed by hubris. However, their attitudes are highly influenced by the changing geopolitical context in the Mediterranean sphere; as one of these nations rose in political and military power, historians likewise increased the strength and modified the direction of their vitriol. Many scholars of the Roman empire have considered the personal situation and individual motivations of Komnene, Kinnamos, and Choniates in their interpretations of these texts. However, this analysis will examine how these historians, regardless of their unique backgrounds, were all strongly influenced by the constantly shifting and evolving international balance of power in the Mediterranean, focusing first on Komnene's *Alexiad*, then Kinnamos's *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, and culminating in Choniates' *O City Byzantium*. The historians resolved to look beyond their personal prejudices and came to recognize and accept that they did not live in the world of their forefathers, a time in which the Roman empire eclipsed the West in scholastic learning, cultural refinement, and military dynamism. Instead, as they wrote their histories, Western powers came to overtake the East, necessitating that the Romans accept and adapt to these barbaric peoples.

## Chapter One: Anna Komnene

Alexios I Komnenos' assumption of power represented a fundamental change in the Roman political system and national identity. He ascended to the throne at a time when the Roman Empire was in a state of paralysis, facing economic collapse, social unrest, and the threat of foreign invasion. Using his extended family, Alexios I established a monopoly over the state apparatus, mitigating domestic unrest.<sup>15</sup> In the *Alexiad*, Anna Komnene, Alexios I's eldest child, details the rise of the Komnenian dynasty and reveals the struggles and triumphs of her father's reign, and also provides an invaluable portrait of the Roman empire in eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>16 17</sup> Komnene universally despised the Latins, and believed them to be culturally inferior. She demonstrates this animosity in her examination of the motives and talents of the Normans and Venetians.<sup>18</sup> Despite this belief, Komnene displays her admiration of the leadership and political acumen of these Westerners and her gratitude for their military support. This paradox is consistent throughout Komnene's text and reveals her understanding of the Normans' and Venetians' precipitous rise to paramountcy at the turn of the twelfth century. Regardless of her belief in the Latins' cultural inferiority, Anna Komnene accepts that the Roman empire must engage in a series of alliances with Western societies in order to ensure its survival. Writing in the middle of the twelfth century, she understood that the political climate in the Mediterranean was not that of her father's time, and the supremacy of the Roman state over its Western counterparts was no longer assured; instead, she advised her nephew and the current emperor, Manuel I, to seriously consider the Westerners as valuable allies, or dangerous enemies.

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<sup>15</sup> Frankopan, "Kinship and the Distribution of Power in Komnenian Byzantium", 1–3.

<sup>16</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 14.

Historians praise Komnene's adoption of the Greek tradition in the *Alexiad*. This practice, promulgated by the ancient Greek historian Herodotus, calls for the recording of facts without bias to ensure that future generations develop an accurate understanding of the past. Komnene also adopts the methods of the Greek historian Thucydides, portraying "with contemplative justice even those whom she looks upon as fools".<sup>19</sup> In general, she emulates the Roman historian Tacitus, writing without anger or passion. Komnene adhered to this practice since she did "not want the public to imagine" that she was "inventing marvels" to glorify her family.<sup>20</sup> However, while she attempts to demonstrate impartiality, it is impossible to ignore her glorification of her father. In the *Alexiad*, Anna Komnene adopts an almost Homeric complexion, casting her father as the hero in her tale of military glory.<sup>21</sup> Anna Komnene even chose to title the work the *Alexiad* because she saw her father's rule as an epic equal to Homer's *Iliad*.<sup>22</sup>

As the eldest daughter of Alexios I, Komnene obtained an exceptional education in literature, mathematics, medicine, and philosophy, an advantage few women obtained at the time.<sup>23</sup> Alexios I betrothed her in her childhood to Constantine Doukas, the heir to the throne. In her childhood, Anna Komnene resided in the household of Constantine, nine years her senior, and his widowed mother Maria, whose political acumen she idolized. After the birth of Komnene's younger brother John and a resurgence of division between the Komnenoi and the Doukas family, Alexios appointed John as his heir.<sup>24</sup> He ended Anna Komnena's engagement with Constantine, depriving her of what she viewed as her rightful position as future empress. Komnene later married Nikephoros Byrennios, an ally of her father's.<sup>25</sup> She admired Byrennios for his military

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<sup>19</sup> Eckstein-Diener, *Imperial Byzantium*, 283.

<sup>20</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 151–52.

<sup>21</sup> Angold, *The Roman Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 156.

<sup>22</sup> Eckstein-Diener, *Imperial Byzantium*, 311.

<sup>23</sup> Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*, 233.

<sup>24</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*, 234.



skill and scholarly devotion and hoped that one day he would succeed her father, thereby making her an empress. Her mother Irene Doukaina, who exercised increasing influence in the later years of her husband's reign, supported Anna Komnene's wishes in this regard. Along with her mother and husband, Komnene frequently accompanied her father on military campaigns.<sup>26</sup>

When Alexios I died in 1118 C.E, Anna Komnene and her mother attempted to place Nikephoros Byrennios on the throne instead of her brother John. However, this venture proved unsuccessful as Byrennios vowed to remain loyal to John.<sup>27</sup> After Komnene and her mother attempted to assassinate John II in 1119 C.E, he exiled them to a monastery.<sup>28</sup> Anna Komnene and Irene Doukaina founded literary circles while living in the convent. In her studies, Komnene examined the works of the Ancients and earned the respect of clergy and scholars alike through her unequalled intellect and dedication to study. She also supported translators, contributing to a revival of the study of Aristotle throughout the Empire. Komnene's scholarly was partly a consequence of her banishment from court and isolation from society.<sup>29</sup>

The dowager empress Irene Doukaina died in 1127 C.E and Byrennios passed away in 1137 C.E.<sup>30</sup> Komnene's husband left behind the beginnings of a history of Alexios titled *Materials for a History*, which Irene Doukaina had commissioned.<sup>31</sup> This work chronicled Alexios I's rise to power, and legitimized his claim to the throne by combining the claims of the Komnenoi and Doukas families.<sup>32</sup> After her husband's death, Komnene continued his work, transforming *Materials for a History* into the *Alexiad*, a chronicle of her father's thirty-five year

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<sup>26</sup> Eckstein-Diener, *Imperial Byzantium*, 285 - 308.

<sup>27</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 14.

<sup>28</sup> Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*, 234.

<sup>29</sup> Angold, *The Roman Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 246-247.

<sup>30</sup> Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*, 234.

<sup>31</sup> Eckstein-Diener, *Imperial Byzantium*, 310.

<sup>32</sup> Angold, *The Roman Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 4.

reign by her death ten years later.<sup>33</sup> In her research, she consulted her father's retired generals, and examined political documents and papal chrysobulls. She wished to ensure that as John II achieved military success and domestic acclimation, her father's successes would not be forgotten. Some historians argue that Komnene's nostalgia led her to romanticize the achievements of her father and present him as an ideal ruler and a model for Manuel I, the current emperor, should adopt.<sup>34</sup> Other historians hold an even stronger position, characterizing Komnene as an embittered old woman, born in the purple and now an elderly aunt, imprisoned in a convent. Komnene may have felt that her exceptional learning and firsthand political experience was being wasted. These historians describe Anna Komnene as adopting a tone of "frustrated ambition", as she bemoans her failure to achieve the supremacy she viewed as her birthright.<sup>35</sup> Her refusal to chronicle the manifold military triumphs of John II is further evidence that Anna Komnene resented her diminished position in Byzantine society following her father's death.

In the *Alexiad*, Komnene introduces Guiscard, the leader of the Normans, as a "foreign [predator]" and "an evil hard to combat, an incurable disease". Guiscard was a subject of "universal condemnation" in the Roman court. Despite her harsh treatment, Komnene praises the Normans, especially Robert Guiscard, for his military might and dedication to his people. She respected the Norman commander, labeling him as "the bravest and most daring of men".<sup>36</sup> This contraction and grudging admiration reveals Komnene's knowledge of the growing power of the Normans, regardless of their supposedly inferior cultural heritage. Anna Komnene's characterization of the Normans delineates her cultural prejudice and political foresight, as she

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<sup>33</sup> Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*, 232.

<sup>34</sup> Angold, *The Roman Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 5.

<sup>35</sup> *The Oxford History of Byzantium*, 206.

<sup>36</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 53-152.

sets aside her conviction in their bestiality, immaturity, impulsivity, and imperfect religiosity and recognizes the Westerners' rapid ascendancy.

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Western expansion led to increased interaction between Eastern and Western cultures and a breakdown of the Roman empire's social and political barriers. The Normans secured a significant role in the Roman court, and the emperor appointed many to the rank of Roman nobility.<sup>37</sup> The Normans obtained this influence through their military capability and proximity to Roman territory; the Normans were encroaching on the empire's Western territories and if they succeeded in invading the Balkans, the Roman empire would crumble.<sup>38</sup> The Romans therefore saw the Normans as a people with whom they must engage, despite their prejudices, in order to ensure domestic and international security.<sup>39 40</sup>

In the *Alexiad*, Komnene continues the tradition of former Roman scholars and political leaders in their condemnation of outsiders as savage and irrational. In the sixth century C.E., Emperor Maurice had characterized the "yellow haired nations" as "rash and dauntless", and willing to fight to the death, equating retreat with "cowardice". He cites these Westerners as lacking "[concern for] safety, and any conception of their own best interest". However, he perceived that despite the Westerners' barbarism, they were powerful and dangerous.<sup>41</sup> In the tenth century C.E., Constantine Porphyrogenitus echoed the sentiments of Emperor Maurice, and warned his son that the peoples of the north possessed a greed for money and an inexhaustible desire for wealth and territorial domination.<sup>42</sup> Komnene develops this idea in the *Alexiad*, urging contemporary sovereigns to perceive the Westerners as a serious threat. Yet, like her

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<sup>37</sup> Epstein and Kazhdan, *Change in Roman Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 167 - 180.

<sup>38</sup> Angold, *The Roman Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 130.

<sup>39</sup> Harris, *Byzantium and the Crusades*, 38.

<sup>40</sup> Kaldellis, *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium*, 93.

<sup>41</sup> *Byzantium: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes*, 103 - 169.

<sup>42</sup> *Byzantium: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes*, 104 - 121.

predecessors, Komnene is careful to separate success from skill; while the Westerns might sometimes achieve military success, they will never achieve the level of precision of the Roman army. Therefore, Komnene supports long-standing convictions that the Normans were inherently less sensible and therefore inferior to the noble Romans.

Komnene depicts Robert Guiscard as inhuman and beastly in order to demonstrate the relative mercy of the Roman rulers and refinement of Roman civilization. She equates Guiscard to an “incurable disease”, a pestilence that the Romans must eradicate in order to ensure the future of the empire. Furthermore, Komnene intends to strike fear in the mind of her readers through the characterization of Guiscard as a man with an “overbearing character and a thoroughly villainous mind”. She highlights his inhumanity in later passages, such as in her narration of his deception of his father-in-law. Komnene outlines how Guiscard devised a “wicked plot” to deceive his father-in-law, caught him in a trap and “attacked him murderously”.<sup>43</sup> Komnene uses this example to demonstrate how Guiscard violated not only military conduct, but also societal morals.

In contrast, Komnene establishes the importance of trust and loyalty between immediate and extended family in Roman society. In the early years of Alexios I’s reign, his wife Irene Doukaina offered her entire inheritance and the financial and marital support of her family in aid of her husband’s military campaigns.<sup>44</sup> The importance of loyalty in Roman culture led Anna Komnene to condemn Guiscard’s plot against his father-in-law. Komnene also refuses to believe Guiscard when he claimed he was only fighting the Romans to “avenge the wrong done” to his father-in-law and that he desired peace, revealing that he was actually plotting rebellion. For Komnene, this second deception confirms Guiscard’s lack of civilized behavior. Anna Komnene

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<sup>43</sup> Komnene, *The Alexiad*, 54–56.

<sup>44</sup> Frankopan, “Kinship and the Distribution of Power in Komnenian Byzantium,” 3.

argues that the Normans cannot be trusted: if Guiscard came from a culture where patricide is an acceptable use of might, how could Komnene or the Roman state ignore this rising power?

Komnene's disdain for the Normans is further apparent in her characterization of Robert Guiscard's inhuman treatment of those he conquered. Anna Komnene delineates how Guiscard behaved "in a cruel fashion, treating the prisoners "with hideous savagery" by blinding them and cutting off their hands, noses, and feet. Anna Komnene details Robert Guiscard and his natural son Bohemond working together as a team, and that "what was left by [Guiscard], his son fed on and devoured".<sup>45</sup> Komnene exhibits these scenes in order to demonstrate the relative inhumanity of the Normans, and their lack of regard for dignity. This instance of Norman savagery was far from an anomaly by Komnene's telling; when the army sacked Thessalonica, it displayed brutality and barbarism, killing all without discretion, raping women, plundering the city of all of its luxuries.<sup>46</sup> Although she aims for the *Alexiad* to be an unbiased text, Komnene's does not reveal the brutality of her father in his own military conquests. This may be because the Romans absolved themselves of their own crimes of war, claiming that murder in the time of war, especially against those that did not share the Orthodox faith, was legitimate.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to describing the Normans in such savage terms, Komnene frequently characterizes the mercenaries as immature and lacking the wisdom of the Romans. Sagacity was highly valued in Roman culture, and the most important church in the empire, the Hagia Sophia, was dedicated to 'Holy Wisdom'. In addition, the Romans still possessed the writings of Greek and Roman philosophers and historians, unlike the polities of Western Europe. Since Guiscard, a Westerner, lacked this cultural enrichment, Komnene saw him as an uneducated barbarian and a

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<sup>45</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 66 - 190.

<sup>46</sup> Epstein and Kazhdan, *Change in Roman Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 166.

<sup>47</sup> J. A. McGuckin, "A Conflicted Heritage: The Byzantine Religious Establishment of a War Ethic," 38.

slave to his unwieldy emotions. She demonstrates her belief in Guiscard's immaturity, describing how he was "full of bitterness, swift to anger, with a heart overflowing with passion and wrath". Komnene perceived Guiscard's lack of maturity and control over his own emotions as a weakness. She depicts him as having "one of two objects: either to run through with his spear any man who resisted him", or to end his own life. Through her description of Guiscard's rash behavior, in which death is preferable to defeat, Komnene reveals how he was unable to exercise self-restraint and see reason beyond his bloodlust. Furthermore, Anna Komnene examines Guiscard's self-centered nature, a frequent mark of immaturity, commenting that when Robert Guiscard was "at the height of his power", he boasted that his battle cry could make "the earth tremble" and "cause terror among whole regiments". Komnene also believed Bohemond to be inconstant, a "trait common to all the Latins".<sup>48</sup> Komnene soon sensed that the impulsive nature and unpredictability of the Normans made them a questionable ally and a potentially lethal opponent.

Komnene connects immaturity to impulsivity and spares no expense in recording the rash behavior of the Normans, most often through the example of Robert Guiscard. Komnene's understanding of Guiscard and the threat he posed to the Roman empire revolves around her fear of his "unrestrained ambition", a worry shared by her father, Alexios I. Komnene uses the analogy of an infectious disease to characterize Guiscard's behavior. She delineates that "once a man has seized power, his love of money displays nearly the same characteristics as gangrene, for gangrene, once established in a body, never rests until it has invaded and corrupted the whole of it".<sup>49</sup> Komnene believed that like a disease, Guiscard's lust for supremacy has consumed his

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<sup>48</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 152 - 329.

<sup>49</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 137.

entire being. Since this contamination is permanent, Komnene insinuates that it would be impossible for Guiscard or other Normans to graduate to the Romans' level of civilization.

In the *Alexiad*, Komnene stresses the deleterious nature of the Normans' overzealous ambition. While she respects Guiscard's assumption of power from "the direst of poverty and obscure origin to become master" of all of Lombardy, she argues that his ambitions have grown too strong, causing him to act rashly. Komnene reveals Guiscard's lack of sagacity as a driving force behind a majority of his actions. She states that even when faced with defeat, Robert Guiscard remained "absolutely resolved never to give up", believing that he was "indomitable". Anna Komnene displays Guiscard's impulsive behavior in order to demonstrate that this lack of forethought led him to become "notorious for his power-lust".<sup>50</sup> Komnene believed the Romans to be superior to these whims of fancy, acting on wisdom and foresight.

