



5. The Crusade of 1197 (Map by the University of Wisconsin Cartographic Laboratory)



6. The Straits and the Aegean (Map by the University of Wisconsin Cartographic Laboratory)

# IV

## BYZANTIUM AND THE CRUSADES, 1081-1204

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**T**he middle part of the eleventh century was a watershed in the history of the Byzantine empire. It is only necessary to compare the successful expansion of the frontier under Basil II and his determined onslaught on the aristocracy with the straitened circumstances of Alexius I Comnenus and the steady growth in the power

The main Greek historical sources are: Anna Comnena, *Alexiad* (the best edition is by A. Reifferscheid, 2 vols., Leipzig, 1884; there are also *CSHB*, 2 vols., Bonn, 1839, 1872, and ed. B. Leib, 3 vols., Paris, 1937-1945, with translation; English translation by E. Dawes, London, 1928); John Zonaras, *Epitome historiarum* (3 vols., *CSHB*, 1841-1897; ed. L. Dindorf, 6 vols., Leipzig, 1868-1875); John Cinnamus, *Historia* (*CSHB*, Bonn, 1836); Nicetas Choniates (wrongly called Acominatus), *Historia* (*CSHB*, Bonn, 1835). These texts are also in Migne, *Patrologia graeca*. The rise of the Comnenian house is also dealt with by the historians of the period before 1081, for which see volume I of the present work, chapter VI. There are several world chronicles of little value—Michael Glycas (*CSHB*, Bonn, 1836); Constantine Manasses (*CSHB*, Bonn, 1836); Joel (*CSHB*, Bonn, 1836); and Ephraem (*CSHB*, Bonn, 1840). The capture of Thessalonica in 1185 is described by Eustathius, metropolitan of Thessalonica (*CSHB*, Bonn, 1842, after Leo Grammaticus; German translation by H. Hunger in *Byzantinische Geschichtsschreiber*, ed. E. Ivanka, vol. III, Vienna, 1955).

The most important of the numerous occasional pieces, letters, and poems are: Theophylact of Ochrida, *Epistolae* (*PG*, vol. 126); Theodore Prodromus, *Scripta* (*PG*, vol. 133, and various critical editions scattered in periodicals; see details in G. Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, 2 vols., rev. ed., Budapest, 1958, pp. 522 ff.); Eustathius of Thessalonica, *Opuscula* (ed. G. L. F. Tafel, Frankfurt, 1832), and *PG*, vols. 135-136; Nicetas Choniates, ed. K. Sathas, *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλ.*, I (1872), and ed. E. Müller, in *RHC, Grecs*, II; Michael Choniates, *Opera* (ed. Sp. P. Lampros, 2 vols., Athens, 1879-1880), and in G. Stadtmüller, *Michael Choniates Metropolit von Athen* (*Or. Christ. Analecta*, XXXIII, Rome, 1934).

Documents, secular and ecclesiastical, are cited in F. Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches*, part II: 1025-1204 (Munich, 1925), and in V. Grumel, *Les Actes du patriarcat de Constantinople*, I, fasc. 3: *Les Regestes de 1043 à 1206* (1947). Reference should also be made to F. Dölger, *Byzantinische Diplomatie* (Ettal, 1956), and to G. Moravcsik, *op. cit.*, which is an indispensable bibliographical guide to the Greek sources.

Reference to Latin and oriental sources will be found in the relevant chapters in this volume. Brief references to the more important Slavic sources may be found in G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (Oxford, 1956), *passim*, which gives the best short survey both of the sources and of the historical background, with bibliography to the end of 1954.

The most substantial secondary authority is still F. Chalandon, *Essai sur le règne d'Alexis I Comnène* (1081-1118) (Paris, 1900); *Les Comnène: Jean II Comnène* (1118-1143) *et Manuel Comnène* (1143-1180) (Paris, 1912); and *Histoire de la domination normande en Italie et en Sicile* (2 vols., Paris, 1907); Chalandon's work sometimes needs to be modified in the light of recent research, often scattered in periodicals. Other studies on political aspects are: H. v. Kap-Herr, *Die abendländische Politik Kaiser Manuels mit besonderer Rücksicht auf Deutschland* (Strassburg, 1881); F. Cognasso, "Partiti politici e lotte dinastiche in Bisanzio alla morte di Manuele Comneno," *Memorie della R. Accademia della Scienze di Torino*, ser. 2, LXII,

of the great military families. The period of transition was characterized by a bitter struggle between the civil and military parties. The accession of Alexius Comnenus in 1081 marked the end of a half century which had seen a swift succession of inefficient or ill-fated rulers. He, his son, and his grandson among them ruled for almost a hundred years. But even their statesmanship could only check the ring of hostile powers, and at home they often had to accept, and use, precisely those elements which some of their greatest predecessors had been most anxious to curb. Indeed, from the end of the eleventh century and throughout its precarious existence in the later Middle Ages, the two decisive factors which molded the history of the empire were the predominance of the military aristocracy, to which the Comneni belonged, and the steady growth of feudal and separatist elements. The inevitable corollary was the impossibility of restoring the systems of government and defense which had been the twin pillars of the middle Byzantine empire. Effective central administration and the farmer-soldier as the mainstay of the armed forces virtually vanished with the death in 1025 of the greatest Macedonian emperor, Basil II. After the follies of the civil party, it was left to rulers drawn from a wealthy landed family to use what resources were available, and it was only by reason of Comnenian statesmanship that the empire, during most of the twelfth century at any rate, was able to hold its own among the rising Slav and Latin powers and to check the various Moslem potentates.

The way in which the young but astute Alexius Comnenus came to the throne in 1081 has already been traced.<sup>1</sup> With the help of his own native wits and the support of his family, including his

1912), and *idem*, "Un imperatore bizantino della decadenza: Isacco II Angelo," in *Bessarione* XIX (1915), 29-60; W. Ohnsorge, "Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte Manuels I. von Byzanz," *Brackmann Festschrift* (1931).

On social, intellectual, and ecclesiastical life see: C. Diehl, *La Société byzantine à l'époque des Comnènes* (Paris, 1919); J. M. Hussey, *Church and Learning in the Byzantine Empire 867-1185* (Oxford, 1937); L. Oeconomos, *La Vie religieuse dans l'empire byzantin au temps des Comnènes et des Anges* (Paris, 1918); P. E. Stephanou, *Jean Italos, philosophe et humaniste* (Rome, 1949); D. Obolensky, *The Bogomils* (Cambridge, 1948); and P. Joannou, *Christliche Metaphysik*, I (Ettal, 1956).

On the administrative and economic side, fresh ground has been broken by the brilliant work of G. Ostrogorsky, *Pour la féodalité byzantine* (Brussels, 1954), and *Quelques problèmes d'histoire de la paysannerie byzantine* (Brussels, 1956). See also P. Charanis, "The Monastic Properties and the State in the Byzantine Empire," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, IV (1948), 51-118, and E. Stein, "Untersuchungen zur spätbyzantinischen Verfassungs- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte" in *Mitteilungen zur osmanischen Geschichte*, II (1923-1925), 1-62. An indispensable study for diplomatic relations, particularly during the years 1143-1185, is P. Lamma, *Comneni e Stauffer: ricerche sui rapporti fra Bisanzio e l'occidente nel secolo XII* (Studi storici, fasc. 14-18 and 22-25, 2 vols., Rome, 1955-1957).

<sup>1</sup> See volume I of this work, chapter VI.

redoubtable mother Anna Dalassena, he weathered "the stormy waters of government" which threatened him. But the first ten years of his reign revealed difficulties which were to recur throughout the twelfth century. At home the treasury was short of money, while recruitment for the navy and army slackened seriously. Abroad Alexius' authority was challenged on all sides, for he was ringed by enemies in Asia Minor, in the Balkans and beyond, and in Italy. Much of Anatolia was in the hands of the Selchükid Turks, and the empire was thus deprived of an important source of manpower and wealth. The native recruitment of its army and of its navy suffered accordingly, and, further, its trade, as well as its defense, was adversely affected by the decline of its maritime strength, at a time when the Italian powers were developing apace.