Komnene also displays the imperfect religiosity of the Normans to support her judgement of their relative inferiority. She recounts how Guiscard "emulated Herod in his madness" when he gathered the elderly men and youth Lombardy and forced them into military service, causing the "lamentation of men and the wailing of women".<sup>51</sup> For this reason, the Lombard people sought to rise up against the hated Normans.<sup>52</sup> This lack of respect for humanity can be correlated with a lack of Christian values, leading Komnene to compare Guiscard to Herod, the ruler of Judea who ordered the death of all male children under the age of two in order to kill the Christ child.<sup>53</sup> Komnene asserts that Guiscard exceeded Herod in his wickedness, because while Herod "raved only against babes, ...Robert against boys and older men as well", which the

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<sup>50</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 53 -188.

<sup>51</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 65 - 66.

<sup>52</sup> Angold, *The Roman Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 50.

<sup>53</sup> Matthew 2:16-18 (New American Standard Bible)

Romans saw as graver since it had a larger impact.<sup>54</sup> Komnene's Biblical allusion reveals her religiosity and conviction in the special relationship the Roman imperial family shared with Christ, in contrast to the barbaric and irreligious Normans.

Komnene's perception of the Normans was greatly influenced by her time at her father's side in the Sacred Palace and on military campaign. When the Normans invaded the Roman town of Thessalonica, they murdered townspeople within the confines of a church, crushing hundreds to death, and violated the tomb of the city's patron saint. This lack of respect for religious sanctuary, in which the confines of a Christian structure were considered impermeable to murder, further demonstrates the Normans' warped religiosity.<sup>55</sup> At the time, sanctuary law granted that an individual seeking safety in a church was protected by the Church's spiritual authority, and immune from capital or corporal punishment.<sup>56</sup> Anna Komnene uses this example to reveal the Normans' barbarism, that they would dare to violate the most fundamental codes of decency in the Christian world. She saw the Norman leaders as the antithesis of her father: while the Roman emperor was appointed by God and consecrated by the Church, Western barbarians derived their strength solely from their ruthless military tactics.

In ancient Rome, citizens had revered current and former emperors, often regarding them as divine. With the transition to Christianity, Roman rulers could no longer lay claim to celestial status. However, a new tradition arose, one of caesaropapism, in which the Roman emperor exercised a considerable role in church affairs and a closer relationship with Christ than any other worldly ruler could claim.<sup>57</sup> The first Christian emperor, Constantine I, retained the position of Pontifex Maximus, High Priest, even after his conversion to Christianity, believing

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<sup>54</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 65.

<sup>55</sup> Brand, *Byzantium Confronts the West, 1180-1204*, 166.

<sup>56</sup> Shoemaker, *Sanctuary and Crime in the Middle Ages, 400-1500*, ix.

<sup>57</sup> Harris, *Constantinople: Capital of Byzantium*, 62.



that God had appointed him as His representative over His earthly kingdom. Constantine considered it his responsibility to maintain religious unity in the empire and ensure that his subjects followed the true faith. He saw the church and state as one, believing that each was an important aspect of the Basileia, the Christian empire on earth.<sup>58</sup>

The Romans believed that Christ was their ruler and saw the Roman Empire as Christ's chosen kingdom.<sup>59</sup> In turn, they held without question that the emperor was chosen by God to this position of sovereignty and he represented the divine spirit of Christ.<sup>60</sup> To this end, he dressed in the ancient costume of religious icons, seeking to model the court etiquette on religious ritual, and craft a kingdom that would represent that of Christ in its political, economic, and social structure. Even the court's choice of decoration had religious significance—the Book of Revelations narrates God's chosen people as living in a 'new Jerusalem' made entirely of gold, and the palace glittered with gold mosaics. The emperor played a lead role in daily religious ceremonies, acting as an equal actor with the patriarch.<sup>61</sup> The ruler of the Romans had a double throne, and he sat on the right side, that of Christ, on all days but feast days and Sundays, for on those days the right seat was reserved for Christ.<sup>62</sup> The Gospel was displayed on this seat of power, and all would approach in reverence, bowing in submission.<sup>63</sup> Through this placement, the emperor declared his joint sovereignty of the empire with Christ. Behind his throne was a mosaic of Christ Pantokrator, representing Christ as the ruler of all, and the emperor as his ambassador on earth.<sup>64</sup> When a foreign ambassador approached the Roman sovereign on his seat

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<sup>58</sup> Geanakoplos, *Interaction of the "Sibling" Roman and Western Cultures in the Middle Ages and Italian Renaissance (330-1600)*, 119 - 129.

<sup>59</sup> Guerdan, *Byzantium: Its Triumphs and Tragedy*, 17–18.

<sup>60</sup> *The Oxford History of Byzantium*, 14.

<sup>61</sup> Guerdan, *Byzantium: Its Triumphs and Tragedy*, 18 - 46.

<sup>62</sup> Geanakoplos, *Interaction of the "Sibling" Roman and Western Cultures in the Middle Ages and Italian Renaissance (330-1600)*, 131.

<sup>63</sup> Guerdan, *Byzantium: Its Triumphs and Tragedy*, 17.

<sup>64</sup> Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*, 171.

of power, he prostrated himself to the floor three times, the number of three connecting to Orthodox liturgy regarding the trinity.<sup>65</sup> As the ambassador bowed to the emperor, his throne would rise in the air, rendering the emperor a transcendent and untouchable God.<sup>66 67</sup>

Members of the royal family fostered a special relationship with the clergy and served as a model of piety for their subjects, far more than in Western kingdoms. The royal family constructed churches to demonstrate their temporal and spiritual authority.<sup>68</sup> In churches, mosaics of Roman emperors represent them with halos around their heads, indicating their saintly status.<sup>69</sup> Writing in the sixth century, Procopius expressed how the intelligence of the Hagia Sophia's architects was "a proof of the esteem with which God regarded" the current emperor, Justinian. Komnene speaks at length about the "saintly character" of her grandmother<sup>70</sup>, who strove to create a virtuous court<sup>71</sup>, and of her mother's devotion to the writings of saints, from which "she longed to reap the benefits of true wisdom".<sup>72</sup> Komnene presents the close relationship the royal family sought to establish with the Church, both publicly and privately, demonstrating her belief the emperor enjoyed a singularly important position with God, one not possessed by other rulers.<sup>73</sup>

Despite her apparent nativism, Komnene claims that she intends to "write the truth above all" and she attempts to "[tone] down the universal condemnation" of Guiscard.<sup>74</sup> While she does not care for the Norman warlord or his people, she recognizes the perilous consequences of

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<sup>65</sup> Guerdan, *Byzantium: Its Triumphs and Tragedy*, 19–20.

<sup>66</sup> Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*, 171.

<sup>67</sup> Guerdan, *Byzantium: Its Triumphs and Tragedy*, 19–20.

<sup>68</sup> Geanakoplos, *Interaction of the "Sibling" Roman and Western Cultures in the Middle Ages and Italian Renaissance (330-1600)*, 131.

<sup>69</sup> Harris, *Constantinople: Capital of Byzantium*, 63.

<sup>70</sup> *Byzantium: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes*, 121 - 195.

<sup>71</sup> Garland, *Roman Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium, AD 527-1204*, 185.

<sup>72</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 178.

<sup>73</sup> Harris, *Constantinople: Capital of Byzantium*, 62.

<sup>74</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 53.

offending the Normans. Komnene repeatedly praises Robert Guiscard for his military might and national loyalty. Her view is consistent with contemporary Romans who despised the barbaric Normans despite holding an admiration of their military qualities. They saw the Normans as adhering to the “ideal of aristocratic prowess which was coming into vogue in the Comnenian court”.<sup>75</sup> This increased association of gentility with military success may be a consequence of the rising power of the Romans’ political and economic competitors, as it became more difficult for the empire to assert Mediterranean supremacy. To this end, Komnene describes Guiscard as “quick-witted”, “courteous”, and “a clever conversationalist”, and acknowledges that he may possess some genteel characteristics. Furthermore, she asserts that other foreign governments recognized Guiscard’s sophistication, commending him for his masculinity, “marvelous skill in war” and “steadfast spirit”. She writes that even defeat, Guiscard was “more courageous than ever”.<sup>76</sup> Komnene also commends Guiscard’s son Bohemond, praising his muscular build and spirited eyes.<sup>77</sup> She believed that his “daring, strength, [and] aristocratic and indomitable spirit” made him the “exact replica and living image of his father”.<sup>78</sup> Despite her praise, she cautions that any tenderness this man may maintain is overpowered by his brutality and craftiness.<sup>79</sup> Komnene’s admiration of Norman successes and military acumen does not overshadow her conviction in the Norman’s barbarism and violent nature.

Komnene recognized the importance of understanding one’s adversaries: she certainly would have remembered the early years of her father’s reign, when his control of the empire was tenuous, and enemies threatened invasion from all directions. In the *Alexiad*, Komnene does not

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<sup>75</sup> Angold, *The Roman Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 156.

<sup>76</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 54 - 196.

<sup>77</sup> Eckstein-Diener, *Imperial Byzantium*, 285.

<sup>78</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 66.

<sup>79</sup> Eckstein-Diener, *Imperial Byzantium*, 285.

adopt the blanket opinions of the populace, demonizing or sanctifying figures. Instead, she pragmatically prevents her own prejudices from inflaming her evaluation of Guiscard. Her attitude might be partly motivated by a need to appease the Normans, since Norman mercenaries came to play an invaluable role in the Roman army.<sup>80</sup> As early as 1040 C.E, the Romans targeted the Normans as a source of military aid, and by the eleventh century they had become a common feature in the army. Despite their personal and cultural prejudices, the Romans generally believed that using these mercenaries was imperative to ensure military success.<sup>81</sup> The Romans believed that these mercenaries were “some of the most loyal and effective troops in service to the emperor”.<sup>82</sup> The Roman sovereigns bestowed high honors upon these mercenaries, believing that their nationality would prevent them from becoming involved in political life.<sup>83</sup> Komnene’s recognition of the necessity of Norman participation in the Roman military and court motivates her to grudgingly acknowledge the accomplishments of these relatively ‘barbaric’ people.

Furthermore, Komnene admired Guiscard’s dedication to his people, and his commitment to his troops. She recounts how Robert Guiscard trained his troops “daily and hammered his recruits into a disciplined force”, revealing his dedication and patience and countering the stereotype of Norman impulsivity. In addition, Komnene remarks how he took the time to address their needs and injuries, demonstrating care for his common soldiers. This care contrasts sharply to Guiscard’s previous abuse of military recruits in Lombardy. The discrepancy may lie in that Guiscard showed preference to soldiers from his home country. Komnene also remarks that Robert Guiscard “treated with respect all of his subjects, especially those who were more than usually devoted to him”. Komnene’s respect for Guiscard’s rule establishes Guiscard as less

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<sup>80</sup> Harris, *Constantinople: Capital of Byzantium*, 133.

<sup>81</sup> Epstein and Kazhdan, *Change in Roman Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 174.

<sup>82</sup> Harris, *Byzantium and the Crusades*, 37.

<sup>83</sup> Guerdan, *Byzantium: Its Triumphs and Tragedy*, 118.

of an upstart and more of a legitimate ruler; his vested interest in the life of his subjects is not the approach of an invader who seeks only plunder and tribute. In addition, Komnene praises Guiscard for his pragmatism; when insulted by the Romans, Robert Guiscard “made nothing of it and applied himself to the business in hand”.<sup>84</sup> His matter-of-fact nature ensured that he was placing his army and his citizens before any personal rivalries. The Romans highly valued military skill, and these learned combat skills helped ensure their competitiveness for centuries.<sup>85</sup> Komnene therefore held Guiscard’s dedication and foresight in high esteem, despite her pervading prejudice.

Komnene also insinuates a Roman superiority through her view of gender roles in Roman and Norman society. She examines Guiscard’s wife Gaitia, noting how she was involved in political and military affairs, and also delves into the role her own grandmother played in her father’s government. While in both cultures, ruling women exercised considerable political influence, it was only in Norman culture that this authority extended to the military sphere. Komnene specifies how Gaitia “[accompanied Guiscard] on campaign” and appeared “like another Pallas, if not a second Athena”. Athena was Ancient Greek goddess of war and wisdom, and Komnene’s interpretation of Gaitia demonstrates that Norman women had the agency and license to assume military roles. Komnene further details how Gaitia condemned deserters, urging them to “be men” and then “[grasping] a full spear and [charging] at a full gallop against them”. This aggressive imagery is further apparent with Komnene’s description of Gaitia donning armor while on campaign, creating a “formidable sight”. Although Komnene would have observed female members of the royal family assuming a political role, they did not seem to enter the military sphere. This field was reserved for masculine supremacy. Komnene admires

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<sup>84</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 66 - 195.

<sup>85</sup> Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, 10–11.

the sovereignty of Norman women, especially because her prerogative derived from the men in her life, and not herself. Robert Guiscard also sought Gaitia's advice on matters of state.

Komnene mentions how when Guiscard received an important military letter, he "at once went to his wife and read it aloud to her privately", seeking her counsel.<sup>86</sup> Komnene esteems the Normans' inclusion of women in politics, since she also came from a society in which women in the imperial family could yield substantial power.

In the twelfth century, there were few governments in which women could obtain greater position than in the Roman empire. Romans saw their empresses as equal to emperors, and the Patriarch crowned and anointed empresses prior to their marriage, demonstrating that their authority derived from God and from their imperial spouses<sup>87</sup>. Some empresses even ruled alone, often as dowager rulers during their son's minority. Alexios' mother, Anna Dalassena, exercised extraordinary political influence.<sup>88</sup> Dalassena had nurtured an ambition for imperium for her family since 1059 C.E, when her brother-in-law Isaac offered her husband the throne and he refused, denying her the imperial crown.<sup>89</sup> His refusal and later death led her to turn her efforts to her sons.<sup>90</sup> Through securing powerful marriage alliances, Anna Dalassena ensured the rise and consolidation of the Komnenian dynasty.<sup>91</sup> Alexios was "obedient to the precepts of his mother" and valued her judgement.<sup>92</sup> Throughout the court, she was considered an excellent administrator, and restored the public perception of her family.

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<sup>86</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 60 - 147.

<sup>87</sup> Guerdan, *Byzantium: Its Triumphs and Tragedy*, 34 - 35.

<sup>88</sup> Harris, *Constantinople: Capital of Byzantium*, 81.

<sup>89</sup> Diehl, *Roman Portraits*, 300-301.

<sup>90</sup> Garland, *Roman Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium, AD 527-1204*, 187.

<sup>91</sup> *The Oxford History of Byzantium*, 206.

<sup>92</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 113.

Dalassena's aid was especially important in the early years of Alexios' reign, when he frequently went on campaign.<sup>93</sup> Only a few months after his accession, Alexios had to lead an army against the Normans who were invading the Balkans and appointed his mother to rule in his absence.<sup>94</sup> He sought her advice in all political matters and she soon became his ruling "confidante and co-partner".<sup>95</sup> In her description of her grandmother, Anna Komnene praises Anna Dalassena for her "manly mind", piety, strong character, and intellectual ability, demonstrating her own belief that women had a place in Roman political life.<sup>96</sup> Alexios gradually involved Dalassena into state affairs and "declared openly that without her brains and good judgement the Empire would not survive". Although he valued his mother's acumen, he did not recognize her wishes. As Alexios gained power and security, he came to consider himself superior to his mother, who was a mere servant of the empire. In her later years, Dalassena desired to join a monastery. However, Alexios "bound her more closely to himself" and "prevented her from attaining her own goal".<sup>97</sup> Komnene's description of her grandmother's fate reveals her belief that while it was acceptable for the mother of an emperor to play a large role in the empire, she could not solicit that authority.<sup>98</sup>

However, not all Romans valued women so highly, and many considered women unfit for in political life. Michael Psellos, writing in the twelfth century, claimed that it would be improper for a woman to govern the Roman empire.<sup>99</sup> In a sixth-century Roman text, the author condemns "ancient authorities" for "[conferring] upon women the right of acting as witnesses", since this privilege gives women the habit of "speaking more freely than they ought and

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<sup>93</sup> Garland, *Roman Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium, AD 527-1204*, 190 - 191.

<sup>94</sup> Harris, *Constantinople: Capital of Byzantium*, 81.

<sup>95</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 116.

<sup>96</sup> Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*, 233.

<sup>97</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 116.

<sup>98</sup> Garland, *Roman Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium, AD 527-1204*, 192.

<sup>99</sup> Harris, *Constantinople: Capital of Byzantium*, 80.

depriving them of the morality and reserve of their sex”. In addition, the author opposes this practice because it “encourages them in the exercise of boldness and wickedness”. The author concludes the passage by forbidding women from being “called to witness contracts”.<sup>100</sup> This strict delineation of gender roles reveals Komnene’s earlier assumption that it would be improper for a woman to assert regency in her own right. Through these two passages, it is evident that although women may attain a position of power in Roman culture, their aid must be solicited by male powerholders, and they never would don armor like Gaitia. Anna Komnene acted within these limitations, capitalizing on her own political ambition and hatred of her brother’s birthright by attempting to place her husband on the throne. However, her plan proved unsuccessful when it became apparent that her husband wanted no part in the plot. Therefore, Komnene’s hopes went unrealized, demonstrating that female power in Roman society was conditional, and such conditions were out of a woman’s control.

The Normans are not the only Western force that Komnene chronicles in the *Alexiad*. The rising threat of the Normans necessitated that Alexios I solicit the support of the Venetians, a current trading partner and fellow actor in the Mediterranean. In the *Alexiad*, Anna Komnene reveals her conviction in the loyalty, bravery, and economic resourcefulness of the Venetian people and state, overlooking the cultural prejudice that characterized Roman relations with Westerners. Through her description, she demonstrates her conviction in the importance of Venetian military support in order to ensure national and international security.

The Romans had a strong relationship with the Venetian state, which had once been a colony of the Roman empire.<sup>101</sup> There was a strong Roman influence in Italy and especially in Venice, which had profited greatly from its former absorption in the Roman empire. By the mid-

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<sup>100</sup> *Byzantium: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes*, 304.

<sup>101</sup> *The Oxford History of Byzantium*, 20.



twelfth century, the Venetians were well-established in major Roman cities, and some had even married into native families. For three generations, Venetian merchants had enjoyed freedom from the customs duties on commercial transactions that the state required all other consumers to pay, and enjoyed a cooperative relationship with Roman merchants.<sup>102 103</sup> Despite this alliance, the Romans saw the Venetians as “poor cousins of the empire” who were not quite barbaric but were almost as “crude and ill-mannered” as other Westerners.<sup>104</sup> Because of this, the Romans generally displayed an aversion to the growth of foreign nations within its borders. However, the Komnenian emperors were willing to exempt the Venetians from this policy due to the Venetians’ love of the Roman state.<sup>105 106</sup>

Alexios I greatly needed Venetian support in the early years of his reign. In 1081 C.E, the Norman army began to encroach on Roman territory. Emperor Alexios saw Robert Guiscard, leader of the Normans, as his “main opponent” since Guiscard disputed Alexios’ usurpation of power in addition to posing a military threat. Alexios I recognized that if the Normans gained control Albania, they would soon have access to the Balkans. The loss of the Balkans, including the Greek provinces, would be catastrophic for the Roman state, as it was the only place where the Roman bureaucracy functioned effectively and supplied substantial tribute to the imperial authorities.<sup>107</sup> In addition, the ultimate source of Roman wealth lay in trade, which was conducted by foreign agents.<sup>108</sup> This was also the situation when Komnene was writing in the twelfth century. If the Normans succeeded in taking control of the Greek provinces, they would block Venetian travel and trade, stifling the Roman economy. This conquest would have

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<sup>102</sup> *Byzantium, A World Civilization*, 63–77.

<sup>103</sup> Guerdan, *Byzantium: Its Triumphs and Tragedy*, 161.

<sup>104</sup> Madden, *Venice: A New History*, 65.

<sup>105</sup> Kaldellis, *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium*, 260.

<sup>106</sup> Angold, *The Roman Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 16 - 168.

<sup>107</sup> Angold, *The Roman Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 129 - 130.

<sup>108</sup> Harris, *Constantinople: Capital of Byzantium*, 118.

devastated the Roman economy, especially in the coastal regions which depended on imports even in peacetime. In this desperate time of military weakness and internal poverty, Alexios I knew he had to take action.<sup>109</sup> Venice's location at the head of the Adriatic made it an ideal choice, as it could use its fleet to cut off Guiscard's supply of men and arms in Southern Italy.<sup>110</sup>

Anna Komnene recounts how Alexios solicited the help of the Venetians with "promises and bribes". He cautioned that these rewards would only be granted if "the Venetians would be willing to equip all their fleet", protect the city of Dyrrachium, and "engage in serious warfare with Guiscard's navy".<sup>111</sup> Alexios was in desperate need of an ally in 1082 C.E and thus willing to promise the Venetians almost anything.<sup>112</sup> Luckily, the Venetians were true to their word and soon prepared a fleet. The Venetians did not desire conflict in the Adriatic, so this action was in their interest.<sup>113</sup> In fact, the Venetians felt threatened by the rise of Guiscard, as they wished for peaceful waters and profitable trade, conditions which war would prevent.<sup>114</sup> Komnene reveals how the Venetians served the emperor well and he received them at an official audience with "friendly greetings and rewarded [the Venetians] with a thousand kindnesses". In return, Alexios I eliminated any tax on trade within all Roman provinces so that the Venetians were "completely free of Roman authority" and they could trade without interference.<sup>115</sup> He also granted the Venetians their own commercial quarter, known as the Embolo, and allowed them to conduct church services in their own tongue.<sup>116</sup> The Doge was personally honored "with the rank of *protosebastos* and the appropriate pension" and all churches in Venice received an annual

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<sup>109</sup> A. R. Gadolin, "Alexis I Comnenus and the Venetian Trade Privileges: A New Interpretation," 439 - 442.

<sup>110</sup> Harris, *Byzantium and the Crusades*, 39.

<sup>111</sup> Komnene, *The Alexiad*, 137.

<sup>112</sup> Angold, *The Roman Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 168.

<sup>113</sup> Harris, *Constantinople: Capital of Byzantium*, 123.

<sup>114</sup> Madden, *Venice: A New History*, 60.

<sup>115</sup> Komnene, *The Alexiad*, 138-191.

<sup>116</sup> Harris, *Constantinople: Capital of Byzantium*, 123.

payment in gold.<sup>117</sup> These privileges ensured the supremacy of Venice compared to the other Italian states in Constantinople, making competition futile. Regardless of this possible future complication between resident aliens in the capital city, Alexios was grateful for Venetian support, and Komnene echoes this sentiment.

Komnene's acclaim of the Venetians was shared by Roman citizens, who supported the imperial chrysobull of Alexios I. In his writings, a contemporary Roman citizen praises the Venetians, describing them as faithful allies, whose actions are known by all, and who remained loyal to the Romans despite the loss of some of their own men. He favorably recounts how Alexios I specified that the Venetians would receive an annual gift of twenty pounds of gold to distribute to their own churches as they see fit. This statement is free of the religious tensions between the East and the West that pervaded much of the past few centuries, revealing the gratitude the Romans felt towards the Venetians. The author labels the Venetian doge as noble, and worthy of being bestowed the honor of *protosebastos*. He also characterizes the Venetian patriarch as most honorable, and that every patriarch after this current one would also be bestowed these high honors. This honor indicates that the Romans wished for this relationship to be long-standing, although the concessions would be temporary.<sup>118 119</sup>

Furthermore, Alexios I had declared that the Venetians would be free of trading and shipping charges and not subject to the stipulations of Roman regulatory officials. Recognizing that this provision might alarm imperial officials, the author warns these officials to not be contemptuous, since the Venetians are faithful servants of the emperor and will remain so in the future.<sup>120</sup> Lastly, he praises the Venetians' benevolence and fidelity to the Roman state, revealing

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<sup>117</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 191.

<sup>118</sup> *Byzantium: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes*, 286 - 287.

<sup>119</sup> Harris, *Byzantium and the Crusades*, 114.

<sup>120</sup> *Byzantium: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes*, 287–88.

the overall sense of gratitude and faith the Romans had in the Venetians in the late eleventh century.

Despite Komnene's description of her father as a noble and benevolent ruler, Alexios I did not initiate these generous concessions merely to express his thanks to the Venetians. The emperor was under considerable pressure from the Venetians themselves, as well as his own citizens. Members of the Roman landowning class, who had supported Alexios' rise to power, had donated considerable sums to this defensive war against the Normans. The decline in trade had further lessened the income of these aristocrats. In fact, by the mid-eleventh century, Westerners had begun to bypass Asia Minor and the Black Sea region and sail directly to Syria and Egypt. This situation jeopardized the economic future of the Roman empire, and its continuation would have eventually led to political crisis. Alexios I therefore presented the Venetians with these concessions in order to encourage the Italians to return to the Roman trade markets they had begun to abandon.<sup>121</sup>

The imperial chrysobull of 1082 C.E was not the first time that the Romans demonstrated their preference for the Venetians in regard to trade. As far back as the ninth century, Venetians conducted almost all of their overseas trade in the eastern Mediterranean, mainly in the Roman empire. This relationship was a symbiotic one, as the Venetians relied on the security of the Roman state to ensure the safety of shipping and low levels of piracy. In 950 C.E, when given the choice to ally with Western lords or keep their centuries-long fealty to the Roman empire, the Venetians chose to follow the path of their ancestors and maintain their dedication to the Roman state, earning the regard and admiration of the Romans.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> A. R. Gadolin, "Alexis I Comnenus and the Venetian Trade Privileges: A New Interpretation," 440 - 442.

<sup>122</sup> Madden, *Venice: A New History*, 47 - 53.

Despite her belief in the inferiority of the Venetians, Komnene reveals the bravery and conviction of these Westerners throughout the *Alexiad*. After Alexios I “urged [the] Venetians to equip a strong naval expedition” under the promise of future reimbursement, the Venetians rose to the occasion. They defeated the Normans, led by Robert Guiscard, in a battle Komnene characterized as a “tremendous struggle”. Komnene’s narration reveals her admiration of the Venetians’ sacrifice of arms and men and their resilience in the face of defeat. Komnene reveals how when Guiscard defeated the Venetians in a battle, he treated them with “hideous savagery”, blinding some Venetians and removing the eyes, noses, hands, and feet of others. Despite these displays of senseless brutality, when Guiscard suggested negotiations of peace, the Venetians rejected this insinuation of defeat. They declared that they stated they would “not cease to help” the emperor and pledged to continue to “fight bravely on his behalf”. In addition to her admiration of their loyalty, Komnene regarded the Venetians as brave soldiers, displaying how after initial defeat, they “[took] fresh heart and [pressed] their attack with more confidence.<sup>123</sup> Komnene amassed significant esteem for the Venetians after observing their loyalty, despite her acknowledgement that they were not equals of the Romans.

While Komnene expresses gratitude towards the Venetians, the rising wealth of Venetian merchants and their favored status soon garnered envy and resentment.<sup>124</sup> Historians have argued that the 1082 C.E chrysobull’s concessions made the Venetians’ position in the Roman economy so strong that it soon undermined the historic guild system. The Romans were not in favor of this usurpation of control, especially because they believed the Italians to be their inferiors.<sup>125</sup> They

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<sup>123</sup> Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 138 - 191.

<sup>124</sup> Madden, *Venice: A New History*, 65.

<sup>125</sup> Angold, *The Roman Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 16 - 168.

found it “galling” to see the Venetian merchants flaunting the wealth that had been given to them by the sovereign and the Roman people.<sup>126</sup>

In her descriptions of both the Normans and Venetians, Komnene considers the insular practices of her predecessors, labeling these Westerners as culturally inferior and lacking the sophistication and storied tradition of the Romans. She insinuates that the credibility of a polity derives from more than brute force; it is only through established practice and divine sanction that a ruler can aim to achieve a position equal to that of the Roman emperor. However, Komnene recognizes that the era in which she resides is not that of her forefathers; the supremacy of the Roman empire is no longer ensured. In the twelfth century, rising Western powers and the advent of the crusades engendered the interaction of Eastern and Western Mediterranean cultures and realms at far greater rates. Writing close to the middle of the twelfth century, Komnene understood that these Western powers also had value, and that she would have to look beyond her cultural prejudice and motivate others to do the same. In the *Alexiad*, she offers a warning to her nephew Manuel, the current emperor, revealing that the strength and political acuity of Normans and Venetians necessitated that the Romans consider these Westerners as valuable allies, or treacherous enemies.

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<sup>126</sup> Madden, *Venice: A New History*, 65.

## Chapter Two: John Kinnamos

In the latter years of his reign, Alexios I Komnenos penned a “political testament for his son [and successor]” John II Komnenos, warning him not to forget “how the West moved against” the Romans and “Almighty Time purposed to desecrate and dishonor the sublimity of New Rome and the dignity of its throne”. He urged John to “lay up sufficient stores of cash to fill the ever-open maws of the barbarians, to stop those mouths through which they breathe hatred, and to provide for the possibility that they will raise a great army to hurl angry lightnings upon [the Romans], at some moment when many others of [the Romans’] enemies, encircling the capital, have risen in rebellion”.<sup>127</sup> This warning came to influence the policy of Alexios’ son John II, and to some extent that of his grandson Manuel I, in their relationships with the Venetians and Normans, especially those that inhabited Roman cities. However, the Romans’ haughtiness would come to haunt them in years to come, as it became clear that the rising power of the Latins could no longer be ignored.<sup>128</sup>

When Anna Komnene completed the *Alexiad* and passed away in 1153 C.E., her father Alexios I and brother John II had both concluded their reigns. John II had designated his son Manuel as his heir, choosing to bypass his older son Isaac, claiming that “the empire’s standard of excellence points rather to the latest-born” and praising Manuel’s “strength, might, and valor”. It was John Kinnamos, a dedicated civil servant and the imperial secretary of Manuel I, who assumed the role of historian for the next generations of the Komnenian dynasty and chronicle their reigns.<sup>129</sup> His writings represent a valuable insight into the later years of the Roman empire and the changing power balance in the Mediterranean.

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<sup>127</sup> Eckstein-Diener, *Imperial Byzantium*, 301.

<sup>128</sup> Guerdan, *Byzantium: Its Triumphs and Tragedy*, 183.

<sup>129</sup> Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Komnenos: By John Kinnamos; Translated by Charles M. Brand*, 1-30.

In his history, *Deeds of John and Manuel Komnenos*, John Kinnamos demonstrates intense animosity against the Latins, revealing his impression of the Venetians as prideful and vulgar, and his conviction in the Normans' greed and inhumanity, despite their military renown. Through his depictions, Kinnamos reveals the Romans' wounded pride at Western refusal to maintain their position as Roman vassals as they came to realize and exceed the Easterners' naval and military supremacy. Even though the Roman state may not have actually been in danger of demise, the empire's inhabitants perceived this threat as an aggression. Despite their claims of universal sovereignty, it became abundantly clear that by the middle of the twelfth century, the empire was merely one among the states of Europe.<sup>130</sup> Because of the Venetians' rising hegemony in the Mediterranean and the relatively smaller threat the Normans posed to Roman power than in the time of Alexios I, Kinnamos exhibits greater hostility towards the Italians. Reflecting the changing power structure in twelfth century Europe, this posture differs from Komnene, who feared the Normans and admired the Venetians.