It was indeed from the west, from the Normans and later the growing Italian maritime cities, that Alexius' most dangerous foes were to come. In the months immediately succeeding his coronation, imperial defense and imperial diplomacy were concentrated against the Norman Robert Guiscard, whose flagrant and persistent attacks on Byzantine territory bore out Anna Comnena's belief that he "desired to become Roman emperor".<sup>2</sup> Between Alexius' accession in April 1081 and the arrival of the First Crusade in 1096, the Comnenian came to terms with the Selchükid ruler of Rüm, Sulaimān, thus temporarily stabilizing the position in Anatolia. He made various diplomatic moves in the west, seeking help against Guiscard. He enlisted the naval support of Venice and obtained mercenaries from Sulaimān. He kept a wary eye on the Balkans and fomented revolts in the Norman lands in Italy. Though Guiscard's unexpected death in 1085 was opportune for Alexius and was followed by Norman withdrawal from Greek territory, it entailed no more than a truce in the duel between Constantinople and the Latins; in the immediate future Bohemond, the son of Guiscard, was to carry on his father's aggressive and ambitious policy.

This early period of Alexius' reign revealed certain important factors which no Byzantine ruler could afford to neglect. In particular, the various minor principalities in the Balkans were potential enemies whose defection might turn the balance; overwhelming disaster might threaten from the roving Pecheneg or Kuman tribes beyond the Danube; maritime help was required, even at the cost of ever-increasing trading privileges, thus piling up economic problems and the ill-will of the native Greeks towards the Italian cities, first Venice, and then Pisa and Genoa. In the east, the

<sup>2</sup> Anna Comnena, *Alexiad*, I, xii, 5 (ed. Leib, I, 44).

diplomatic situation at this time was perhaps more favorable than in the west or in the Balkans. The death of Sulaimān of Rūm, the partition of the sultanate, and the mutual hostility of the emirs had considerably eased the position and, as always, the precarious balancing of forces in the Moslem world gave scope of which Byzantine diplomacy was quick to take advantage.

This situation had been exploited to the full by the resourceful Alexius. It was, however, radically changed by the coming of the western crusaders, for Greek and Latin aims were marked by fundamental differences. It is unlikely that Alexius invited the crusade by appealing to Urban II<sup>3</sup>; the Byzantine need was for mercenaries or auxiliaries under imperial control to be employed as required, whether in the Balkans or in Asia Minor. Latin concentration on Syria, and particularly Palestine, the natural goal of the devout crusader, and the refusal of the westerners to put the needs of Byzantine foreign policy before their own individual ambitions inevitably led to mounting hostility between eastern and western Christendom during the twelfth century.

The advent of the Latin crusaders and their establishment in the eastern Mediterranean may have influenced, but did not dominate, Alexius' policy at home and abroad. The more detailed account of the first few crusades<sup>4</sup> has already demonstrated Comnenian adaptability and clear-sighted recognition of the real danger, never far below the surface, of a western attack on Constantinople itself. Alexius' exaction of homage and fealty, and of an oath to restore former Byzantine territory, and his genuine coöperation with western military leaders, particularly in providing essential supplies and guides, show his understanding of the feudal tie and its obligations, and his determination to control and direct the adventure. He reaped his reward in western Asia Minor, where land was regained, but with the capture of Antioch in 1098 and the astute maneuvering of his enemy, the Norman Bohemond, he received his first real check. Antioch, though uncontestedly Byzantine and recently in imperial hands, became the center of a virtually independent principality ruled by Guiscard's son. The kingdom of Jerusalem and the county of Edessa were farther off, and for various reasons not of such immediate concern to Constantinople.

During the years 1096-1108 Alexius had to reckon with open Norman aggression directed from both Antioch and Italy, and with

<sup>3</sup> See G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, p. 321; a different view is to be found in volume I of this work, p. 219.

<sup>4</sup> See volume I, chapters VIII-X, XIV.

an insidious propaganda campaign against Byzantium in the west, of which Bohemond was almost certainly one of the main instigators. Fickle, malicious, courageous, tenacious, Bohemond in Syria quarreled with his fellow crusaders and with the emperor, and was worsted by the Turks. He was forced to return to Italy to seek help; there he spread the story that the crusaders had been betrayed by the Byzantines, and even suggested the conquest of Constantinople, a feat at which he himself aimed in his renewed attack on Greece in 1107, when he landed at Avlona. But he had no more success than his father, and was defeated by Alexius. By the treaty of Devol (Deabolis; 1108) Bohemond had to recognize the overlordship of Alexius and his son John, and to promise to hold Antioch as a fief and to give military service to the emperor. He also swore that "there shall never be a patriarch of our race, but he shall be one whom your Majesties shall appoint from among the servants of the great church of Constantinople",<sup>5</sup> for the appointment of a Latin patriarch (Bernard of Valence) to the ancient see of Antioch had caused great offense in Byzantium. Tancred, who was at the time acting for his uncle in the principality, refused to implement this treaty, and Antioch long continued to be a center of opposition to Constantinople. But Alexius had at least checked Bohemond and guarded his western approaches.

The defeat of Bohemond indicated the steady increase of Alexius' strength. His prestige grew commensurately. He held the balance between the Serbian principalities of Zeta and Rascia in the Balkans; in 1104 he married his son and heir John to a Hungarian princess, thus recognizing the increasing importance of Hungary in Balkan and Adriatic politics; he organized campaigns against the Selchükids in Anatolia. Although he excelled at playing off one power against another, his weapons were not only diplomatic ones. Indeed diplomacy alone would not suffice to build up the military and naval strength of the empire, and imperial attention and astuteness were therefore also constantly directed towards the improvement of internal affairs.

Amid fundamental changes which distinguish the Comnenian from earlier periods, the old Byzantine conception of the imperial office still remained unchallenged, as the *Alexiad* demonstrates. At home Alexius was a vigorous administrator and a keen churchman, aware of his responsibilities in both secular and spiritual spheres. His support of orthodoxy and of the church was unwavering. In acute financial difficulties in the early years of his reign, he had

<sup>5</sup> Anna Comnena, *Alexiad*, XIII, xii, 20 (ed. Leib, III, 134).

incurred ecclesiastical displeasure by pawning certain church treasures. Differences over property did not, however, sour his good relations with the church. Alexius led the campaigns against heresy, chiefly Bogomilism, already entrenched in the Balkans and now creeping into the capital itself. It is even possible that the emperor's mother Anna Dalassena became tainted with heresy.<sup>6</sup> Though armed with military force as well as powerful theological arguments, even Alexius could not root out the insidious dualist heresy which exploited national feeling in Bulgaria against the imperial conquerors and their churchmen, and various forms of dualism lingered on in the Balkans long after 1204. Alexius was more successful with the theological aberrations of intellectuals, and the philosopher and scholar John Italus, for instance, was made to recant his "errors" from the pulpit of Hagia Sophia.<sup>6a</sup>

Monasticism received full imperial support. Alexius regulated life on Mt. Athos, and encouraged reform and new foundations on and around Patmos, and elsewhere. His wife, the empress Irene, did likewise; the regulations for her house in Constantinople reveal everyday life in an ordinary nunnery, as well as the foundress's practical nature. The careful detail found in monastic charters, or ecclesiastical reports, or recorded in the *Alexiad*, admirably illustrate the imperial sense of values. However precarious the foreign situation, however imminent the threat of invasion or treachery, no Byzantine emperor could afford to neglect what was universally regarded as one of his most important responsibilities.

Alexius' main administrative concern was with problems of finance and defense. Both had been inefficiently dealt with by his more immediate predecessors. Though he did not introduce radical changes in policy — the taxes for instance continued to be farmed out, thus increasing the taxpayers' burden — he did to some extent attempt to check the debasement and inflation which had been chronic from the mid-eleventh century onwards.<sup>7</sup> He ruled that a nomisma should have the value of four silver coins (*miliaresia*), only a third of its original value, thus effecting a devaluation the impact of which extended to the poorest classes. The population was also

<sup>6</sup> See S. Runciman, "The End of Anna Dalassena," *Mélanges Henri Grégoire*, I (Brussels, 1949), 517-524.

<sup>6a</sup> On possible political implications of John Italus' trial, see Joannou, *Christliche Metaphysik*, I, 26-29.

<sup>7</sup> See P. Grierson, "The Debasement of the Bezant in the Eleventh Century," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, XLVII (1954), 386, "It was left for Alexius I Comnenus to restore a 'hyper-pure' gold nomisma and to build up out of the debased nomismata a system of fractional coinage whose intricacies we still only very imperfectly understand." On this controversial and difficult subject see also Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, pp. 327-328.



burdened with obligatory labor services and billeting. By these acts Alexius contrived to extract for the treasury the maximum revenue, and the government found some relief from its financial straits and could build up its military and naval defenses.