In *Deeds of John and Manuel Komnenos*, Kinnamos eulogizes John II and Manuel I, adopting a tone similar to that of Komnene's panegyric of her father in the *Alexiad*. He excessively praises Manuel I, and enthusiastically describes his military valor, cunning and perception, horsemanship, and remarkable intellect. Through this practice, Kinnamos was emulating the Roman tradition of historical and courtly literature. Similar to other Roman authors, Kinnamos gave ancient names to contemporary foreigners, labeling the Hungarians 'Huns' and the Islamic nations 'Persians'. In addition, he adopts the tradition of designating the inhabitants of Greek territories as Romans, reflecting the strong sense of identity carried by those

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<sup>130</sup> Brown, "The Venetians and the Venetian Quarter in Constantinople to the Close of the Twelfth Century," 172.



living in the Roman empire, who labeled themselves as ‘Rhomanoi’ despite their Greek religious practices, language, and culture.

As we will examine more closely in the next chapter, Kinnamos’ work contrasts sharply with that of his contemporary Niketas Choniates, who also covered the reigns of John II and Manuel I Komnenos, as well as later emperors. Choniates expressed a disdainful attitude in his depiction of the Comnenoi, seeking to blame them for the 1204 C.E. Latin invasion of Constantinople and the empire’s subsequent subjugation. Kinnamos’ opinions may differ from those of Choniates because Kinnamos wrote his text before the fall of Constantinople to the Latins. In addition, Kinnamos had a substantially different position in society; while Komnene and Choniates had the privilege to receive exceptional educations unavailable to most of their contemporaries, Kinnamos was an ordinary bureaucrat. Because of this relative lack of literary and cultural standing, some historians regard Kinnamos as less important than Komnene and Choniates, lacking their literary and cultural standing. It is true that Kinnamos had only a reasonably commendable education in the classics, which cannot compare to Komnene’s extensive reading of the ancients and Choniates’ adaptation of their literary styles. In addition, his clear and direct style contrasted sharply with the complicated diction and flowery vocabulary of contemporary writers. However, Kinnamos did have knowledge of classical authors and modeled his writing after that of Procopius, a sixth - century Roman historian.<sup>131</sup> His knowledge of Aristotle extends beyond the standard education of a Roman bureaucrat, indicating that Kinnamos proactively sought to continue his education.<sup>132</sup> Kinnamos’ work remains an invaluable source of knowledge of Roman history and cultural mentality, and his relatively humble upbringing allows his convictions and perspective to mirror those of the larger

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<sup>131</sup> Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus: By John Kinnamos; Translated by Charles M. Brand*, 1-8.

<sup>132</sup> Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 408.

population, exposing literate Romans' straightforward understanding of the nature and purpose of history. Since he was not a member of the imperial family or the aristocracy, Kinnamos would have readily grasped the tenets of caesaropapism, and came to regard the empire and the emperor as fundamental elements in his religious understanding. Kinnamos perceived the empire as part of Christ's divine plan, and the emperor as the divinely appointed leader of the Romans, who were God's chosen people.<sup>133</sup> This ideological stance complements the Roman's conception of their own cultural and political supremacy, even as the gap between perception and reality widened.

John Kinnamos was born in 1143 C.E., not long after the ascension of Manuel I Komnenos, to a family with a history of imperial service. He probably spent his early years in Constantinople and received the standard secondary education of a future bureaucrat. At the age of fifteen, he accompanied the emperor Manuel I on his campaign of 1159-1159 C.E., serving as one of his secretaries. Kinnamos' distinct and geographically precise descriptions of Manuel I's campaigns and unprecedented knowledge of papal politics and foreign relations in the city of Rome speak to his position at the forefront of international affairs.<sup>134</sup> Kinnamos soon rose to the position of imperial secretary and became a member of a large body of clerks that worked for the imperial court and served the emperor personally. This body of clerks might have accompanied the emperor or armies on diplomatic missions. Kinnamos also claims that he established a personal relationship with the emperor, Manuel I, and even discussed Aristotelian philosophy with him. Kinnamos' long history of serving in the imperial family and gratitude for their patronage may have influenced his adulation of the Comnenoi.

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<sup>133</sup> Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus: By John Kinnamos; Translated by Charles M. Brand*, 2.

<sup>134</sup> Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 407.

When Manuel died, his young son Alexios II replaced him, with his mother Maria of Antioch as regent. During his regency, Alexios II favored Latins living in Roman territory over native Greeks, a preference was abundantly clear to Kinnamos and his contemporaries.<sup>135</sup> Many Romans, especially merchants in Constantinople, detested Alexios II because of his Western mother and wife and his reliance on the support of the Latins in Constantinople. Furthermore, many Romans were hostile to his mother, Maria of Antioch, daughter of Raymond of Poitiers, who frequently came into conflict with John II Comnenus.<sup>136</sup> Kinnamos opposed the emperor's preference of Westerners, and his lack of access to official archives when writing his history suggests that his antipathy may have threatened his position in the imperial administration at this time. While Kinnamos never directly criticized Latin members of the imperial family or their relatives such as Raymond of Poitiers, and Louis VII, King of France, the father of Empress Anna, wife of Emperor Alexios II, his prejudice was apparent.<sup>137</sup> Despite these sentiments, Kinnamos managed to maintain his position as clerk during the reigns of Alexios II, Andronicus I, and Issac II Angelus, although he would never praise them as he had Manuel I.<sup>138</sup> However, unlike Anna Komnene, Kinnamos was a civil servant, and had financial and social incentive to restore his status, regain imperial favor, and establish a position in government.<sup>139</sup>

Kinnamos' precarious position in public life might have influenced his desire to praise the Comnenoi, and to this extent he paints Manuel I as the hero of his history. Harris reveals that Kinnamos attributes a plethora of virtues towards Manuel, praising his intellect, humanity, knowledge of philosophy, and bravery in battle.<sup>140</sup> However, Kinnamos adapted his writings in

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<sup>135</sup> Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus: By John Kinnamos; Translated by Charles M. Brand*, 2-3.

<sup>136</sup> Brown, "The Venetians and the Venetian Quarter in Constantinople to the Close of the Twelfth Century," 178-179.

<sup>137</sup> Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus: By John Kinnamos; Translated by Charles M. Brand*, 4-5.

<sup>138</sup> Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 408-9.

<sup>139</sup> Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus: By John Kinnamos; Translated by Charles M. Brand*, 5.

<sup>140</sup> Harris, *Constantinople: Capital of Byzantium*, 93.

his portrayal of Manuel's successors, seeking to maintain his position. During the reign of Andronicus I, which followed Alexios II's brief reign, Choniates describes Kinnamos debating theology in the emperor's tent while on campaign. The new emperor, Andronicus I, had seized the throne from Alexios II a few years after Alexios' ascension, and would have sympathized with Kinnamos' anti-Latin prejudice and opposition to the regency of Alexios II.<sup>141</sup> Kinnamos would have in turn praised Andronicus I's repudiation of Latins from political involvement in the empire, and his desire to ally with the Roman merchants, whose livelihoods had been threatened by the Latin monopoly on foreign trade.<sup>142</sup> After the fall of Andronicus I Komnenos, Kinnamos served under the next emperor, Issac II Angelus, and addresses an oration to the emperor, indicating his approval of the emperor's reign.<sup>143</sup>

Kinnamos' perception of the Venetians mirrors that of contemporary Romans in the twelfth century. While Anna Komnene displays gratitude towards the Italians for their aid against the Normans in the *Alexiad*, Kinnamos condemns the Venetians as prideful and vulgar in his work. Kinnamos' judgements reveal the shift in the relationship between the Romans and the Venetians by the end of the twelfth century. In the middle of the twelfth century, the Venetians had maintained their status as a vassal state to the Romans, providing military support in times of need. However, simmering tensions between the Venetians and the Romans jeopardized the situation in Roman territory. The causes for this friction became more apparent as the twelfth century progressed and revolved around the rapid growth of the Venetian Republic as it sought independence from the Roman empire and commercial supremacy in the Adriatic Sea and to the East. Venice was gaining military power through its conquest of Jerusalem, political power

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<sup>141</sup> Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus: By John Kinnamos; Translated by Charles M. Brand*, 5.

<sup>142</sup> Brown, "The Venetians and the Venetian Quarter in Constantinople to the Close of the Twelfth Century," 183.

<sup>143</sup> Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 409.

through its alliance with the Norman state, and economic power from the increasing prosperity of its colony in Constantinople.<sup>144</sup> Starting in the 1130s, the Venetians began to invest significant capital in establishing more permanent residences in Roman cities. While their trading profits were not exponential, the Venetians had a significant advantage since they did not have to pay any customs duties, and by midcentury the Venetian colony was substantially wealthy.<sup>145</sup> The rising wealth of the Venetians, occurring as local merchants remained subject to the *kommerkion* and other taxes, may have appeared unjust to Roman merchants who had to pay the *kommerkion*.

When John II came to the throne in 1118 C.E., he recognized how the Venetians continued to exert a stranglehold over international trade in the empire. In addition, the emperor was in need of funds, and he may have seen the Venetians as merely another drain on his coffers.<sup>146</sup> In 1119 C.E., when the doge sent an embassy “to beg for the renewal of the Alexian chrysobull, it was refused”.<sup>147</sup> John II delayed ratification of the treaty, having witnessed the economic and social effects of his father’s generous concessions to the Venetians, which included Italian control of the economy and purchase of Roman titles.<sup>148</sup> Romans of John II’s generation had stewed in resentment at what they saw as Venetian arrogance borne of the spoils of the imperial chrysobull of Alexios I. In retaliation, the Venetian doge sent a fleet in 1121 C.E., attacking Corfu and Rhodes. Since the emperor did not have a fleet of his own, as both the Normans and the Venetians had turned against him, he soon realized his weakness and that he needed the Venetians as allies, not enemies.<sup>149</sup> In addition to these political factors, John II realized that the Venetians had come to play an essential role in the Roman economy,

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<sup>144</sup> Brown, “The Venetians and the Venetian Quarter in Constantinople to the Close of the Twelfth Century,” 83.

<sup>145</sup> Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 227 - 228.

<sup>146</sup> Brown, “The Venetians and the Venetian Quarter in Constantinople to the Close of the Twelfth Century,” 83-167.

<sup>147</sup> Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus: By John Kinnamos; Translated by Charles M. Brand*, 73.

<sup>148</sup> Brown, “The Venetians and the Venetian Quarter in Constantinople to the Close of the Twelfth Century,” 167.

<sup>149</sup> Madden, *Venice: A New History*, 73-75.

maintaining the empire's economic prosperity and supplying it with essential food and services.<sup>150</sup>

John Kinnamos was born in 1143 C.E, soon after Manuel I assumed the throne and witnessed the critical role the Venetians played in the Roman economy and foreign policy. While many historians of the early twentieth century regarded Alexios I and John II for their military, administrative, and diplomatic acumen, they allotted far greater praise to Manuel, lauding him for his physical attractiveness, courage, astute grasp of theology and literature, and grandiose display of power and wealth.<sup>151</sup> Kinnamos' youth in the early years of Manuel's reign may account for his lack of fear of the Normans and animosity of the Venetians. In 1147 C.E., Norman forces encroached and threatened to invade the Roman empire, prompting the emperor to turn towards Venice for aid. The Venetians immediately agreed to help, as a stable and peaceful Roman empire would be in their interest and Norman conquest of Constantinople could lead to economic ruin. In response, Manuel I Komnenos quickly sent the Venetians a chrysobull that year, confirming their trade privileges. Once the Norman danger was averted, Manuel expressed his gratitude by dramatically expanding the Venetian quarter in Constantinople and rewarding his loyal allies.<sup>152</sup>

In continuation of this relationship, Kinnamos depicts how in 1165 C.E. the Venetians "agreed to aid the Romans with a fleet of a hundred triremes for conflicts by sea, renewing their previous treaties" once again. They also "gave pledges to maintain opposition throughout his life to Frederick, king of the Germans, and all others in the western region if they should wage war on the Romans". The 'king of the Germans' that Kinnamos refers to was known as the Holy

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<sup>150</sup> Harris, *Constantinople: Capital of Byzantium*, 126.

<sup>151</sup> Diehl, *Byzantine Portraits*, 16.

<sup>152</sup> Madden, *Venice: A New History*, 82-84.

Roman Emperor to the rest of Europe. The insinuation that the Roman emperor was not the one true Roman emperor residing in Constantinople was an insult to the *basileus*, and Romans perceived the rising power of central Europe to be a threat to their supremacy. Therefore, the Romans sought to establish alliances against the Germans to strengthen their own position. Located at “the farthest part of the Ionian Gulf”, the Venetians were a strategically placed and valuable ally. However, Kinnamos’ negative impression of the Venetians in his history reveals that rising tensions in the Roman empire soon damaged this symbiotic relationship.

Kinnamos criticizes the Venetians for their pridefulness. He repeatedly condemns the Venetians for their “boastfulness”, “rashness”, and “great ignorance”. He dictates how the Venetians “received various recompense” from the Romans after they “formerly offered an allied force to emperor Alexios I” when Robert Guiscard” attempted to “besiege” the Roman empire. He explains that part of these concessions included the agreement that the Venetians would not have to pay “tithes on commerce” to the Roman government. Since the state required all merchants to pay this tax, called the *kommerkion*, and the Venetians would now be free from this burden, Kinnamos considered this a very generous concession. He expected the Venetians in turn to express their gratitude and not abuse this gift. Because of this expectation, Kinnamos was not pleased when the rising power of the Venetians led them to behave as equals or superiors to the Romans, and not their inferiors as in previous decades. The Romans believed all Latins to be their inferiors, and the emperor manifested this perception in his foreign policy. Therefore, regardless of the Venetian’s material wealth, the Romans considered these people to be forever consigned to a subordinate position, unable to achieve the level of sophistication necessary to rise to the Romans’ international status. Kinnamos details one instance of the emperor exercising this position of power. He describes that when the French king, Louis VII, arrived for an

audience with the emperor, he “came inside the palace”, where “the emperor was seated on high, and a lowly seat...was offered” to Louis VII, reinforcing this power structure. However, it was not just the imperial family that held this conviction, but all Roman citizens.

Echoing the opinions of Roman merchants, Kinnamos expresses his belief that the Venetians’ “immoderate enrichment...quickly elevated them to boastfulness” and soon led them to treat the Romans as slaves, even those of great prominence.<sup>153</sup> While the Venetians did not truly subordinate the Romans, the locals certainly felt a loss of power. Roman officials had no jurisdiction over the Venetians, and judicial decisions regarding the conduct of Venetians living in Roman territory often came from Venice, instead of Constantinople.<sup>154</sup> As a result, the Italians enjoyed not only a favorable position in terms of trade, but also a significant degree of judicial immunity within the rapidly expanding *embolo*.<sup>155</sup> The Venetians further instigated the wrath of the Romans by disregarding Roman law and engaging in petty crime.<sup>156</sup> In response, locals lived in fear of their troublesome and hostile guests.<sup>157</sup> In addition, there was friction over Venetians settled in the empire who had married into Roman families, as it was difficult to define the rules and expectations for these peoples and their children of a partly Roman, partly foreign ancestry. Venetians who married into Roman families and their children often claimed privileged status, placing them out of Roman jurisdiction. Roman locals detested this practice, which they perceived as unfair and disrespectful to their land and emperor.<sup>158</sup>

While Kinnamos recognized that directly criticizing the policies of the current emperor Alexios II and that of his father Manuel I would not be politically advantageous, he could not

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<sup>153</sup> Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus: By John Kinnamos; Translated by Charles M. Brand*, 69-213.

<sup>154</sup> Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 229.

<sup>155</sup> Harris, *Constantinople: Capital of Byzantium*, 135.

<sup>156</sup> Madden, *Venice: A New History*, 76.

<sup>157</sup> Diehl, *Byzantine Portraits*, 18.

<sup>158</sup> Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 229.



refrain from displaying his animosity toward the Venetians. He considers the Venetians a dangerous and untrustworthy people and believes that the emperor was too generous in admitting the Venetians back into the empire, as this only raised “them to still more bragging and pride”. Kinnamos expresses his feelings in the form of praise as to not incite the ire of the imperial family, while remaining true to his own judgement. Unlike Choniates, he wrote while the Roman emperors were still in power. However, Kinnamos did not have to mince his words too often, as Manuel I did not share his grandfather’s gratitude towards the Venetians and his own acts of benevolence towards them grew increasingly scarce in later years. Kinnamos reveals that in his letter to the Venetians after their military retaliation to their expulsion in 1171 C.E., Manuel I accused the Venetians as having “great ambition to betray [the Romans] to their enemies” and describes their decision to attack the Romans as one of “vainglory”. The Romans’ anger at the Venetians’ attitude may have been exasperated by the rise of Western powers and the entrance of Western armies in Roman territory. Later in his history, Kinnamos details how when German soldiers traveled through the Roman Empire on the Second Crusade, they “slaughtered cattle mercilessly and slew many Romans who resisted them”. Hearing about this, the emperor “directed...that whenever the Germans again attempted to commence unjust violence, [the Romans] should oppose them insofar as possible”.<sup>159</sup> While Kinnamos was wary of inciting the anger of the imperial family, he remains convicted in the Venetians’ hubris and the dangerous political implications of this upset in the balance of power.

Kinnamos’ impressions of the tempestuous situation in Constantinople were echoed by the fourteenth century historian Nicephorus Gregoras. Gregoras expresses that the Genoese’s elevated position in Roman society. He details how the Romans had permitted the Genoese for

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<sup>159</sup> Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus: By John Kinnamos; Translated by Charles M. Brand*, 62-213.

years to “construct certain small and insignificant buildings”, but “with the passing of much time, the Genoese had gradually achieved great wealth and power”. In addition, he argues that the Genoese took advantage of internal divisions and external threats to the empire, and “secretly and treacherously supported now one side and now the other”.<sup>160</sup> To this end, Gregoras illustrates that the Genoese took over “almost all the future from the sea [trade]”, as well as “many public functions of various sorts that brought money to the treasury”.<sup>161</sup> Gregoras’ conviction in the extent of the Venetian’s economic and cultural damage to Roman society supports Kinnamos’ own fears.

In addition to criticizing the Venetians for their haughty behavior, Kinnamos reveals his conviction in the vulgarity of these Italian peoples. Kinnamos describes the Venetians as “corrupt in character”, and “jesting and rude more than any other” nation because the Venetian population is “filled with sailor’s vulgarity”.<sup>162</sup> The Venetians’ behavior and boldness in their interactions with Roman authorities further aggravated the local citizens. The Venetian’s behavior led many Romans to see the Latins as barbarians and began referring to themselves as Hellenes, in order to further emphasize the cultural gap and discord between the two groups.<sup>163</sup> In his history, Kinnamos accuses the Venetians of “inflicting blows” on many of the aristocrats and “[insulting] them savagely”. Kinnamos and his fellow Romans resented how the Venetians used their diplomatic immunity to their advantage, committing needless crimes since there would be no consequences. Furthermore, Kinnamos believed that the Venetians’ vulgarity necessitated that they take an inferior role in Constantinople’s social structure. This is seen in Kinnamos’

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<sup>160</sup> *Byzantium: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes*, 289.

<sup>161</sup> Geanakoplos, *Interaction of the “Sibling” Byzantine and Western Cultures in the Middle Ages and Italian Renaissance (330-1600)*, 289–90.

<sup>162</sup> Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus: By John Kinnamos; Translated by Charles M. Brand*, 210.

<sup>163</sup> Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 233.

opposition to Venetians' practice of taking "for themselves Roman wives" and living "like other Romans in their houses outside the residential area granted them by the emperor".<sup>164</sup> He also would have opposed the Venetians' practice of obtaining Roman titles and honors for themselves and Roman teachers and brides for their sons.<sup>165</sup> This practice further fueled Kinnamos' conviction in the Venetians' hubris and led Kinnamos to view the Venetians' refusal to abide by the status quo set when they were in an inferior state as a personal and political insult.

Kinnamos further condemns the Venetians for actions he believes exhibits their coarseness and lack of civilized behavior. For example, he described a confrontation in Constantinople between the Venetians and the Lombards, a people from Northern Italy. When the Venetians grew angry at the Lombards, they "pulled their houses down to their foundations and did them great damage". However, Kinnamos describes that when "the emperor condemned them to rebuild the Lombards' houses" and "restore what had been taken from them", the Venetians refused to do so and threatened the Roman emperor.<sup>166</sup> Kinnamos offers this illustration to reveal the depth of the Venetian's disrespect for Roman authority and culture. Many Romans disliked the Italians because groups from different city states living in Roman territory repeatedly fought amongst themselves, instigating violent confrontations in Roman cities.<sup>167</sup> Kinnamos would have viewed these displays of violence as a lack of gratitude towards the Romans' hospitality, and a further indication of the Venetian's barbaric nature.

However, it did not take much to enlighten the Romans' prejudice. The Romans used the Venetians' incidents of brutality as evidence of their barbarism. Kinnamos and his contemporaries soon found ways to separate themselves from their more barbaric trading

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<sup>164</sup> Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus: By John Kinnamos; Translated by Charles M. Brand*, 210.

<sup>165</sup> Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*, 205.

<sup>166</sup> Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus: By John Kinnamos; Translated by Charles M. Brand*, 211.

<sup>167</sup> Harris, *Constantinople: Capital of Byzantium*, 136.

partners. This animosity even expanded to the imperial branch. Kinnamos details how the emperor claimed that it was impossible to place the two states on an equal level since the Venetians are “a nation not even anciently worthy of the name” and not comparable to the Romans in terms of strength. The Romans believed their famed history to be second to none and perceived other nations as upstarts. Their criticism of the Venetian’s lack of background reveals that even centuries later, the Venetians would never achieve the Romans’ level of sophistication, as the Roman state would always be older and more established. Furthermore, Kinnamos details how the emperor stated that the Venetians entered the Roman state as “wanderers gripped by poverty” who “showed great disdain” towards the Romans.<sup>168</sup> The historian repeatedly references the Venetians’ past to remind the Italians of their lowly history, which will forever taint their international reputation, Kinnamos’ choice to designate the Venetians as barbaric outsiders at a time in which they were becoming wealthier, and more likely to afford key indicators of refinement reveals the Romans’ refusal to accept their relative decline in status in the Mediterranean sphere.

William of Tyre, a contemporary historian and resident of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem, was “partial to Manuel”, and reveals Roman attitudes to the Latins. He details that “during the reign of Manuel...the Latins had found great favor with him - a reward well deserved because of their loyalty and valor”. William of Tyre praises Manuel I, describing him as “a great-souled man of incomparable energy”, who “relied so implicitly on [the Latins’] fidelity and ability that he passed over the Greeks as soft and effeminate and entrusted important affairs to the Latins alone”. In fact, Manuel I “held [the Latins] in such high esteem and showed towards them lavish generosity” and was “constantly improving their status”, that the Latins “regarded

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<sup>168</sup> Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus: By John Kinnamos; Translated by Charles M. Brand*, 213.

him as their great benefactor and eagerly flocked to his court”. However, “the kindred of the emperor”, in addition to Greek nobles and commoners, “naturally conceived an insatiable hatred towards [the Latins]”. This hostility was increased by “the difference between [Eastern and Western] sacraments” and “furnished an additional incentive to their jealousy”. In addition, the Romans regarded all who did not follow their religious tradition as heretics. Because of this mutual hostility, the Romans “had for a long time cherished this hatred in their hearts and were ever seeking an opportunity, at least after the death of the emperor, to destroy utterly the hated race of the Latins” in order to “satisfy their inexorable animosity”.<sup>169</sup> William of Tyre’s commentary reveals that Kinnamos’ sentiments were shared by the majority of his contemporaries, especially those of similar social standing. His account also displays that the emperor’s preference for the Latins may have played a significant role in Roman perception of the Latins as their own underlying cultural prejudice.

Kinnamos’ denunciation of the Venetians is apparent in his depiction of the conflict between the foreign merchants and the imperial court. In 1167 C.E., the emperor called upon his Venetian vassals to defend the Roman empire against the Normans, and the Doge refused, explaining that he did not want to endanger Venice’s commercial treaty with the Normans. In retaliation, Manuel I soon came to favor the Venetians’ commercial rivals.<sup>170</sup> The empire cultivated stronger relationships with the Genoese and Pisans, even granting merchants from these city states their own quarters in Constantinople, close to the Venetian quarter. This new favoritism angered the Venetians, who then violently raided the Genoese quarter until the imperial guard managed to subdue the violence. The Romans condemned this display of brutality and disobedience and the emperor even went so far as to assert that the empire no longer needed

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<sup>169</sup> *Byzantium: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes*, 364.

<sup>170</sup> Brown, “The Venetians and the Venetian Quarter in Constantinople to the Close of the Twelfth Century,” 84.

the support of the Venetians, and could instead rely on Genoese naval power, since they had a naval force as large as that of the Venetians, and none of their arrogance.

Recognizing how his decision threatened the livelihoods and potentially endangered the lives of Venetians living in Roman territories, in 1168 C.E. and 1170 C.E. the Doge forbade Venetian merchants from entering the Roman empire. However, Manuel I feared that the exodus of Venetians would lead to a decline in trade and loss of control and soon sent diplomats to the Doge to withdraw this order, claiming that the lives and livelihoods of Venetians living in the empire were secure. However, the emperor was merely concealing his true desire to punish the Venetians for their insolence and secretly called in troops to the capital city. The Venetians suspected as much, and their leaders sought an audience with the emperor, who publicly denied any such intent to harm the Venetians.<sup>171</sup> Kinnamos details how Manuel I soon decided to “[commit] the Venetians who lived by the Roman Empire and anywhere else in the Romans’ land to public prisons” and [to register] their property with the treasury. The emperor then expelled the Venetians, who soon attacked the Romans. Because Manuel I “intended to take [the Venetians] on the same day in a net, he dispatched letters throughout the Romans’ land, whereby he specified to those who governed the province the moment at which they had to lay hands on the Venetians”. The Romans then seized all the Venetians living in Roman territories and imprisoned them in prisons and monasteries and “caused [the Venetians’] property to be registered in the state treasury”.<sup>172</sup> When Venetians fleeing Constantinople reached Venice and revealed the Romans’ violence and duplicity, the Doge initiated a war against the Romans.<sup>173</sup> As Kinnamos relates it, the Venetians “took Chios and ravaged the celebrated islands of Rhodes and

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<sup>171</sup> Madden, *Venice: A New History*, 84-86.

<sup>172</sup> Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus: By John Kinnamos; Translated by Charles M. Brand*, 209-211.

<sup>173</sup> Brown, “The Venetians and the Venetian Quarter in Constantinople to the Close of the Twelfth Century,” 86.

Lesbos” and “pursued a course of piracy by sea and had no mercy on mankind” in retribution against the Romans.<sup>174</sup> Fearing the economic and military impacts of this action, Emperor Manuel soon sought to create peace between the two empires but died before doing so in 1180 C.E.<sup>175</sup> While the Venetians eventually returned to Constantinople, Kinnamos’ resentment of the Italians is apparent, indicating his permanent mistrust of the Venetians living in Roman cities.<sup>176</sup> In his writings, Kinnamos reveals his belief in the Venetians as prideful and vulgar barbarians, outsiders who were seeking to usurp power in Roman economic and political life. His perceptions reveal the growing power of the Venetians, and Roman fear of their subsequent loss of power in the Mediterranean.

Kinnamos displays a more positive impression of the Normans, praising them for their renown in battle despite their foolishness and inhumanity. He was able to assume this position and respect these rulers of Sicily, since they no longer represented a threat to Roman naval supremacy. However, Manuel I still recognized their power, and negotiated his first marriage alliance with a relative of the German emperor to serve as a counterbalance to Norman power in the Mediterranean.<sup>177</sup> In addition, Kinnamos may have been hesitant to criticize the Normans since Manuel I’s second wife, Maria of Antioch, was descended from Robert Guiscard on her mother’s side, and her son, Alexios II, was emperor when Kinnamos wrote his history. Also, the Normans’ power declined after the death of Roger II in 1154 C.E., so when Kinnamos wrote his history decades later, public wariness of the Normans would have faded.<sup>178</sup> In Kinnamos’ history, he recounts how the “caesar” Roger [II of Sicily] “had his eye on the empire at the

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<sup>174</sup> Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus: By John Kinnamos; Translated by Charles M. Brand*, 210.

<sup>175</sup> Brown, “The Venetians and the Venetian Quarter in Constantinople to the Close of the Twelfth Century,” 86.

<sup>176</sup> Harris, *Constantinople: Capital of Byzantium*, 115.

<sup>177</sup> Brown, “The Venetians and the Venetian Quarter in Constantinople to the Close of the Twelfth Century,” 170–71.

<sup>178</sup> Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 201.

moment when” John II died, and “surrounded himself with many other partisans”, including Italians. The term “caesar” denotes an emperor or ruler and considering the Romans’ conviction in their emperor as the world’s supreme ruler, Kinnamos’ use of the word “caesar” reveals his respect for the Normans. In addition, it demonstrates that Kinnamos, and other everyday Romans, did not perceive the Normans as a threat to their preeminence.

Kinnamos describes Roger Guiscard, the leader of the Normans during the reign of Alexios I, favorably, as “ranked among the counts”, and “an active and vigorous man, skilled in contriving matters and clever at setting in motion what had been settled”. He further counseled that Guiscard was “renown” and a powerful foe. Kinnamos and his contemporary Romans were impressed with the Normans’ military acumen, and the Romans employed many Normans in their army. Guiscard had passed away more than seventy years before Kinnamos wrote his history, and Kinnamos’ depiction of the Normans reveals that popular opinion had remained in the Normans’ favor for generations. Kinnamos also reveals his positive impression of Roger II, the son of Roger Guiscard, who ruled until the middle of the twelfth century. Kinnamos reveals how Roger II cleverly “contrived treacherous schemes and without battle” and expelled the invader, Lothar.<sup>179</sup> This praise indicates that Kinnamos respected the Normans and admired their prowess in battle, viewing their success as an asset to the Roman state, and not a potential threat.

Despite this prejudice, Manuel I himself appreciated the Western concept of chivalry and admired the prowess of Western knights.<sup>180</sup> Writing in the early twentieth century, the French historian Charles Diehl lauded Manuel for his success in creating cultural syncretism in the Roman court, blending Western practices with the rich tradition of the Roman empire.<sup>181</sup> Manuel I

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<sup>179</sup> Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus: By John Kinnamos; Translated by Charles M. Brand*, 37-210.

<sup>180</sup> Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 236.

<sup>181</sup> Diehl, *Byzantine Portraits*, 16.



delighted in Western customs such as jousting and wearing pants, and frequently selected Western brides for members of his family.<sup>182</sup> In addition, during his reign, Manuel I employed a greater number of Westerners at his court than ever before, where they served as translators and ambassadors.<sup>183</sup> Because of this, his generosity towards Latins living in his empire became legendary in the West.<sup>184</sup> Manuel recognized the importance of Western opinion, and so even went as far as paying for the ransoms of Latin knights and nobles captured in battle in order to improve his standing with Western rulers.<sup>185</sup> He may have perceived that there would come a time when Western support would be greatly needed. In general, Roman emperors supported the admittance of foreigners, as they were fascinated by the novelty of these fighters from distant lands, and their impressive array of skills. Mercenaries had found a home in the Roman empire for decades, as the empire possessed a higher degree of tolerance than other lands in Christendom, perhaps because of its inherent confidence in its own political situation and society. Kinnamos may have decided to praise the Normans in order to appease Manuel I and condone his favoritism, despite his personal sentiments.

Although some disapproved of Manuel's blatant favoritism towards the Westerners, Romans grudgingly appreciated the Latin's fighting capacity and bravery, and admired the Normans for their strength.<sup>186</sup> The Romans regarded the Normans as valuable allies in the Mediterranean sphere, and Kinnamos' praise of the current ruler's grandfather would have served to strengthen bonds between the two nations, reminding the Romans of their debt to the Normans. They realized that these foreigners, barbaric as they were, had to be reckoned with,

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<sup>182</sup> Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*, 260.