The mainstay of the Byzantine army in Alexius' day was no longer the native soldier-farmer with his small heritable military holding, though the Comneni did from time to time settle prisoners of war on the land in this way. Cecaumenus's continuator, who wrote at the beginning of Alexius' reign, speaks at length on military matters. It is noticeable that he says a good deal about mercenaries, who had become a particularly vital element in the Byzantine army in the eleventh century, and on whom Alexius had at first largely to rely. He also drew on levies, particularly of light-armed infantry, from the great secular and ecclesiastical estates. Of particular importance for the future was the device of granting an estate for a specific time in return for military service. The first known grant in *pronoia* is found in the mid-eleventh century, but it is not until Alexius' reign that a military obligation can be traced. The grantee, or *pronoiar*, became known as a rule as the "soldier" (*stratiotes*). Equipped and mounted and accompanied by his contingent of troops, he was of a different social class from the small farming militia. As long as the estate was held by him in *pronoia* he enjoyed its revenues, and the taxes and dues of the peasant tenants (*paroikoi*) were now collected by him. This financial aspect constituted one of the main attractions of the grant, which at this time was usually made for life while title and disposition remained with the state.

Alexius also made use of the *charistikion*, a device by which monastic property was handed over, in the past usually by ecclesiastical authorities, to the care of a private person. In this way the property was developed, the monastic community was guaranteed an income sufficient for their needs, and any excess went to the *charistikarios*. Alexius found this a convenient way of rewarding individuals and the practice increased during his reign, though the grant remained, as before, without specific conditions. As a method for promoting a more economic development of monastic lands it was sometimes defended by churchmen, but was also sometimes condemned, for it was obviously open to abuse.

The establishment of the Comnenian dynasty in 1081 had marked the triumph of the great military families after their long struggle with the civil aristocracy in the eleventh century. Alexius, true to his upbringing and party, chose to build on those elements

which the strongest rulers of the middle Byzantine period had tried to check. He was as statesmanlike and as capable an emperor as Romanus Lecapenus or Basil II, but he was sufficiently realistic to accept the fact that in changing circumstances he could only recognize and use the landed families. Such a development at a time when Latin feudal states were established in the east, when western crusaders thronged to and fro through the empire, and when the Byzantine court was so often linked by marriage and friendship to Frankish families, has sometimes given rise to the view that it owed much to western feudalism. Recent research has shown, however, that Byzantine feudalism was in many ways the product of its own internal forces and was not a Frankish import,<sup>8</sup> though naturally the influx of Latin crusaders familiarized the Byzantines with many of the customs of western feudalism.

Thus Alexius' domestic and foreign policy was characterized by the growing ascendancy of the military aristocracy. The success with which he maintained Byzantine prestige abroad in the face of major threats on all fronts, particularly from the Normans, and upheld the imperial tradition in church and state, should not blind the historian to those fundamental changes at work within the polity which were ultimately to undermine the imperial authority and to strengthen local and separatist elements.

In essentials the situation remained unaltered throughout the reigns of Alexius' son John II (1118-1143) and his grandson Manuel I (1143-1180). Thus to some extent the policies of John and Manuel were predetermined for them. The main concern of the Comnenian house was the problem of finding some *modus vivendi* with the Normans of Sicily, and then, after the failure of direct male heirs in the Norman house, with the German emperors, Frederick Barbarossa and his son Henry VI, who married the heiress of the Sicilian kingdom and planned the conquest of Constantinople. Generally speaking, the policies of John and Manuel Comnenus were distinguished by variations in emphasis and orientation rather than by fundamental differences. John concentrated more on the east, but was unexpectedly cut short in the midst of his career; Manuel had a more original western policy and a longer reign, but was inevitably alive to eastern problems, if only because Mediterranean politics were now an inescapable factor in European diplomacy. Indeed, events during the sixty-odd years

<sup>8</sup> See G. Ostrogorsky, *Pour l'histoire de la féodalité byzantine* (Brussels, 1954); cf. A. A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire* (Madison, 1952), pp. 563 ff. (on Byzantine feudalism).

covered by the reigns of these two impressive rulers highlight the startling changes introduced by the crusading movements and by the steady development of western states and Balkan powers.

John Comnenus was the finest of the three Comneni, though his fame has perhaps suffered from lack of any particular contemporary historian of his own. He was a mild and moderate man in his personal life, but an austere disciplinarian in military matters, and his principles and statesmanship continued the best traditions of his house and enabled him to maintain the imperial position. There is a comparative dearth of material for reconstructing the domestic policy of his twenty-five years. John found time to interest himself in the trial of heretics, and, with his wife, the Hungarian Piriska ("Irene"), to promote hospitals and social welfare through a splendid monastic foundation. His agrarian policy was that of his father and was dictated by military needs: he settled prisoners of war (such as the Pechenegs and Serbs) on small farms in return for military service, and continued to grant lands in *pronoia* for the same reason. For the most part he was a military emperor, who used both diplomacy and force in his successful exploitation of the advantages secured by his father.

John thought in terms of allies and recognition in the west and in the Balkans, and of an offensive in the east. In the Balkans two factors were of importance — the rise to power of the Serb principality of Rascia and the growing encroachment of Hungary south of the Danube. Where he could not hope for direct control — in Hungary, in Rascia, and in Zeta — John intervened in disputed elections. Although Rascia, as also Bosnia, was drawn into the orbit of Hungarian influence — the ruler (*župan*) of Rascia had married his daughter Helena to Bela the Blind, king of Hungary (1131–1141) — Constantinople on the whole outweighed the Magyars, especially when it came to war, and in 1128 forced Hungary to make peace. Further, after 1131 Byzantium was helped by the understanding between Bela II of Hungary and the pro-Byzantine Conrad III of Germany, and no doubt by Hungary's realization that its Dalmatian ambitions would inevitably antagonize Venice, in which case it might be advisable to have an ally in its powerful Byzantine neighbor.

Byzantium for its part was not averse to reducing the power of Venice, which had been extended in Dalmatia during the later years of Alexius' reign. Venice had applied to John on his accession for a renewal of the trading privileges in the empire which had

brought it great wealth, though also great unpopularity. John's attempt to reduce Venetian influence resulted in attacks on Byzantine territory, particularly the islands, during the years 1122-1126. Finally he judged it expedient to make peace and in 1126 renewed the privileges granted by his father. He had to recognize that Venetian enmity would damage his position in Italy. He did, however, attempt to establish good relations with Venice's rivals, Pisa and Genoa. Pisa, which was being approached by Roger II of Sicily, was courted by a Byzantine embassy in 1136, followed by the confirmation of the trading privileges which had been granted it by Alexius Comnenus. The Genoese, who were to play so important a role in the later empire, also wished for a share in imperial trade, and they appear to have been in Constantinople in 1142 for purposes of negotiation.

At the opening of John's reign affairs in Germany and Italy were not unfavorable to him. Emperor Henry V of Germany and pope Gelasius II were at loggerheads and Apulia was rent by feuds. But when Roger II united the Norman lands in southern Italy and Sicily in 1127 and was crowned king in 1130, danger threatened. John sought to counter this by a rapprochement with the German rulers, first Lothair II, who followed Henry in 1125, and then his successor, Conrad III. Throughout he also kept in touch with the popes, who were precariously placed between the Normans and the Germans; he approached first Calixtus II in 1124, and then Honorius II in 1126,<sup>8a</sup> with the prospect of ecclesiastical reunion. In particular, he suggested an understanding whereby the pope would have the spiritual, and the "Roman" (Byzantine) emperor the secular, supremacy, though the actual wording of this famous letter is so vague as to defy precise elucidation (which was perhaps what was intended).

With his position to some extent safeguarded by his network of alliances in the west, John in 1136 judged it opportune to attempt the extension of his authority in the east by striking at both Moslem and Christian powers. His goal was full control of Antioch and the implementation of the treaty of Devol which his father had made with Bohemond in 1108. Apart from constant vigilance towards his Selchükid neighbors at Iconium (Konya), John's more particular concern in Anatolia at this time was the rising power of the Dänishmendids, who had in 1125 captured Melitene. They had penetrated into Cilicia, compelling the Rōupenids to pay tribute, and

<sup>8a</sup> Some scholars suggest the years 1139 and 1141 in Innocent II's pontificate. See Lamma, *Commeni e Staufer*, I, 28.

moving still further south had defeated the Normans of Antioch, killing Bohemond II in 1130. It was therefore necessary for John Comnenus to safeguard his own frontiers in Paphlagonia and to check the Dānishmendids as a preliminary to the advance south which he himself was planning, and with this in view, during the years 1132-1134 he undertook campaigns in the neighborhood of Kastamonu against the emir Gümüshtigin Ghāzī. John's position was eased by the death of the powerful Gümüshtigin Ghāzī about 1134. Towards the end of 1136 he advanced against the Christian Armenians who had settled in the Taurus and Anti-Taurus districts and took the offensive against the Rōupenids of Lesser Armenia, the principality which stood between his domains and the crusading kingdoms. Its ruler Leon I fled to the mountains in 1137 but was captured in the following year and sent to Constantinople. John was thus able to turn his full attention to Antioch.