<sup>183</sup> Harris, *Constantinople: Capital of Byzantium*, 260.

<sup>184</sup> Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 236.

<sup>185</sup> Harris, *Constantinople: Capital of Byzantium*, 107.

<sup>186</sup> Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*, 248.

and made to serve the best interests of the Empire and submit to Roman influence. In addition, it was better to keep these potential enemies close by, recording their weaknesses and strengths in order to understand the best way to handle them.<sup>187</sup> However, Kinnamos retains his conviction in Roman supremacy, describing the Romans as “superior in battle” to the Sicilians, who were often of Norman ancestry.

Yet, Kinnamos did not refrain from characterizing the Normans as unreasonable and foolish. His judgement of the Normans as having a lack of common sense served to support his conviction in their relative inferiority. Kinnamos illustrates the Normans’ lack of judgement through their relationships with other leaders. In one instance, Roger I was attempting to negotiate with Pope Innocent III. Kinnamos describes how when Roger I approached the pope’s envoy secretly, he “corrupted” the messenger “with money and persuaded him to give the usual signal of a war’s conclusion”. Kinnamos describes this as “a barbarous and foolish custom”, as the Normans did not abide by established standards and practices. In another episode, Kinnamos exhibits how Roger II asked the emperor at the time, John II, to supply “a bride of imperial blood” for Roger’s son. When Roger II was not successful, he also contacted Manuel I regarding this request. Roger “seduced by gold” the Roman envoy and persuaded him to “[promise] some unwelcome things, chief of which was that in the future the emperor and Roger were to be on an equal plane of greatness”. Kinnamos disapproved of this practice and believes that the Romans and Normans should not negotiate on an equal level. He details how when the envoy died “without paying the penalty for his rash deed”, and the emperor heard about his promises, he treated the request as a joke and “dismissed Roger himself from his mind”. Therefore, Kinnamos

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<sup>187</sup> Diehl, *Byzantine Portraits*, 54.

believed the Romans did not need to take the Normans seriously, considering them a mere annoyance.

Kinnamos praises the Normans for recognizing their faults, and humbly apologizing for their past overstep. He reveals that when Roger II died, “his son William I who took up rule was well aware of his father’s many crimes against the Romans’ realm and recognized that he had to send envoys to the emperor to resolve their differences”.<sup>188</sup> In both Komnene’s and Kinnamos’ histories, it is clear that the Comnenoi recognized the importance of diplomatic agreements with foreign forces and sought to use these alliances to strengthen their own position on the world stage. However, the imperial family and the common people both believed that their superior position in comparison to these other countries should be reflected in diplomatic negotiations. To this end, the Romans continued to regard themselves as the only civilized peoples and treated the rest of the world with condescension.<sup>189</sup>

Kinnamos reveals the Normans’ foolishness, using their lack of reason to justify the Romans’ accepted international hierarchy of Roman superiority and Latin inferiority. He states how when William, ruler of Sicily, asked for the Romans’ aid when other powers invaded his territory, the emperor stated that the Normans had “ruined former excellent victories and invited on [themselves] the fate in which you presently are, and now, when others were eager with God’s aid to recoup by war what you had previously mismanaged, you stand in the way”.<sup>190</sup> Kinnamos reveals his belief that the Normans do not deserve the support of the Romans, since they previously rejected Roman intervention. In addition, he argues that only the Normans are to blame for their problems. During the Sicilian campaign, contemporary Roman chroniclers

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<sup>188</sup> Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Komnenos: By John Kinnamos; Translated by Charles M. Brand*, 72-94.

<sup>189</sup> Diehl, *Byzantine Portraits*, 53–54.

<sup>190</sup> Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus: By John Kinnamos; Translated by Charles M. Brand*, 132.

adopted a similar attitude, describing the Normans as headstrong, flighty, unreliable and deceptive, and arrogant despite their inability to defeat the Roman emperor.<sup>191</sup> This unforgiving nature and harsh prejudice would engender feelings of resentment within the Latin community, and the Romans would later come to regret this treatment when their hold on power became more tenuous.

Lastly, Kinnamos condemns the Normans for their inhuman behavior, especially atrocities committed against civilians. When introducing Roger II, Kinnamos reveals how he had “terrorized over Sicily” and “was greedy for” the Italian principality of Capua, which was “rich and prosperous”. Kinnamos’ focus on Roger II’s greed and desire for territorial gain marks him as a usurper, not a consecrated ruler. Creating this further separation between Roman emperors and foreign rulers reveals the deep cultural prejudice between the Romans and the Latins. Furthermore, Kinnamos seeks to discredit Roger II and dispute his sovereignty, thereby weakening his hold on power. Kinnamos describes how many of the Italians had “been driven from the realm by the tyrant of Sicily”, Roger II, “and consequently had become the emperor’s voluntary” subjects. Therefore, he asserts that Roger II lacks the support of his subjects, and that he is an inhumane and unjust ruler. In contrast, the Sicilians recognize that the Roman empire is a place of peace and prosperity, and so have chosen to reside in the emperor’s territory of their own free will. Kinnamos further seeks to create a contrast between the barbarism of the Normans and the scrupulous Romans when depicting the Roman invasion of Bari, an Italian city on the Eastern coast that was under Norman control. He reveals that the citizens of Bari willingly yielded the city to the Roman army and demolished the citadel that stood at a symbol of the Normans’ power. The citizens of Bari took these actions in order to direct their “hatred” towards

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<sup>191</sup> Chrissis, Kolia-Dermizaki, and Papageorgiou, *The Roman Empire and the West*, 122.

Roger II, since he “behaved inhumanly to them”, and “as customary for tyrants”.<sup>192</sup> Kinnamos considers this behavior unsurprising and remains firmly convinced in the Norman’s inhumanity. In his opinion, this lack of respect for the lives of innocent civilians bars the Normans from ever hoping to be considered on the same level as the Romans.

One cotemporary Roman chronicler shared Kinnamos evaluation of the Normans as barbaric and condemns the Normans for their brutality in their invasion of Thessaloniki, detailing that the Normans “committed such impieties as to provoke divine reaction” when they broke into churches.<sup>193</sup> The Romans considered themselves descendants of the Romans from the age of Constantine and considered a threat to Christianity as a threat to their empire. The chronicler further asserts that this “profanation of the holy churches...may be viewed as waging war on God”, revealing the depth of the Normans’ standing in Roman opinion.<sup>194</sup> The barbarism of the Normans is further revealed when the chronicler illustrates how the Normans “profaned the objects of the divine” and “destroyed sacred images”. Similar to Kinnamos, this historian uses Norman desecration of holy property and rape of Roman women, to strengthen his claim of Roman cultural superiority, and the Normans’ barbarism.<sup>195</sup>

In his history *Deeds of John and Manuel Komnenos*, Kinnamos exhibits substantial cultural prejudice in his depictions of the Latins, especially those that resided in the Roman empire. He condemned the Venetians for their pride and vulgarity and criticized the Normans for their greed and inhumanity, revealing his belief in Roman superiority. The Romans saw all Westerners, even powerful ones, as inferiors, and as temporary holders of land that belonged to

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<sup>192</sup> Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Komnenos: By John Kinnamos; Translated by Charles M. Brand*, 38-110.

<sup>193</sup> *The Roman Empire: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes*, 367.

<sup>194</sup> *Byzantium: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes*, 367.

<sup>195</sup> *The Roman Empire: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes*, 367-398.

the Romans, either as vassal states or land seized by lawless annexation.<sup>196</sup> Kinnamos' perceptions were influenced by the changing geopolitical context. As the Roman empire declined in relative power and significance, Latin nations rose to the forefront of trade and international affairs. Embittered by this loss of position, Kinnamos and his contemporaries resolved to reduce the Venetians in cultural standing, regulating them to a forever inferior role in Roman society.

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<sup>196</sup> Diehl, *Byzantine Portraits*, 176.

### Chapter Three: Niketas Choniates

In the beginning of his description of the sack of Constantinople, Choniates references Solon, an ancient Athenian statesman. He reveals how Solon warned of the rise of tyranny, recognizing that it was “easier to eradicate an emerging evil in the very beginning and thus prevent it taking root than to cut it away and destroy it after it has grown and become very strong”. When Solon’s protestations were ignored, he warned that the Athenians would not be able to blame the gods for their future suffering. He explained that the gods were “good” and “the fault was” that of the Athenians, who willingly placed “all the strongholds” in the hands of the tyrant, Peisistratus. He then states that “the same would be true” if a member of the Roman empire had attempted “to come to the aid of a state whose emperors, from the beginning, were nurtured in indolence” and secluded themselves from state affairs in favor of court trivialities and whose citizens were “concerned only with the business and commerce and driving a trade”.

With these words, Choniates acknowledges that the Romans cannot blame God or Fate for the Latin invasion, as the emperors refused to take their position as head of state seriously and the locals prioritized profit and economic well-being over control over their own economy. In addition, the emperor’s concessions to Westerners over the years only increased their power and control of the cosmopolitan market. Furthermore, Choniates states that he does not refrain from recounting the history of the sack of Constantinople since if the Romans refuse to “sing the deeds of the barbarians, [God] will take the wise in their own cleverness, he will often cause the proud to fall and fill their faces with dishonor and deliver them to nations more barbarous than themselves, to their ruin”.<sup>197</sup> While Choniates retains the traditional Roman depiction of

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<sup>197</sup> Nicetas Choniates and Harry J. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, Byzantine Texts in Translation (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 321-322.

Westerners as barbarians, he argues that the Romans must recognize their defeat, looking beyond their hubris and grasping the reality of the situation.

Komnene had introduced the Latins in the *Alexiad* as a disease, an unwanted substance permeating Roman politics and society, with the potential to inflict significant harm. Kinnamos echoes Komnene in *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus* and acknowledges the rising power of Western forces and their importance in the Roman bureaucratic and military structure, despite believing in their barbaric qualities. Yet, Komnene and Kinnamos lived through a period of relative prosperity in the Roman empire, in which the continuation of Eastern supremacy and the Roman state appeared to be secure. The final writer of the Komnenian period, Niketas Choniates, was not so lucky. Born in the empire's height in the reign of Manuel I Komnenos, Choniates lived to see its virtual destruction in the Fourth Crusade.<sup>198</sup> In *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, Choniates reveals his impressions of the Normans as arrogant and barbaric and his conception of Venetians as prideful and vulgar. Despite his belief in the inferiority of these Westerners, Choniates reveals that this very cultural prejudice blinded the Romans to the festering issues at home and abroad and enabled the fall of the empire. As Choniates constructs it, this cultural supremacy is rooted in both the presumption that the Latins were not genuine Christians and in the belief that the Romans' Greek heritage gave them a unique position as possessors of the basic texts of Christianity in their original language and holders of classical Greek historical and literary works.<sup>199</sup> While all three of the Komnenian historians' works betray this cultural positioning, the changing historical context heavily influenced the preferences of each author, and which group felt the Romans' wrath the most keenly. It is my contention that while the Romans may have resented the Latins' presence in Constantinople and religious status

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<sup>198</sup> Warren Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* (New York; Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 422.

<sup>199</sup> Robert Browning, *The Byzantine Empire* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 197.



since the beginning of the Komnenian dynasty, it was only when the Latins became a political force that rivaled the imperial state that the Roman historians began to distrust, fear, and despise these peoples.<sup>200</sup> This chapter will first examine the life and works of Niketas Choniates, and then delve into his perception of first the Normans and secondly the Venetians.

Choniates was born around 1155 C.E. to a family of prosperous landholders who were members of the lesser nobility in Chonai, a city in western Anatolia.<sup>201</sup> He was “highly prized and much loved by his parents”, who sent him to Constantinople at the age of nine to meet his older brother Michael, a member of the clergy, who assumed responsibility for his education and future career. Choniates’ education centered around grammar, rhetoric, poetry, mathematics, astronomy, law, and politics. In his history, he describes how he “devoted [himself] to advanced studies under the direction of teachers”.<sup>202</sup> Through his achievement of a fine literary and legal education, Choniates sought to obtain a position in the central bureaucracy.<sup>203</sup> His first position was as a tax official under Manuel I.<sup>204</sup> The internal strength of the Komnenian dynasty and the energetic campaigning and diplomacy of Manuel, his father John II, and his grandfather Alexios I had stabilized the empire’s borders and created a degree of peace. When Manuel died, and his son Alexios II assumed the throne, the empire appeared secure. However, Alexios II’s regency with his Latin mother soon proved unpopular.<sup>205</sup> Meanwhile, Choniates, closely guided by his older brother Niketas, who was soon elevated to archbishop of Athens, became an imperial undersecretary during Alexios’ II reign.<sup>206</sup> This was a position with excellent prospects for future

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<sup>200</sup> Michael Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 2nd ed (London; Longman, 1997), 302.

<sup>201</sup> Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 423.

<sup>202</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, x-xii.

<sup>203</sup> Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 423.

<sup>204</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, xii.

<sup>205</sup> *The Oxford History of Byzantium* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2002), 194.

<sup>206</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*. xii

promotion.<sup>207</sup> In this period of the Roman empire, the bureaucracy enabled the rise of men of modest origins to high positions in government, and Choniates' early career was no exception. While this increased social mobility proved advantageous for Choniates, it also revealed the loosening of barriers that could lead a foreigner to assume a similar position. When Andronicus I Komnenos rose to power in 1183 C.E., Choniates resigned in protest, condemning the "man-eating tyrant" and his "murderous" acts. Instead, Choniates devoted himself to studying the law.<sup>208</sup> Modern historians, such as Robert Browning, echo Choniates' sentiments, revealing Andronicus as a ruler whose political ineptitude, impatience, and inclination towards violence and brutality prevented him from becoming a wise and humble ruler.<sup>209</sup> He may have also left because Basil Camaterus, his former patron, had joined a conspiracy that unsuccessfully attempted to halt Andronicus' rise to power and Choniates did not want to be suspected of sympathizing with Camaterus.

When Issakios II Angelos ascended the throne in 1185 C.E., Choniates returned to imperial service, serving as a secretary to the emperor and accompanying him on campaigns in Anatolia and Eastern Europe. Choniates was about the same age as the emperor, which might have contributed to their close relationship. Choniates ascended to eight different positions during Issakios II Angelos' 10-year reign. When Issakios II Angelos married a Hungarian princess, he chose Choniates to give an oration and poem at the wedding. In 1187 C.E., Choniates accompanied Issakios II Angelos on his first campaign as emperor, in which the emperor opposed the Bulgarian rebels in Thrace. In his message back to the capital, Choniates praised victory as a success even though the results were less than impressive.<sup>210</sup> Choniates was

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<sup>207</sup> Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 423.

<sup>208</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, x-xii.

<sup>209</sup> Browning, *The Byzantine Empire*, 184.

<sup>210</sup> Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 424-426.

later appointed to grand chamberlain of the public fisc, the second ranking official in the imperial treasury, in 1188 C.E., and became a member of the senate.<sup>211</sup> By 1190 C.E., Choniates had assumed the position of chief subordinate of the postal logothete and was later appointed as a judge of the Velum. During this time, he composed many encomiums in the emperor's honor. In 1195 C.E., he became logothete of the secreta, the senior minister of the whole civil service. When Issakios was overthrown and blinded by his brother Alexius III in 1195 C.E., Choniates maintained his position as logothete of the Secreta. After holding so many prestigious and well-paid positions, Choniates had become a rich and influential man with a wide circle of friends, colleagues, and clients. He owed a large part of this success to the patronage of the imperial family and his social and political connections within the imperial bureaucracy.

Choniates likely began his history in 1194 C.E., using his brother Michael's histories as a source. He could not have begun much after this, as his first draft, completed eight years later, was long and well researched. Choniates may have used his history to praise and condemn the current emperor Isaac Angelos' predecessors, acting as a subtle advisor. His later editions, published during the reign of Alexios III Angelos, favorably recounts Alexios III's assumption of power stating that Isaac was blinded by his own army, and not at the orders of Alexios III. When the Latins assumed power over Constantinople and the Empire in 1204 C.E., Choniates fled with his pregnant wife and young children, first hiding in the home of a Venetian merchant he had befriended.<sup>212</sup> When he returned to Constantinople, he witnessed the destruction of ancient masterpieces and the fall of the largest, wealthiest, and best-fortified city of the Western

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<sup>211</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, xii-xv.