His intervention was opportune for various reasons. In both Jerusalem and Antioch the throne had passed in 1131 to the female line; problems of succession were already threatening to weaken the Latin principalities. In Antioch at any rate there was a pro-Byzantine party who realized the wisdom of a firm alliance with Constantinople, all the more so since in the north Zengi, the regent (*atabeg*) of Mosul, was daily growing in power. By August 1137 John had reached Antioch, and Raymond of Poitiers, the husband of the Norman princess Constance, was compelled to swear allegiance. A year later John made a solemn entrance into the city. Even so, the Byzantine, and indeed the Christian, cause was weakened by lack of Latin support. It was largely for this reason that John had been unable to make any real headway against the Moslems in northern Syria earlier in 1138, and later in the year he judged it wiser to leave Antioch, where riots were being stirred up against the Greeks.

Afraid of papal and Sicilian activities in the west, as well as the Dānishmendids in Anatolia, John returned to Constantinople in 1138. Here he renewed his links with Germany and negotiated a marriage between Bertha of Sulzbach, the sister-in-law of Conrad III, now undisputed king, and his son Manuel. After further campaigns against the Dānishmendids, he again turned his attention towards Antioch. Cinnamus suggests that John, who had every reason to distrust the Latins, now intended to create a frontier principality, consisting of Adalia, Antioch, and Cyprus, for his son Manuel,<sup>9</sup> or he may possibly have had in mind the revival of the old

<sup>9</sup> John Cinnamus, *Historia*, I, 10 (CSHB, p. 23).

duchy of Antioch,<sup>10</sup> only on a wider basis. Byzantine intentions were bitterly resented by an influential party among the Latin knights and clergy in Antioch. Both laity and clergy clearly had everything to lose if John's demand in 1142 for the surrender of the entire city was met. Therefore the prince of Antioch repudiated the agreement of 1137, ostensibly on the ground that he could not dispose of his wife's inheritance. John clearly intended to force the issue. He wintered near Mamistra (1142-1143), and from a letter he wrote to king Fulk of Jerusalem, we may surmise that he hoped to extend his authority southwards as soon as he had taken control in Antioch. But in the spring of 1143 he died of a septic wound.

Thus Christian feuds and John's untimely death prevented any effective drive against the Moslems, and in the next year Zengi captured Edessa, thus provoking the ill-fated Second Crusade.

Before he died John had had his youngest son Manuel, who was with him in Cilicia, acclaimed emperor. Manuel Comnenus was exceedingly tall, with a complexion so dark that his enemies taunted him with being like a negro. He possessed great physical strength and endurance and could hold his own with the best of the western knights (though it seemed odd to his subjects that he should even wish to do so). He had charm of manner and was a gracious host; he had too the family taste for letters and had read widely, though his mind was vivacious and lively rather than profound or deeply intellectual, and, as the discerning Cinnamus remarked, he tried to make up for inadequacies in logic and dialectic by being exceedingly quick witted.<sup>11</sup> Both Greek and Latin contemporary writers testify to his medical knowledge, which he did not hesitate to use, as for instance when he set Baldwin's arm when it was broken on a hunting expedition.

Manuel was removed by two generations from the days of the First Crusade, and he got on with westerners in a way which would have seemed unbecoming to his grandfather Alexius, still more to his earlier predecessors. His mother was a Hungarian, his first wife the German Bertha of Sulzbach (renamed Irene by the Greeks), his second the Norman princess Maria of Antioch. His little son Alexius was betrothed to a daughter of the French Louis VII. Half a century had witnessed great changes in the eastern Mediter-

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Chalandon, *Les Comnène*, pp. 184-185. For an adverse judgment on John's accomplishments, see volume I, chapter XIII, pp. 445-446.

<sup>11</sup> John Cinnamus, *Historia*, VI, 2 (*CShB*, p. 253).

anean, and political and economic circumstances, as well as imperial marriages and friendships, had brought an influx of Latins into all parts of the Byzantine empire, thus sowing seeds of future trouble. It has even been suggested that Manuel sought to renew the internal vigor of Byzantium by deliberately introducing Latin elements into the empire.<sup>12</sup> At the same time he was essentially Byzantine: he would concede nothing to the west insofar as his imperial position was concerned, for like any true medieval "Roman" emperor he regarded himself as the heir of a long line stretching back to Caesar Augustus.

Manuel's outlook and needs determined his policy at home and abroad. He had to establish his somewhat unexpected succession to the throne and secure allies among the western powers. And he even went a step further by aiming at active rehabilitation of Byzantine authority in the west. His ceaseless diplomatic moves, like those of other powers interested in the Mediterranean, were characterized by a fluidity, a readiness to consider offers from any quarter, a reluctance to close any door, which created a constantly shifting situation, though the main trends are clearly discernible.<sup>13</sup>

Like Alexius and John, Manuel knew that his interests conflicted with those of Sicily. At the very start of his reign in 1143 he was apparently willing to consider a rapprochement with Roger II, who had asked for a Greek princess to wed his son, but this plan fell through. The first major phase of Manuel's Italian policy was primarily one of military intervention, and concluded with his defeat in Sicily in 1158; after this he changed his methods somewhat, confining himself on the whole to diplomatic weapons. Throughout he sought to continue his father's alliance with the German ruler, Conrad III, who shared his hostility to Roger. In 1147 the Second Crusade forced a temporary suspension of their plans. Conrad had taken the cross and was moving east, leaving his ally Manuel isolated in the west and exposed to attack, as well as faced with the passage of crusading armies through his lands. Roger of Sicily, now hostile to Manuel, was trying to rouse the French king, Louis VII, and was himself plotting against the Byzantine emperor. Manuel was able to take little part in the disastrous expedition<sup>14</sup>: he was engaged with Roger, who had attacked Corfu and the Morea (1147) at a time when Manuel might reasonably be supposed to have concentrated his forces in the east to aid the

<sup>12</sup> See Lamma, *Comneni e Staufer*, passim.

<sup>13</sup> This lack of any fixed political system is one of the main themes of Lamma, *Comneni e Staufer*.

<sup>14</sup> See volume I, chapter XIV; on Roger's moves, see above, chapter I, pp. 11-15.

crusaders. Manuel had to safeguard his eastern borders by making a treaty with Mas'ūd, the Selchūkid ruler at Iconium, and by getting Venetian help against the Normans at the cost of still further trading privileges. The Normans were driven out, but they took with them an enormous booty and a number of captured Greek silk weavers. At the same time Manuel reinforced his alliance with Conrad when the latter journeyed through the Byzantine empire on his return from the Second Crusade.

By the treaty of Thessalonica (1148) it was evidently agreed that Manuel had some claim on Italian territory. The text itself has not survived, but the account of Cinnamus states that the emperor reminded Conrad of what he had previously undertaken to do, "to restore to Irene [his kinswoman Bertha of Sulzbach] her dowry, Italy [*Ἰταλία*]"<sup>15</sup> However the word "Italia" may be interpreted — and it has been suggested that it might mean the whole of Italy — it would certainly include the southern Italian lands of Apulia and Calabria. A joint expedition proposed against Roger did not materialize. Manuel's preparations were held up by a Serbian revolt fostered by Hungary and by Venetian intrigues; Conrad was hampered by Welf troubles fomented by Roger, who had by now gained papal recognition and had signed a truce with Eugenius III. But fortunately for Manuel any active western league against Byzantium foundered on the papal fear of increasing Roger's power and the steady pro-Byzantine policy of Conrad. Both Conrad and Manuel were planning an expedition in Italy for 1152, when Conrad died in the February of that year.