<sup>212</sup> Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 425 - 430.

world.<sup>213</sup> <sup>214</sup> Despite his dismay at the current situation, Choniates attempted to make Latin rule more palatable for the Romans.<sup>215</sup>

Choniates consulted firsthand and secondhand sources in his research for his history. He recorded what he had heard “from those contemporaries who personally knew the emperor and who escorted him on his campaigns against the enemy and accompanied him into battle”. In addition, he had access to the archives of the Hagia Sophia, but not to the imperial archives. His lack of access to the imperial archives is apparent in his limited knowledge of John II’s reign and the early years of Manuel I’s reign.<sup>216</sup> Historian Warren Treadgold argues that Choniates’ work is more carefully and judiciously composed than Psellus’ *Chronography* and more objective and perceptive than Comnena’s *Alexiad*, as he acknowledges both personal and political flaws in the emperors and other members of the imperial family.<sup>217</sup> He uses classical words and phrases to suggest parallelism with and a difference from situations and personages of classical antiquity, creating a kind of historical counterpoint, and leading historians such as Robert Browning to label him as the greatest of the Roman historians of the Eastern empire.<sup>218</sup> In addition, his writing reveals a strong knowledge of grammar and rhetoric, and a thorough understanding of the works of Homer and the writers of the Gospels.<sup>219</sup> With his admiration of classical learning and background in Christian and Roman literature, philosophy, and theology, Choniates is characterized as a scholar between the medieval and Renaissance world.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, xv.

<sup>214</sup> Thomas F. Madden, *Venice: A New History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 145.

<sup>215</sup> Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 431.

<sup>216</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, xvii.

<sup>217</sup> Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 456.

<sup>218</sup> Browning, *The Byzantine Empire*, 205.

<sup>219</sup> Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 432.

<sup>220</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, xxvii.

Unlike Komnene and Kinnamos, Choniates possessed an unusually clear and sensible conception of the military, financial, and diplomatic policies that he thought the empire should have pursued. He claims that it was the government's failure to collect sufficient revenues to pay for its expenses that led to the empire's decline. He even goes so far as to dismiss the excessive and oppressive taxes during the reigns of Manuel I, Issakios II, and Alexios III and reproach these rulers for their cowardice and idleness in not prioritizing matters of state.<sup>221</sup> In addition, Choniates labels the Komnenian rulers as the “most inept, unfit, and stupid of men”, who “rebelled time and again in order to place themselves at the head of the empire”. While Komnene and Kinnamos wrote during the reign of Manuel I, the height of the Komnenian dynasty and a period of political and cultural revival for the empire as a whole, Choniates composed his history having seen his homeland crumble to outside forces. As a historian, it would have been only natural for him to attempt to make sense of the political upheaval in the past decade.

In *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, Choniates depicts the Normans as arrogant and barbaric, revealing his conviction in their cultural inferiority and inhumanity. Choniates advances this stance in order to demonstrate how these barbarians were wrongful usurpers of the Roman throne. Choniates introduces the Normans as “Roman haters” who viewed the Romans as their “bitterest enemies”.<sup>222</sup> These descendants of the Vikings were predators and mercenaries of no lasting loyalties and no fixed address, who strongly resisted commitment to any of the powers that sought their services, despite their adherence to knightly honor and religious reform in their conquered territories.<sup>223</sup> Choniates explains that the Normans’ “inordinate hatred” and the “excessive disagreement” between the Romans and the Normans had

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<sup>221</sup> Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 450–456.

<sup>222</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, xxiv–xxvi.

<sup>223</sup> *The Oxford History of Byzantium* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2002), 189.

prevented the cultivation of human feeling between the two groups. However, Choniates reveals that despite the Romans' intense animosity to the Normans, the Romans could not ignore these Western peoples, describing the two groups as "closely associated and frequently [sharing] the same dwelling".

Choniates seeks to expose the Normans' hubris in his work, and the dangers of their foolhardy nature. He describes the Normans as overweening, pretentious, supercilious, boastful, unable to understand and appreciate the more refined Roman demeanor. He believes that it is the Norman's excessive pride which has led them to overestimate their own power and position in the Mediterranean world. However, Choniates' own perception was highly influenced by his own historical context. Writing after the fall of the Roman state to Latin forces, Choniates wished to redeem the political might of the Roman empire, or at least assert that the Romans' cultural foundation remained unyielding. Choniates argues that previous emperors favored the Normans, offering them political and military positions, and that this accord elevated the Normans' self-perception as well as their financial and political position. His jealousy of these privileged foreigners is apparent in his bitter description of the Normans as men who spoke broken Greek and "driveled in their speech", and in his surprise that the emperor even appointed these men to judgeships. This slight was especially relevant to Choniates, a judge himself who had obtained an extensive political and legal education and risen to this office only after first serving in several bureaucratic positions and could support a historical counterargument that this work is more strongly influenced by the unique position of its author. Choniates further argues that Manuel's decision to favor the Latins in the imperial administration angered and alienated

native Romans, especially when Manuel I delegated the role of tax collector to Norman officials, placing Roman money into foreign hands.<sup>224</sup>

Choniates further seeks to display the arrogance of the Normans in his depiction of relations between Norman and Roman rulers. In one such exchange, regarding the treatment of Norman prisoners of war, the Norman ruler William II “sent letters reproaching [emperor Issakios Angelos] for his lack of mercy and for cruelly allowing the ranks of so many men of such tender age to perish of hunger and nakedness”.<sup>225</sup> Choniates certainly opposed this condemnation of the actions of his most sacred and infallible emperor. He would not have considered it proper for the Norman ruler, a clear subordinate in his mind, to question the actions of the supreme emperor, God’s representation on Earth of the most holy empire. Choniates also reveals William II’s futile attempt to unite the two nations in a common Christian brotherhood despite the “great gulf of disagreement” between the Normans and the Romans.<sup>226</sup> Instead, Choniates illustrates that the Roman emperor “took no heed of the letter’s contents”, and “allowed the wretches to waste away as before, which was the fate he had in store for them”. Through this scene, Choniates demonstrates his conviction in Roman cultural superiority and the Normans’ arrogance and audacity at assuming that the two powers could even be held at equal level. He implies the clear power and authority of the Roman emperor, who reigns supreme and answers only to Christ, unbothered by the pleas of mere feudal lords.

Choniates also establishes his position on Venetian pride and boastfulness through his depiction of an audience between the Roman emperor and Sicilian generals, who were of Norman birth and origin. This meeting followed a series of military battles between the two

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<sup>224</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, xxvi.

<sup>225</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, 201.

<sup>226</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, xxvi.

competing states, of which the Romans had been the victors. Like many Romans, Choniates would have considered the Normans usurpers of land that belonged to the Romans by right. He reveals how emperor Issakios Angelos questioned the Norman generals, asking them “why they had reviled him, the anointed of the Lord, who had given no just cause for complaint”.<sup>227</sup> The emperor’s mocking tone highlights his amusement at the pride and foolhardy nature of the Normans, who had dared to defy the Roman state and its sacred ruler. Furthermore, Choniates’ inclusion of this scene references his belief in the supreme power of the Roman state, and his wish that Constantinople would return to Greek hands. Although at times Choniates expresses his disapproval of emperor’s personal lifestyle choices, this action does not prevent his abiding faith in the special relationship the emperor shared with Christ.

Another instance in which Choniates reveals the arrogance of the Normans is in his depiction of the sack of Constantinople in 1204 C.E. Choniates describes how the Norman crusaders were “maddened by war and murderous in spirit...boasting terribly, barking like Cerberus and exhaling like Charon”. The historian uses this scene to demonstrate the Normans’ excessive pride in their own success, so much so that they viewed themselves as Cerberus and Charon, ancient gods of the underworld. The Normans may have used this association to demonstrate their power over the fates of those they subjugated. However, Choniates uses this description to highlight the Normans’ barbarous nature, reducing them to the level of ferocious canines charged with guarding the gates of hell. Choniates further highlights how the Normans “sacked the sacred places and trampled on the divine things and ran riot over the holy vessels, ...fearing neither God’s anger or man’s vengeance”.<sup>228</sup> The historian uses this scene to display

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<sup>227</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, 201 - 202.

<sup>228</sup> *Byzantium: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 369.



how the Normans failed to respect Christ and the Church, and that this lack of obeisance to a higher power demonstrates the Normans' arrogance and lack of humility.

Choniates advances his belief in the Latins' barbarism, describing them as "haters of the beautiful", unable to appreciate the finer elements of society due to their vulgar and uneducated ways.<sup>229</sup> This lack of refinement makes the Normans, in Choniates eyes, forever unequal and inferior to the Romans. In addition, he characterizes the Normans as "boastful, undaunted in spirit, lacking all humility, and trained to be ever bloodthirsty".<sup>230</sup> Choniates considers these men slaves to their base natures, satisfying their greed by dressing "in great opulence and wore armor into battle".<sup>231</sup> Furthermore, he remains convinced that the Normans were bound by their excessive wrath, arguing that the Westerners "nurtured an unsleeping hostility against the Romans" which emanated into "a perpetual, raving, hatred".<sup>232</sup>

Choniates illustrates the barbarism of the Normans through his choice to depict certain scenes of Roman military and political life, a practice also used by Komnene and Kinnamos. After the Norman rulers of Sicily succeeded in taking several Romans, Choniates describes Manuel I Komnenos "pondering how to take his revenge against the Sicilians" and "how to punish them for the inhuman crimes they perpetrated against the Romans".<sup>233</sup> Choniates assumes a patronizing tone in this scene, seeking to reveal the Normans' lack of decency and respect in comparison to the noble Romans. While both nations acted ruthlessly in matters of war, Choniates asserts that it is the Normans who are more at fault, and that their lack of civilized nature leads them to exceed the line of Christian humanity. The historian also makes this

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<sup>229</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, xxviii.

<sup>230</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, 113.

<sup>231</sup> *Byzantium: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes*, 113.

<sup>232</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, 113.

<sup>233</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, 43.

assumption because the Romans “are of the opinion that anything which is done for the Sacred Empire cannot be judged treachery”, extending the doctoring of caesaropapism to a conception of imperial infallibility.<sup>234</sup> Therefore, Choniates and his contemporaries considered the Roman empire and its leaders above reproach and concluded that the Romans’ adversaries must always be the parties in the wrong.

In addition, Choniates reveals the barbarism of the Normans by displaying military negotiations between the two groups. He describes that as Western powers “spread across the sea”, Manuel I “offered friendship ... and won them over with sundry friendly gestures as he provided them with quarters” in Constantinople. However, Choniates reveals that the emperor remained “anxious lest one of their so-called kings should muster a large military force and then attack the Romans”. Clearly, Choniates perceives, Manuel I Komnenos did not trust the Norman rulers to honor the agreement at hand, evidence of the Normans’ refusal to abide by the existing rules of military warfare and adhere to established social norms. In addition, the use of the term “so called-kings” reveals Choniates lack of respect for Norman rulers, who he perceives as lacking the holy anointment and powerful nature of the Roman emperors. Therefore, Choniates reveals how Manuel I “plied [the Normans] with gifts of money” and he “exercised his influence over those peoples who were in danger of falling under the sway of a more powerful ruler and roused them to take up arms”. Choniates argues that the Normans’ obsession with increasing their coffers is evince of their barbarism and focus on the material aspects of life. Also, it reveals the unscrupulous nature of the Norman mercenaries, who worked by wage and not out of patriotic duty to one’s king and country. Reading between the lines, however, it is evident that

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<sup>234</sup> Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 199.

the Romans, despite their prejudices, genuinely feared the rise of the Normans, and sought solutions ranging from appeasement to military aggression.

Choniates also seeks to illuminate the barbarism of the Normans through their perceived perfidious nature. He displays how Manuel I Komnenos recognized the possibility that the Western nations “would enter into a compact against the Romans”, joining a conspiracy against the imperial throne. Consequently, Choniates derides the faithlessness of the Normans, with whom it was impossible to negotiate since these peoples refused to adhere to established principles. Choniates then reveals how Manuel resolved to “buy [the Normans’] friendship with money and convince them by feats of arms not to pour over his orders”.<sup>235</sup> Choniates illustrates that the Normans’ barbarism requires the Roman emperor to resort to similar martial terms, threatening and bribing the Westerners.

Choniates furthermore demonstrates the apparent barbarism of the Norman people through his description of the sack of Constantinople in 1204 C.E, attempting to destroy their credibility and diminish their military success. He describes how “after the fall of the city, the dogs did not snatch at the corpses of the slain Romans: but rather targeted the “bodies of fallen Latin [who were Norman Sicilians]” with viciousness and insatiability, and “even broke into graves and unearthed” entombed bodies.<sup>236</sup> Choniates uses this scene to illustrate how the Normans’ barbarism was apparent to all, even animals, who could not understand the Normans’ words but could sense their dangerous and ungenerous nature through actions alone. Accounts by contemporary historians, such as the German monk Gunter of Pairis, support Choniates’ account and reveal that he was not exaggerating the extent of the crusaders’ pillaging. Gunter reveals how that the Romans’ wealth was so great that the extensive looting and devastation transformed

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<sup>235</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, 113.

<sup>236</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, 200.

the crusaders “from aliens and paupers into very rich citizens”.<sup>237</sup> Choniates furthermore asserts that the Normans’ barbaric standing relegates them to an inferior human position, one closer to that of animals. The viciousness, insatiability, and inhumanity of the aforementioned dogs’ mimics that of the Normans, revealing the Normans’ animalistic nature.

Choniates also reveals that during the fall of Constantinople he had to defend a young Roman maiden from a “lecherous and unholy barbarian” who was “held captive by the two most tyrannical of passions, lust and wrath”.<sup>238</sup> While some historians may perceive this passage as an attempt for Choniates to craft himself as a hero, one can also argue that Choniates uses this scene to further demonstrate the inhuman and animalistic tendencies of the Normans, individuals barbaric in nature and without moral qualms. Choniates most strongly expresses the barbaric nature of the Latins in his depiction of the Latin occupation of Constantinople in the first few years after Western takeover. He reveals that “like a line stretching out into infinity, all that was oppressive, horrible, heartrending, soul-destroying, wholly devastating, and utterly desolating in full measure [the Latins] brought to the Roman nation”.<sup>239</sup> This rendering of the Normans as comprising all that is unholy reveals the cultural, political, and economic devastation in the empire, and Choniates own sense of desolation and anger at this injustice. Therefore, the chronicler seeks to display the Latins’ violence and the utter ruin they inflicted upon the Romans, rendering the nation wounded not only in body but also in spirit. Other contemporary historians support Choniates’ account, with one revealing that the Venetians stole “at least four hundred thousand marks of silver, and at least ten thousand horses”, an unprecedented quantity of military

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<sup>237</sup> Judith Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 264.

<sup>238</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, 324–25.

<sup>239</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, 348.

spoils.<sup>240</sup> The most famous of the objects taken by the Venetians were four bronze horses, which dated from the first or second century after Christ, and once stood above the starting gates of Constantinople's hippodrome. Dandolo shipped these treasures to Venice, where the locals installed them on the façade of San Marco, Venice's famed basilica.<sup>241</sup> Choniates also seeks to impress that this display of force is not something awesome and worthy of praise and admiration, but instead an unjust and dishonorable use of force. Therefore, Choniates reveals, the Latins are inferior to the Romans even when they possess superior military and naval power, as it is an empire's display of mercy and chivalry or lack thereof which is the true determinant of its international standing.