The new German ruler, Frederick Barbarossa, managed to come to an understanding with the pope (1153) whereby both agreed that no land in Italy was to be ceded to Manuel, "the king [*rex*] of the Greeks". Undeterred, Manuel still hoped to win Barbarossa over and to continue his western offensive by means of both diplomacy and force. When it suited his plans, the German emperor was, indeed, willing to negotiate with Manuel; there were a number of diplomatic approaches between the two courts, and Frederick even considered taking a Byzantine wife. On Roger's death in 1154 Manuel took advantage of opposition to William I of Sicily, and, without German assistance, he launched his attack. His forces and those of his allies at first gained ground. Frederick I, newly crowned in 1155, evidently wished to assist Manuel, or at least to have some share in the project, but he could not get the support of his vassals and had to go north, not returning to Italy

<sup>15</sup> John Cinnamus, *Historia*, II, 19 (*CSHB*, p. 87); Dölger, *Regesten*, no. 1374.



until 1158. Manuel's successes in Apulia aroused the hostility of Venice, and William grew in strength. The Greeks were trapped and badly defeated at Brindisi. Pope Hadrian IV, who had been wooed by Manuel, had judged it expedient to come to terms with William in June 1156. In Germany Frederick was cooling off, and a Byzantine embassy to his court in 1157 had no success. In 1158 Manuel had to sign a thirty years' truce with William, and he evacuated his troops from Italy.

By now Manuel must have realized the difficulties caused by Frederick's imperial ambitions, and perhaps also the hazardous nature of military action in a country where, in spite of lavish expenditure of money, he could count on no secure base and no sure ally. He did not abandon his western policy, but henceforth he concentrated on diplomacy which, if more cautious than formerly, yet still showed his resourcefulness and determination. The flow of embassies and correspondence between Constantinople and the western powers was unceasing. Manuel tried to utilize the rift between the papacy and Barbarossa, negotiating first with Hadrian and then with his successor Alexander III. From 1159 to October 1177 there were cordial relations between Alexander and Manuel and discussion of the terms on which the Byzantine emperor might receive the imperial crown from the pope. Manuel offered financial aid and ecclesiastical reunion. At this time Alexander feared Barbarossa, who was supporting an anti-pope; hence his negotiations with Constantinople, Sicily, and France. But with the formation of the Lombard League, the pope became less dependent on Manuel, and after the treaty of Venice (1177) and the defeat of Manuel at Myriokephalon, any real hope for a Byzantino-papal understanding faded out.

From the outset Manuel had responded to pope Alexander III's overtures, and had also hoped for the support of Louis VII in a concerted attack against Frederick in 1163, which however came to nothing. He then turned to the project of a marriage alliance with Sicily. William I had died in May 1166 and his heir was a boy of thirteen, William II. According to Romuald Guarna of Salerno, Manuel proposed that the Norman should marry his daughter Maria, who was then his heiress (his son Alexius was not born until 1169). She was already betrothed to Bela (III) of Hungary, but apparently Manuel was prepared to throw over this arrangement and its advantages, possibly as a counter-move to Frederick Barbarossa's fourth expedition to Italy in that year (1166), and perhaps with the hope of being himself crowned by the pope as sole

emperor should the kingdom of Sicily be united to the Byzantine empire. But the marriage proposal came to nothing, possibly because the news of Maria's betrothal to Bela had become known, though no specific explanation is given, only the cryptic phrase "for various reasons". Later on, after 1170, a second attempt was made, and negotiations were so far carried through that the young William II went to Taranto to meet a bride who never came. It was a humiliating experience for the Norman, all the more so if he realized that Manuel may have changed his plans because he thought that there might be a possibility of marrying Maria to the heir of Frederick I.

Throughout the second phase of Manuel's western policy (1158-1180) he was also involved in constant negotiation with the various Italian cities, particularly Venice, Pisa, and Genoa. Venice had always had substantial commercial interests in the east; the rapid rise of Pisa and Genoa now introduced rivals and provided Constantinople with alternative allies, particularly in the Genoese. Support could be bought only by trading concessions, as Alexius and John Comnenus had found; further, it was impossible to satisfy one party without arousing the dangerous hostility of others, and in any case the privileged position of foreign merchants within the empire was bitterly resented by the Greeks themselves. Hence the mounting tension in Manuel's reign, and a radical change in relations which was one of the underlying causes of the Fourth Crusade. Common distrust, first of Roger II, and then of Barbarossa, had for a time united Venice and Constantinople. But Venetian suspicion had been aroused by Byzantine activities in Italy, and partially successful designs on Dalmatia, as well as by the concessions granted to their Italian rivals; treaties were made with Genoa in 1169 and with Pisa in 1170.<sup>16</sup> Venetians within the empire had long been hated for their arrogance and envied for their wealth. In 1162 they had taken part in an attack on the Genoese in Constantinople which had annoyed Manuel, who was at that time trying to win Genoese support. He himself may still have resented the Venetian parody of him at the time of Corfu's recapture from the Normans in 1148, when the Venetians had a mock Byzantine ceremony in which the part of the emperor was played by a huge negro. And it is suggested by a Venetian source that his anger had been aroused by his failure to receive the active support of Venice against the Normans, whose ruler he had alienated by withholding the promised Byzantine bride. Thus the accumu-

<sup>16</sup> Dölger, *Regesten*, nos. 1488, 1497, 1498, 1499.

lated resentment of the native Greek populace coincided with reasons of policy which may have contributed to the carefully planned attack.

On March 12, 1171, all Venetians in the empire were arrested and their goods confiscated. The doge, Vitale Michiele, had to send a fleet to attack Dalmatia and the Greek islands, though he was favorably disposed toward Byzantium and wanted to maintain diplomatic relations. Manuel now realized the danger of an alliance between Venice and Sicily, and began negotiations with Venice. Nicetas Choniates says that he restored Venetian privileges and paid them compensation and made peace,<sup>17</sup> but Venetian sources suggest that the treaty was probably not concluded or relations restored until the following reign, that of Andronicus I.<sup>18</sup> Even then Venetian resentment remained.

In the Balkans and Hungary Manuel scored successes. Rascia, inclined to be independent and open to approach from Latin powers, such as Sicily, had put up irritating opposition, particularly under Stephen Nemanya, who became "župan" in either 1166 or 1167. Stephen approached Hungary and Germany, and tried to stir up trouble in Dalmatia, where Manuel had restored imperial control in 1166. He was finally subdued in 1172 and had to play a humiliating part in Manuel's triumphal entry into Constantinople.

In Hungary, as elsewhere, Manuel took his father's policy a step further. He not only intervened to his own advantage in disputed successions, but went so far as to have in mind the acquisition of the whole country. He proposed a novel solution to end the long hostility between Hungary and Constantinople. After endless diplomacy, he agreed to recognize Stephen III as king in return for his brother and heir Bela as hostage. Bela was to have Hungary's Croatian and Dalmatian lands as appanage, and was to marry Manuel's heiress Maria. The treaty of 1164 was executed only after further fighting, but by 1167 Manuel had Dalmatia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Sirmium. He planned to make Bela his heir, and gave him the name of Alexius and the title of despot. He thus hoped to secure Hungary and incorporate it into the empire, a plan similar to that which he entertained from time to time with regard to Sicily.

The situation changed with the birth of his son in 1169. The betrothal of Bela and Maria was dissolved, and Bela was reduced to the rank of a caesar and married to Agnes of Châtillon, the daughter

<sup>17</sup> Nicetas Choniates, *Historia; De Manuele Comneno*, V, 9 (CSHB, p. 225).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, p. 346.

of Constance of Antioch. With Greek support, Bela succeeded to the Hungarian throne in 1173, and as long as Manuel lived he was loyal to Byzantium, making no attempt to regain lost territory until after 1180. Manuel had thus gained some measure of security in the Balkans and in the north, as well as considerable territory.

In the east, before he was really hampered by Frederick Barbarossa, Manuel successfully developed his father's policy.<sup>19</sup> He asserted his suzerainty, first over the Armenian prince Tōros II in Cilicia in 1158, and then over Reginald of Antioch in 1159, where the crowning symbol of his victory was to be the restoration of a Greek, Athanasius, to the ancient patriarchate in 1165. He was on particularly friendly terms with Baldwin III of Jerusalem, and anxious to prevent the encirclement of the crusading principalities by a single Moslem power. Manuel may have foreseen that any drastic reduction of crusading prestige and territory might turn the Latins towards his own lands. But neither his overtures to the ruler of Aleppo, Nūr-ad-Dīn, nor his expeditions with Amalric of Jerusalem against Egypt, could stay the rise of Saladin. Moreover the death of Nūr-ad-Dīn in 1174 affected the political situation in Anatolia, as well as in Syria and Egypt.

Manuel's position in Anatolia had to some extent been safeguarded by the tension between the rival Moslem powers, the Selchūkids at Iconium and the Dānishmendids. The eastern ambitions of the former had been kept in check by Nūr-ad-Dīn's support of the Dānishmendids. Now dissident Moslem elements looked to Constantinople for help. Manuel, aware of the Selchūkid sultan's quiet consolidation of his position, turned to his own frontier defenses on the marches of Iconium. He refused the overtures of Kiliġ Arslan II and led an expedition against him in 1176. Showing marked lack of generalship he allowed himself to be trapped in the pass of Myriokephalon, and was prevented from headlong flight only by the firm refusal of his officers to countenance this. What might well have been a wholesale massacre was checked by Kiliġ Arslan, who again offered terms. Manuel's prestige and that of the Christians in Syria was shaken by this defeat, though his generals still carried on intermittent warfare against Moslem penetration into the Maeander valley. Manuel himself may have felt that his earlier policy towards Iconium, in particular the treaty of 1161,<sup>20</sup> had been mistaken and perhaps opportunist. He had obtained an

<sup>19</sup> See volume I, chapter XVII, and below, chapter XIX.

<sup>20</sup> Dölger, *Regesten*, no. 1444.

ally, but only at the cost of permitting the steady growth of a Moslem principality on his very borders. Nicetas Choniates says that the sultan of Rūm observed that the worse the "Romans" were treated, the more splendid were the presents which their emperor gave.<sup>21</sup>

It might be pointed out that the difficulties with Iconium had been fomented by Frederick Barbarossa, at heart an enemy of the empire, who revealed his real plans in a letter to Manuel after Myriokephalon in which he announced himself as the heir of the Roman emperors with authority over the "rex Grecorum" and the "regnum Greciae".

The rise of Frederick Barbarossa and the dramatic humiliation of Myriokephalon should not be allowed to obscure Manuel's achievements and his statesmanship. His diplomacy was marked by a bold attempt to adapt a traditional policy to changing circumstances. His conception of imperial authority might have been held by any Byzantine ruler, but its execution had certain original features, such as his project for uniting the thrones of Hungary and Constantinople in the person of his prospective son-in-law Bela-Alexius, or of Sicily and Constantinople by a marriage alliance with William II (and possibly, earlier, with Roger II), demonstrating by this latter move a flexibility of outlook with regard to the Norman problem. The main threat to the empire was from the western, rather than the Moslem, powers. Manuel did at least succeed in postponing during his lifetime a fresh crusade, which would perhaps have struck its first blow at Constantinople, as in 1204, and if successful in the east would in any case have weakened Byzantine influence there. Almost his last move, the marriage of his son Alexius to Agnes of France, was an attempt to stay the hand of Louis VII, who, with pope Alexander III, was contemplating a new crusade. To condemn Manuel for not having concentrated exclusively on strengthening his position in Anatolia and Syria would be completely to misunderstand the practical needs of Byzantium.

The internal life of the empire at this time shows no marked break with the days of the earlier Comneni. Its main features were concentration on needs of defense, the steady growth in the use of grants in pronoiā and of the power of the landowner, and the continuity of the normal activities of a cultured society. As under John Comnenus, the army was well organized and well disciplined. Recruitment presented serious problems. Manuel tried to increase

<sup>21</sup> Nicetas Choniates, *Historia; De Manuele Comneno*, III, 9 (CSHB, p. 163).

the free population by liberating those who had become enslaved and by settling prisoners of war within the empire. A good many troops were provided by the system of grants in pronioia. Mercenaries were an important element, whether hired on a purely temporary basis, or provided by the various enrolled corps, or furnished by vassals or allies, such as the Serbs or the Selchükids. Nicetas Choniates says that the navy was somewhat diminished by Manuel's policy of allowing the islands and littoral to pay ship-money in lieu of maritime service and duties,<sup>22</sup> but even so, Byzantium was in a stronger position than in Alexius' day, when it had to rely almost exclusively on Venetian maritime assistance.

Foreign policy, however directed, had always been an expensive item in the Byzantine budget. But though burdens fell heavily on the poorer classes, Byzantium was by no means impoverished. In spite of the territorial contraction of the eleventh century and loss of customs revenue by reason of privileges granted to foreign merchants, there were still strong reserves, and lucrative trade was carried on in the great commercial centers of the empire, such as Thessalonica and Constantinople. The riches of Byzantium were the surprise and envy of all visitors; Benjamin of Tudela reports that the Greeks went about looking like princes.<sup>23</sup>

The fundamental difference between this period and that of the middle Byzantine state was however the gradual weakening of the central authority, particularly by reason of grants made to individuals. This was not so acute in Manuel's day as after 1204, but even under him the use of the pronioia had become an established feature of Byzantine administration. The strictly limited and non-hereditary character of the grant was in the course of time to be gradually modified, so that the property became more like the western fief handed down from father to son. The grant carried with it the right to collect taxes from the tenants (*paroikoi*) on the estate, as well as any other duties owed. This system had become so accepted a part of the Byzantine social structure that by the end of the twelfth century it seemed quite normal to speak of all land as being either hereditary or in pronioia. It was used of other than landed wealth, and was not reserved for Greeks alone. When Nicetas Choniates spoke of some of the pronoiars as being "half barbarian", he may have been thinking of the steppe peoples settled in the Balkans whose wealth was not in land but in herds and flocks, or

<sup>22</sup> Nicetas Choniates, *Historia; Manuele Comneno*, I, 3 (CSHB, p. 75).

<sup>23</sup> Benjamin of Tudela, *Reisebeschreibungen* (ed. L. Grünhut and M. N. Adler, 2 vols., Jerusalem and Frankfurt a. M., 1903-1904), II, 17-18.

even of the Latin knights, such as Renier of Montferrat, to whom Manuel granted what his brother Boniface refers to as "a feudum".<sup>24</sup>

Manuel's reign saw a marked strengthening of the feudal element. Though not hostile to monasticism or the church, Manuel furthered the interests of secular landlords at the expense of ecclesiastical estates when in 1158 he forbade monasteries to add to their land or to the number of their paroikoi, and did not permit alienation of property except to the senatorial and the military (i.e. the pronoiar) classes. Nicetas Choniates remarked on the liberality with which he assigned paroikoi to the pronoiars. But at the same time Manuel did attempt to control the movement of labor and the financial rights of the exchequer. So in confirming the claim to an estate, the imperial charter would give the number of its paroikoi, and new paroikoi could be acquired only if they were without obligations to the fisc, and then only up to a permitted number. The struggle to retain control over the state paroikoi (*demosiakoi*), which is evident as early as the tenth century, was not abandoned by the Comneni, though in the end, as the Palaeologian period was to show, feudal and separatist forces were to triumph at the expense of the central authority.

Manuel's activities at home included administrative and ecclesiastical reform. His chrysobulls and rulings deal with subjects ranging from the reorganization of the secular courts in order to expedite justice to decisions on points of ecclesiastical discipline and ownership of church property.<sup>25</sup> For instance, he forbade bishops to linger long in the capital and charged the civil authorities with the responsibility of seeing that they returned to their dioceses. He and his family were generous patrons of monasticism, but like others before him, he made it clear that the proper home of the monk was in the remote countryside and not in the crowded city.

Manuel took a lively and characteristic part in the theological discussions and problems of his day. Disputes over the nature of the sacrifice of the mass, or of the Trinity, divided Byzantine circles, and Manuel's views were not always those of orthodoxy. He evidently fancied his powers of persuasion, and almost abused his imperial position in his attempt to win supporters over to his point of view. Both inclination and political considerations fostered a certain flexibility in Manuel's outlook. He was for instance

<sup>24</sup> Nicetas Choniates, *Historia; De Manuele Comneno*, VII, 4 (CSHB, p. 273): see Ostrogorsky, *Pour l'histoire de la féodalité byzantine*, pp. 28-31 and p. 53.