Choniates casts the Venetians as vulgar and prideful in order to demonstrate their cultural inferiority regardless of their military and political success. In light of the sack of Constantinople and the influx of Westerners to the empire, Choniates must have found it pertinent to emphasize this cultural divide. Choniates seeks to reveal the Venetians as a people with a "avaricious and money-loving temperament" who were "all-cunning in their ways and troublemakers".<sup>242</sup> Choniates resented how the Roman emperors had chosen to delegate the position of tax collector to foreigners, especially since the Venetian foreigners were not subject to the majority of these taxes themselves. He may have saw these concessions as leading to the eventual sack of the capital city. Modern historians, such as Robert Browning, describe how the Venetians exploited their advantage over Roman traders, and their privileged competition ruined many small commercial and industrial enterprises.<sup>243</sup> To this effect, Chonaites described the Venetians as

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<sup>240</sup> *Byzantium: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes*, 369.

<sup>241</sup> Thomas F. Madden, *Venice: A New History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 146.

<sup>242</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, 296.

<sup>243</sup> Browning, *The Byzantine Empire*, 194.

“money-loving barbarians”, consumed by greed.<sup>244</sup> While the Venetians did not have a stranglehold over the internal trade of the empire, they did substantially contribute to its commercial prosperity.<sup>245</sup> Choniates further seeks to display his conviction in the Venetians’ impudence through his depiction of their barbaric habits. He describes the Venetians as “vagabonds” who are “nourished by the sea” and “cunning of mind”.<sup>246</sup> By characterizing the Venetians as thriving as traveling seafarers instead of grounded and moral citizens, Choniates implies that these Italian peoples lack the refinement of the Romans and their ruling abilities.

Furthermore, Choniates reveals a bitter rivalry between these two groups, one that was present even in moments of military peace. The historian displays how during a jousting tournament, the emperor Manuel I “roused the Romans to strive mightily”, as he wished for them “to excel” at “tilting the lance” against the “even high-spirited and insolent Latins”.<sup>247</sup> Choniates clearly seeks to demonstrate a fundamental cultural divide between the two nations and reveal the Romans’ immutably higher position in the Mediterranean world. Choniates even dares to demonstrate his anti-Latin sentiment in his description of Empress Eirene, the Latin wife of Andronicus I Comnenus. He comments that Eirene wishes for Andronicus’ sons to follow the Latin system of inheritance, dividing the Roman empire into portions governed by each son, a practice that was “in accordance with the laws concerning the property and possessions of vulgar people, and in the same manner transmitted in turn to their children and descendants”.<sup>248</sup> Choniates use of the word “vulgar” to describe a member of the imperial family reveals his inability to separate his prejudices from those of Latin birth, regardless of their later attempts to

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<sup>244</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, xx.

<sup>245</sup> Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 229.

<sup>246</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, 97.

<sup>247</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, 62.

<sup>248</sup> *Byzantium: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes*, 71.

adapt into members of Roman society. While there had been Latins who married into the Roman family before, they had subjugated their foreign heritage and adopted Roman customs, names, and identity. Eirene's decision to support the tenets of the West instead of those of her adopted nation represent a sense of disloyalty and Western impertinence. Choniates disparaged similar attitudes in Venetian merchants, and so would have considered this preference akin to treason. In addition, Choniates' animosity towards the Venetians reveals his refusal to come to terms with their rising military and political power and resolve to distinguish between the two groups.

Choniates displays his low opinion of the Venetians through his description of imperial interactions with these Italians. The historian discloses that the Venetians committed "lawless acts against [the emperor]" and "crimes against the Romans" and that these acts were so "vulgar" that the emperor perceived that they might lead to war. Choniates reveals the comparative sagacity of the Roman emperor, and the emperor's unique connection with the divine, who resolved to "offer the Venetians amnesty...for he perceived that requiting vengeance had its dangers and that other, more pressing needs required his attention". In addition, Choniates diminishes the power and importance of the Venetians through this description, seeking to characterize them as only a minor threat. However, Choniates argues that the limited power of the Venetians did not reduce the degree of insult the Italians had inflicted upon the Romans. To this extent, Choniates describes the emperor as having to "[swallow] his anger for one day", although he "nursed rancor in his heart like an ember buried in ashes until the opportunity came for him to kindle it, as it shall be related at the proper time".<sup>249</sup> In addition, this aside reveals the patience and magnanimity of the Roman emperor, in contrast to the impulsive and ignoble Venetians.

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<sup>249</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, 51.

Choniates also seeks to display the vulgarity of the Venetians through his description of Enrico Dandolo, the aging doge of Venice during the sack of Constantinople in 1204 C.E. Dandolo himself had lived in Constantinople in the 1180s and had lost his eye in an attack on Venetian property.<sup>250</sup> Choniates reveals Dandolo as “not the least of horrors...a creature most treacherous and extremely jealous of the Romans”.<sup>251</sup> Dandolo was a blind man in his nineties by the time of the fourth crusade, but he remained strong, active, and quick-minded, capable of placing fear into the hearts of the Romans.<sup>252</sup> Choniates seeks to demonstrate the vulgarity of the Venetians’ leader in order to undermine the Venetians’ claim rise in power and demonstrate their inferior cultural position. He further describes how Dandolo “schemed to involve other accomplices” in his “treachery against the Romans” and “to share his secret designs with those whom he knew nursed an implacable hatred against the Romans and who looked with an envious and avaricious eye on their goods”. Therefore, Choniates reveals the increasingly mercenary tendencies of powers in the late middle ages, as concepts of fealty paled in comparison to greed and self-preservation. In this narrative, Choniates illustrates the Venetians’ inhumanity and lack of decency, characterizing Dandolo’s hatred as “implacable” to denote the severity of his ire and how this level of anger was unfounded.<sup>253</sup>

Choniates describes in later passages the Venetians’ behavior in military conflicts, using this evidence to support his negative opinion of the Italian peoples. He reveals that the Venetians “launched long ships and attacked and plundered the Eastern coastal regions ... they perpetrated the worst possible crimes, wholly alien to Christian usages”.<sup>254</sup> While soldiers of the Roman

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<sup>250</sup> Judith Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 263.

<sup>251</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, 295.

<sup>252</sup> Madden, *Venice: A New History*, 115.

<sup>253</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, 295.

<sup>254</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, 340.



army actually committed equal if not worse acts, Choniates chooses to ignore this unfortunate reality, seeking the Romans' actions as inherently sanctioned by their imperial and sacred emperor. Choniates seeks to highlight the actions of the Venetians as barbaric by stating that their actions violated religious and moral tenets. The Romans firmly connected their identity to Constantine, the first Christian Roman emperor, and believed their empire to have a special relationship with Christ and the Church. As such, they would have considered violation of the teachings of the church as a serious infraction. Choniates himself adhered to this dogma, recounting Constantinople as "Constantine's fair city, the common delight and boast of all nations", which was "laid waste by fire and blackened by soot, taken and emptied of all wealth, public and private, as well as that of which was consecrated to God by the scattered nations of the West".<sup>255</sup> Therefore, the historian reveals that the Westerners' actions constituted not only an assault on the Roman empire, but on all of Christendom and Christ Himself, a pre-modern crime against humanity. In addition, many Romans relegated the Latins to the position of second-class Christians, considering their faith ingenuine and tendencies schismatic.<sup>256</sup> Choniates further describes the Venetians' crimes as "horrors" which were "manifold, most grievous, and unbearable to the Romans who suffered them".<sup>257</sup> Through this narration, Choniates offers further evidence to support his belief in the Venetians' inherent barbarism, inhumanity, and vulgarity. He seeks to conclude that the Venetians' actions are unforgiveable and relegate them to a status permanently inferior to that of the Romans.

Choniates also argues that the Venetians' arrogance relegates them to a position subordinate to the Romans. Choniates depicts the Venetians as people who "increased and

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<sup>255</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, 322.

<sup>256</sup> Browning, *The Byzantine Empire*, 197.

<sup>257</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, 340.

flocked together” in the Roman empire, “[amassing] great wealth and [becoming] so arrogant and impudent that not only did they behave belligerently to the Romans, but they also ignored imperial threats and commands”.<sup>258</sup> Furthermore, the Venetians set up their own administrative and judicial organs in Constantinople, displaying a disregard of Roman authorities.<sup>259</sup> Since Choniates served as a judge, he would have witnessed the Venetians’ violation of Roman laws, and immunity from the consequences of their actions. Choniates further describes the Latins as having “contempt for, and suspicion of, the Romans”, and harboring a prevailing and “undiminished arrogance”. Therefore, the historian assumes that the Venetians’ attitude is based in their jealousy of the Romans and their celebrated status in the Mediterranean. Choniates also illustrates that the Venetians’ arrogance and audacity led them to target defenseless Romans.<sup>260</sup> As such, the Venetians’ assault against the Romans speaks more to their arrogance and need to display their force than any actual military threat.

Choniates also displays the Venetians’ arrogance through his examination of their relationships with other Italian city states. He reveals that the Angelos brothers, emperors Issakios II Angelos and Alexios III Angelos, “raised the Pisans against” the Venetians and sought to play the Italian city states against one another. In response, the Venetians, “who recalled their ancient treaties with the Romans, could not endure seeing the friendship pledged to them being awarded to the Pisans”, and so “gradually [turned] against the Romans, waiting for the opportune moment to even the score”.<sup>261</sup> Choniates believed that the influx of foreigners in the capital city had led to its inhabitants’ unruly and fickle nature and contributed to the

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<sup>258</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, 97.

<sup>259</sup> Browning, *The Byzantine Empire*, 194.

<sup>260</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, 342.

<sup>261</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, 295.

breakdown of society.<sup>262</sup> Choniates uses this episode to expose the Venetians' wounded pride and arrogant tendencies; unable to handle seeing their former patron show favor to a competitor, they instead resorted to petulant and childish behavior. In addition, Choniates reveals the comparative foresight of the Roman emperors, able to maneuver international politics to their own advantage.

Choniates exhibits the motivations of Enrico Dandolo regarding this slight. He states that Dandolo, "a sly cheat who called himself wiser than the wise and madly thirsting after glory as no other", resolved to "[prefer] death to allowing the Romans to escape the penalty for their insulting treatment of his nation".<sup>263</sup> Through this scene, Choniates strengthens his conviction in the Venetians' arrogance. Dandolo was so angered by this perceived insult to their pride that he decided to seek vengeance at any cost, regardless of the military and political implications of these actions. In addition, Dandolo's prior knowledge of the Golden Horn proved critical to the success of the crusaders' attack.<sup>264</sup> Instead of presenting Dandolo as an aging politician, Choniates reveals the doge to be a reckless, embittered, and unhinged ruler of one of the empire's many subordinates. The doge's personal frustrations render him far inferior to the Roman emperor, strengthening Choniates' claim of Latin cultural inferiority.

In *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, the author reveals his robust cultural prejudice against Westerners. He characterizes the Normans as arrogant and barbaric and seeks to demonstrate his impression of the Venetians as prideful and vulgar. Writing after the fall of Constantinople to Latin crusaders and the ensuing political, economic, and societal devastation, Choniates sought to maintain the position of Roman cultural superiority, regardless

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<sup>262</sup> Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 278.

<sup>263</sup> Choniates and Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, 295.

<sup>264</sup> Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*, 264.

of the geopolitical context. He argues that supremacy in the Mediterranean is not simply a matter of force, but a matter of how a nation chooses to use that force when met with adversaries. To this end, Choniates seeks to reveal that the Normans' and Venetians' use of force, prior to and during the attack on Constantinople, was barbaric. Therefore, Choniates asserts that these Western nations can never reach the cultural and spiritual supremacy of the Romans.

### Conclusion

The Mediterranean world during the twelfth century was a rapidly shifting and evolving sphere, influenced by the growing power of the papacy, the rise of more centralized states in the previously decentralized and internally divided West, and the collective threat of the Muslim states to the south and the east. None of these sources had held a candle for centuries to the highly cultured, deeply traditional, and seemingly unchangeable Roman empire, and Roman rulers and citizens would prefer for it to stay that way. The Romans' conception of their society, and their individual identities, rested on the foundation of the exceptionalism of Eastern Christendom, which had granted them a special religious designation and an impregnable political ideology, grounded in the teachings of their cultural and genealogical forefathers. These Eastern Romans had inherited the ancient Roman concept of caesaropapism and the ancient Greek practices of xenophobia and conviction in the barbarism of the other.

The erosion of this visage in the twelfth century fundamentally confounded and demoralized the Romans, leading them to cling to these old prejudices despite the changing world. They may have perceived this period as a temporary decline, a hiccup that would soon be forgotten. Court historians recognized the importance of their works, which would be read by future generations and form their understanding of Roman history and society. They realized that it was important to craft the Romans as the party of victory despite the reality in order to preserve the nation's cultural identity. To this extent, they resolved to depict the rising Western powers as barbarous, inhuman and irreligious, destroying their credibility and taking every opportunity possible to remark on their weaknesses and the personal failings of their leaders. In particular, the major historians of the Comnenian period, Anna Komnene, John Kinnamos, and Niketas Choniates, specifically targeted the Venetians and the Normans, especially those that frequently interacted

with the Romans. They casted the Venetians as uncultured upstarts, consumed by greed and their lust for power and economic dominance in the Mediterranean. Similarly, the Roman historians disparaged the Normans, describing them as mercenaries motivated solely by profit, and barbarians without refinement and true religiosity. Through these descriptions, the historians sought to reverse the narrative surrounding the changing political tide, creating a lost cause narrative in which the storied empire was destroyed unjustly by powers that were far inferior and less worthy of praise.

Komnene directed the plurality of her wrath to the Normans, especially their leader Robert Guiscard, who posed a major threat to the supremacy of her father Alexios and regards the Venetians with gratitude for their aid to the Romans against the Normans. By the middle of the twelfth century, the concessions the Romans had granted the Venetians in return for their military support had led the Venetians to grow in wealth and self-importance, to the ire of Romans, a sentiment which Kinnamos robustly illustrates in his own text. In contrast, the death of Robert Guiscard led to a noticeable weakening of the Norman presence under the reign of John II and Manuel I, and Kinnamos considers them so minor a threat that he does not hesitate to afford the Normans respect when he mentions them. Writing after the fall of Constantinople to Western crusaders, who were led by the Venetians and their aging doge and included mercenaries from Norman Italy, as well as France and Germany, Choniates demonstrated a disparagement of both parties, condemning their invasion and later treatment of the defeated Constantinople and the Roman people.

At the beginning of the fifteenth century, the philosopher, historian, and orator Leonardo Bruni composed a panegyric dedicated to the city of Florence. Bruni perceived that “a more

distinguished or more splendid city [could] be found on the entire earth”.<sup>265</sup> Like the Roman historians, he traces his city’s origins to the ancient Roman empire, a “distinguished” and “illustrious” nation which was “the lord and conqueror of the entire world”, and reveals that this heritage was central to Florentine identity. In particular, Bruni highlights how the Roman people founded Florence during the Republican period of Roman history, and “for this reason ... the men of Florence especially enjoy perfect freedom and are the greatest enemies of tyrants”. He further impresses how the Florentines’ “interest in republicanism ... has persisted down to the present day”.<sup>266</sup> However, while Bruni was composing this oration, the Republican foundations of Florence were rapidly collapsing. In the coming decades, Bruni’s famed republic of liberty would be transformed into a virtual monarchy led by the Medici, one of Florence’s ruling families.

The practice of granting universal praise to a society that no longer holds the tenets of this admiration is common in the works of many historians. While motivations behind this practice have varied, many historians have attempted to revive an idealized bygone era or inspire future generations to remember the past in a certain way. In their histories, Anna Komnene, John Kinnamos, and Niketas Choniates all aim to present an idealized visage of the eastern Roman empire, one less vulnerable to the growing external threats and the internal divisions caused by this changing geopolitical context. Through this portrayal, the historians attempted to strengthen the credibility of the Roman empire, at the expense of the upcoming Western states, and prepare the Roman people for a return to their rightful place as cultural, spiritual, and political leaders of Christendom. While their efforts failed to return the Roman empire to the glory of Justinian I’s

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<sup>265</sup> Hans Baron, ed., *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni* (Chicago, 1968), 135.

<sup>266</sup> Baron, 150–52.

reign, the historians succeeded in creating a powerful and storied legacy of their empire of old, a lost cause narrative six hundred years before its time.



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