<sup>25</sup> See Dölger, *Regesten, passim*.

anxious for a rapprochement between the Orthodox and dissident churches, and embassies went backwards and forwards between Constantinople and Armenia. They were fruitless, for in both churches a solid block of conservative opinion prevented any form of compromise. By his tolerant attitude towards Moslems, Manuel roused vigorous and open protest. His suggestion that his visitor, the sultan of Iconium, should accompany him in the procession to Hagia Sophia was regarded as wholly unsuitable. His view that the abjuration exacted from Moslems could be worded in a more acceptable form did however prevail, and instead of anathematizing the God of Mohammed the convert was required only to condemn Mohammed, his doctrine, and his successors. It is not surprising that Manuel's contemporaries did not always find his views on theological matters acceptable, and it was even considered after his death that he ought to be condemned as a heretic.<sup>26</sup> No taint of this kind could however cling in respect of his policy towards the various forms of the Bogomil, Massalian, and Paulician heresies which persisted within and without the empire. In Constantinople in 1143 two bishops, and then a monk Niphon, were condemned as Bogomils. They had all worked in Anatolia, and evidently the sect was particularly prevalent in Cappadocia. It was also strong in the Balkans, especially Macedonia and Bulgaria.<sup>27</sup> Manuel could do comparatively little to purge these heretical movements. They gained added strength from underlying Slav antagonism to Byzantine, and later Frankish, rule, and were an important factor in adding to the complexity of the situation in the Balkans at the time of the Fourth Crusade.

During the years 1081-1180 the Comnenian house had given the empire three outstanding rulers whose statesmanship and personality blinded contemporaries and later historians to the fundamental nature of the changes at work in Byzantine society and in neighboring polities. Manuel left a minor heir, Alexius II, whose mother was the Latin Maria of Antioch. Hatred of the strong Latin element in the empire had already been shown during Manuel's reign, though directed in 1171 against the Venetian traders. Political circumstances, marriage alliances, Manuel's personal friendships, all helped to bring a flood of westerners into the empire, and long-pent-up hatred against "the accursed Latins"

<sup>26</sup> John Cinnamus, *Historia*, VI, 2 (*CSHB*, pp. 251 ff.), and Nicetas Choniates, *Historia; De Manuele Commeno*, VII, 5 (*CSHB*, pp. 274 ff.); cf. Chalandon, *Les Comnène*, pp. 644 ff.

<sup>27</sup> See D. Obolensky, *The Bogomils*, pp. 219 ff., and V. Grumel, *Les Actes des patriarches*, I, fasc. 3 (especially on chronology).



broke out in May 1182, when the people of Constantinople made an indiscriminate attack on all foreigners in the city.

At this point Manuel's cousin Andronicus Comnenus was already preparing to take control. An element of instability and restlessness in his character and an underlying antagonism toward Manuel had prevented him from giving service to the empire or settling on his estates; wandering from court to court, Moslem and Christian alike, he had toured the Near East for a number of years, living on his personality and charm. Now he returned to seize his opportunity and to show that he had views of his own on the nature of imperial rule. The reaction against Maria of Antioch and the Latin elements served his purpose. In May 1182 he was accepted by the city, and in September 1183 was crowned co-emperor with Alexius II. So far this was normal procedure, but Andronicus had an impetuous, violent streak in his make-up. Autocratic and dominating, impatient and impulsive, he could not refrain from the elimination, first of Maria, and then of Alexius, though not of Alexius' widow, the little French princess Agnes ("Anna"), whom he married.

Andronicus instituted a vigorous campaign against administrative corruption and the power of the aristocracy. He tried to protect the lower classes against the extortions of tax collectors, government officials, and landlords, so that those who had rendered unto Caesar what was Caesar's could sleep at ease in the shade of their trees.<sup>28</sup> Thus good salaries were to be paid, suitable men were to be appointed, and the sale of offices was prohibited. For various reasons Andronicus was biased against the aristocracy. Their power and their privileges were incompatible with his conception of imperial autocracy and the well-being of his subjects. The bulls of 1158 and 1170<sup>29</sup> which permitted alienation of imperial grants of land only to the senatorial or military class were revoked in December 1182 in the early months of Andronicus's regency.<sup>30</sup> His anti-Latin bias might have gained some support from the aristocracy, but it was more than outweighed by his open hostility to their own privileged position. The widespread practice of grants, whether in *pronoia*, or of *charistikion*, had gone too far to be successfully challenged.

There was strong opposition to Andronicus, who met conspiracy and risings with violence and executions. As external

<sup>28</sup> See Nicetas Choniates, *Historia; De Manuele Comneno*, VII, 2 (CSHB, pp. 265-268).

<sup>29</sup> Dölger, *Regesten*, nos. 1333 and 1398, but on the dating see Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, p. 348, note 6.

<sup>30</sup> Dölger, *Regesten*, no. 1553.

troubles once more threatened, the reaction in his favor rapidly turned to hostility. He lost the support of the military families on whom the empire now depended, and he had no effective weapon with which to ward off attacks from without and revolts from within. Hungary took the offensive and regained Dalmatia and parts of Croatia and Sirmium; Stephen Nemanya shook off his allegiance; in 1185 the Normans of Sicily took Corfu and other islands and advanced to capture Thessalonica. Centrifugal tendencies within the empire were evidenced by Isaac Comnenus, who proclaimed himself independent ruler of Cyprus. Andronicus had tried to stave off western attack by approaching the papacy and by allying with Venice and with Saladin. But news of the dramatic fall and sack of Thessalonica and fear of suffering a similar fate led the people of Constantinople to dethrone and kill Andronicus, the last emperor of the Comnenian house.

The rulers of the dynasty of the Angeli had not the character or qualities of the Comneni. Their policy represented a compromise: it was aristocratic, but not pro-Latin. The difficulties of the empire during the years 1185-1204 were aggravated, but not caused, by the ineffectiveness of the Angeli. Internally the old abuses in the administration reappeared — the sale of offices, the extortions of the tax collector, the oppression and predominance of the landowner. The themes had increased in number despite loss of territory<sup>31</sup>; the provincial governor was overshadowed by the local magnate, thus heralding one of the distinctive features of Byzantium in the Palaeologian age.

Had Isaac II been a statesman of the caliber of John Comnenus he would still have been tried to the utmost. As it was he showed that he was not a mere nonentity. He had to deal first with Norman aggression and then with Hohenstaufen hostility and the Third Crusade. The most pressing problem, once the Normans had been driven from Thessalonica and Durazzo and their fleet recalled from the Sea of Marmara, was in the Balkans, where the discontented Bulgarian provinces were ripe for rebellion and every small Slav principality was easy prey for western mischief-makers. Bulgaria had never wholly acquiesced in its incorporation in the empire in 1018. Religious and political discontent simmered throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries and came to the surface in the troubled days following the death of Manuel Comnenus. The situation was successfully exploited by two local magnates, Peter

<sup>31</sup> Dölger, *Regesten*, no. 1647.

and Asen, who successfully reestablished an independent kingdom and called themselves the *imperatores* (tsars) of the whole of Bulgaria and Vlachia. Fierce controversy has raged around the question of their own ethnic origins, whether Bulgar, Vlach, or Kuman, for in the foundation of the Second Bulgarian empire all three racial groups took part,<sup>32</sup> and the Kumans, for instance, were an important element in the new kingdom. Isaac had already tried to win the support of Hungary by the treaty of 1185 and by his marriage to the Hungarian princess Margaret. He now struggled against centrifugal forces in the Balkans, and after the treachery of his general Alexius Branas, himself led military expeditions during 1186–1187. But he had to accept the situation, and in 1186 Asen was crowned tsar by Basil, the newly established archbishop of Tirnovo. Stephen Nemanya of Rascia made himself “grand župan” of Serbia in 1186, and continued to build up his power at Byzantine expense; he supported the Bulgarian rebels. Imperial authority in the Balkans was therefore being constantly undermined, a situation which the western leaders of the Third Crusade were quick to exploit.

Thus weakened by civil war and campaigns in the Balkans, and without strong military leadership, Byzantium was in no position to control the new crusade or to counter Hohenstaufen ambitions.<sup>33</sup> With the continual deterioration of the crusading position in Syria and Palestine and the comparative failure of the Third Crusade, attention was more and more focussed on the Byzantine empire. Political hostility, keen commercial rivalries, and even the schism between the two churches created a situation in which a concerted western attack on the empire seemed only a question of time. The Third Crusade was a convenient cloak for the ambitions of Frederick Barbarossa, whose son was betrothed to the heiress of the Sicilian kingdom. Frederick traveled through Hungary and the Balkans. He had in 1188 negotiated with Byzantium on the subject of his passage through its territory,<sup>34</sup> but he was also in touch with the sultan at Iconium, and was regarded by both Serbia and Bulgaria as a desirable ally, particularly in view of the understanding between Hungary and Constantinople. Both the “grand župan” and the Bulgarian tsar were willing to submit to Frederick and to attack Constantinople.

Isaac could hardly afford to support the Latin crusading cause,

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, p. 358, note 4, and see in general R. L. Wolff, “The Second Bulgarian Empire: Its Origin and History to 1204,” *Speculum*, XXIV (1949), 167–206.

<sup>33</sup> See above, chapters II and III, for details of the Third Crusade.

<sup>34</sup> Dölger, *Regesten*, no. 1581; cf. above, chapter III, pp. 90–91.

and in the early summer of 1189 he renewed the treaty which Andronicus had made with Saladin, probably in 1185. Frederick prepared to take the offensive against Isaac, who had no diplomatic finesse and mishandled the situation. Philippopolis and Adrianople were occupied by the Germans, who then approached Constantinople. Frederick had already written to his son Henry telling him to bring a fleet to attack the city by sea. Constantinople awaited its fate, fearing that, like Thessalonica, it would be captured and looted. Isaac had no option but to accept Frederick's terms, and in February 1190 he agreed to the treaty of Adrianople, which granted the Germans transport and shipping and Byzantine hostages. Thus Barbarossa had very nearly anticipated events of 1204; he had certainly demonstrated the weakness of the Byzantine government. Meanwhile he crossed into Asia Minor and shortly afterwards his untimely death removed a dangerous enemy.

His western fellows in the Third Crusade, Richard the Lion-hearted of England and Philip Augustus of France, reached the Holy Land, but achieved little for the Christian cause there. But an event of significance for eastern Mediterranean politics in the later Middle Ages was Richard's conquest of the strategic island of Cyprus, then under the independent control of the Byzantine, Isaac Comnenus. From Richard it passed first to the Templars, and then in 1192 to Guy of Lusignan and his dynasty.

Temporarily freed from the German danger, Isaac hastened to retrieve the position in the Balkans. In the autumn of 1190 he defeated the Serbs and came to terms with Stephen Nemanya. The "grand župan" was allowed to retain certain of his conquests and was given the title of sebastocrator and the emperor's niece Eudocia as wife for his son Stephen. Though Isaac could not subdue the Serbian ruler as Manuel had done, in true Byzantine fashion he did at least try to retain him in the hierarchy of princes under the "Roman" basileus. Bulgaria proved more difficult to tame and Byzantine expeditions were defeated. Isaac was undertaking a fresh campaign with Hungarian help when his brother Alexius III deposed and blinded him, and ascended the throne on April 8, 1195.

Isaac has been, perhaps unfairly, denounced as "utterly ineffectual".<sup>35</sup> Faced with contemporaries of the caliber of Frederick Barbarossa, Henry VI, Stephen Nemanya, Peter and Asen, and Saladin, he could not hope to hold his own. But unwise and impetuous and shortsighted as he was, particularly in his internal policy, his military expeditions and his diplomatic activity do at least show

<sup>35</sup> Runciman, *Crusades*, II, 429.

him attempting to retrieve Byzantine prestige in the Balkans with Hungarian assistance, or trying to safeguard Byzantine interests in the east by coming to an understanding with Saladin. Indeed Isaac's negotiations with Saladin reveal the essential rift between the Latins and Greeks and the futility of hoping for any measure of unity in the Christian ranks.

Isaac's successor, Alexius III Angelus, ruled from April 8, 1195, to July 17-18, 1203. His weakness and greed lost the empire what little prestige it still enjoyed, and played directly into the hands of the western and Balkan powers. Already in 1195 Barbarossa's son the German emperor Henry VI, now ruler of Sicily, had demanded from Isaac II the cession of the Greek territory occupied by the Normans under William II of Sicily. The marriage of his brother Philip of Swabia to Irene, the daughter of the deposed Isaac II, provided Henry with a fresh weapon which he did not hesitate to use in his bold policy of attack. Henry planned a new crusade to conquer Constantinople and the empire before passing on to Syria and Palestine. Alexius in his fear tried to meet Henry's demands for heavy tribute, by levying what was known as the "German" tax, though this would doubtless have afforded only a temporary breathing space. Henry, in spite of papal opposition, continued to strengthen his position and was recognized by the rulers of Cyprus and of Cilician Armenia. The danger was averted only by his unexpected death in 1197.

Meanwhile Byzantine weakness had been further exposed by the advances made by Serbia and Bulgaria, both of which now judged it expedient to turn to Rome and to Hungary rather than to Constantinople. In both countries Constantinople had opportunities to extend its influence, but failed to do so. Stephen of Serbia, who was married to Alexius III's daughter Eudocia, in vain sought Byzantine help against his brother Vukan, who succeeded in temporarily gaining control of the government in 1202 with papal and Hungarian help, though only at the price of acknowledging Rome's supremacy and Hungary's suzerainty. The "ban" (ruler) of Bosnia, Kulin, strengthened his position by similar action. In Bulgaria civil war had broken out, and the throne was gained by Ioannitsa (Kaloyan), who had lived in Constantinople as a hostage. But even he, significantly, looked to Rome and not to Byzantium, and in 1204 he was crowned king by the Bulgarian archbishop Basil, who had just been consecrated primate by Innocent III's legate, cardinal Leo.

It needed only Venetian ambition to give direction to the hostile forces waiting to take advantage of Byzantine difficulties. The dismemberment of the empire would ensure the maritime supremacy of Venice, which in the course of the twelfth century had from time to time been threatened by Byzantine imperial policy and by the antagonism of the Greek people. The Fourth Crusade could have presented no surprise in western diplomatic circles. In fact, the internal condition of the empire did in several respects favor such an attack. In the past scholars have stressed the weakness of the dynasty of the Angeli and the hostility and greed of Byzantium's Latin enemies. But in reality a prime cause in determining the course of events was the fundamental change in the character of the empire from the eleventh century onwards. This was largely due to separatist and centrifugal forces which were continually undermining the central authority; such forces were enormously accelerated by the method of land holding based on grants in pronoia which bore a marked similarity to the western feudal system.

Thus weakened, the empire was no match for its western enemies. When Alexius III considered the strength of the crusading host, actually bent on restoring his imprisoned and blinded brother to his throne, he fled with what portable funds he could lay hands on. Nicetas Choniates, who disliked him, said that he was too cowardly to attempt any defense of the city as his son-in-law Theodore Lascaris wished.<sup>36</sup> And so Isaac II was again placed on the throne with his son Alexius IV as co-emperor. But it was an impossible position for the unfortunate Angeli: the hovering Latins continually pressed them for funds which they could not easily raise, while the populace resented and feared the influence of the westerners. Both Greek and Latin sources tell of continual tension and of constant clashes and skirmishes which came to a climax on January 1, 1204, with the Greek attempt to send fire-ships against the Venetian fleet. "This, then, was the way in which Alexius repaid us for all that we had done for him," wrote Villehardouin.<sup>37</sup> The Greeks, for their part, reproached Alexius IV for his failure to control the crusaders; terrified of his own people, the young emperor even thought of admitting the French and Italians into the palace of the Blachernae for his own defense. At this, Alexius Ducas "Mourt-zouphlus", another son-in-law of Alexius III, promptly seized the throne in late January 1204. He had Isaac and Alexius IV im-

<sup>36</sup> Nicetas Choniates, *Historia (CSHB)*, p. 720.

<sup>37</sup> Geoffrey of Villehardouin, *La Conquête de Constantinople*, chap. 220.

prisoned and was himself proclaimed as Alexius V. Isaac died shortly afterwards and Alexius IV was probably strangled.

Alexius IV, understandably enough, had been favorably disposed towards the Latins. Alexius V, on the other hand, did at least attempt to keep them in check, and he set about fortifying the city against the inevitable attack. The very severity of his discipline made enemies. The Latins were by no means at one among themselves, but expediency and ambition determined Boniface and the other leaders to support the intentions of the doge. The empire was partitioned in advance (March 1204) and the city taken by assault on April 13.<sup>38</sup> Mourtzouphlus' troops fought with determination to stave off the repeated attacks made from the crusading ships in the Golden Horn, but his camp was finally broken up and he fled from the city and joined his father-in-law at Mosynopolis. Alexius III treacherously had him blinded; he was caught by the crusaders and finally killed by being hurled from the column of Theodosius in Constantinople. Alexius III fared somewhat better than he deserved: he fell into the hands of Boniface of Montferrat, then took refuge in Epirus with the despot Michael I, who had ransomed him, and finally, after fomenting trouble in Asia Minor, was captured by his son-in-law Theodore Lascaris in 1210; he ended his days in a monastery in Nicaea. It was here that Theodore Lascaris had established his base after the fall of the city, and with courage and astuteness he was now rebuilding the shattered Byzantine state.

<sup>38</sup> See below, chapter V, pp. 184-185.