



The West from a Byzantine Perspective During the Early Crusades

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The article explores changing attitudes to western Europeans in the Byzantine Empire from the eleventh century until the Fourth Crusade and for some time after it. Special attention is paid to the development of old stereotypes and the emergence of new ones. More active contacts between the two halves of Christendom from the eleventh century onwards did not result in an expected rapprochement, but rather led to hatred and resentment. The article focuses on a number of texts by Byzantine authors, such as Michael Psellos, Anna Komnena, John Kinnamos, Eustathios of Thessaloniki, and Niketas Choniates. In my view, the changes in Byzantine perceptions of the west could be represented in terms of the following metaphorically named stages: Calm, Menace, and Bitterness and Despair.

Keywords: Byzantine Empire, Crusades, the image of the other.

Calm

Despite rivalries between eastern and western Christians, which could be traced back to late antiquity, there was also a feeling of latent affinity between them, whether religious, historical, cultural, or political. During the iconoclastic controversy in the eighth and ninth centuries, some iconodules sought the support of the Popes of Rome, who strongly backed their arguments. At the beginning of the tenth century, Pope Sergius III (860 – 911) assumed the role of an arbiter in the question of the fourth marriage of the Byzantine Emperor Leo the Wise (866 – 912). Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos considered the Franks the only rivals of the *Rhomaioi* as they were (presumably!) descendants of Constantine the Great and heirs of the Western Roman Empire (71). We have to stress, however, that contacts between Byzantines and Latins were not so frequent before the late eleventh century, and Byzantine authors in particular were often poorly acquainted with conditions in Europe's western half. The archaizing tendency in Byzantine literature, especially in historiography, as well as the manifest lack of interest in geography, so typical of the Byzantine world and probably due to its imperial outlook, were two characteristic features which moulded the Byzantine view of cultural and religious others (Nicol, “The Byzantine View” 315 – 339; Ducellier 1 – 8).

The *Chronographia*, written by Michael Psellos in the 1070s, the *History* of Michael Attaleiates, Kekaumenos' *Book of Counsels*, written about the same time, and Anna Komnena's *Alexiad*, written probably in the 1140s, are among the historical and moralizing books in which these common features are noticeable. All of these authors share the same disregard for the problem of where western people, including mercenaries, merchants, and invaders, came from. According to Psellos, “from the territories of the Iberians and Arabs to the territories of the Celts, there is only Scythian land or, put briefly, a barbarian periphery” (19).¹ Anna Komnena is content only to mention that the Crusaders came from the remote lands of “outer Europe” (2: X, 207). The authors of the eleventh century demonstrate a relative lack of emotional zeal when dealing with westerners. References to foreigners from the west in Psellos'

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations into English are the author's.

Chronographia do not carry either negative or positive connotations. The Varangians (also known as *Tauroskythai*), who took part in the revolt of the Constantinopolitan mob against Emperor Michael V in 1041, are only mentioned to show the depth of the people's devotion to Porphyrogenneta Zoe and the extent of the popular rage which erupted in the rebellion (Psellos 102). During a mission to the camp of the future emperor Isaac Komnenos, Psellos took notice of the Normans (*Italoi*) and the Varangians, and, according to him, the appearance of these people alone was enough to evoke horror. However, no real fear is in evidence in his description insofar as these people were mercenaries whom the Byzantine emperors and upper-class rebels used as their bodyguards (as was the case with Isaac Komnenos). Psellos also dwells on the differences between Normans and Varangians, presenting the former as daring and unbeatable while the latter are depicted as bestial and ferocious (118). These "axe-bearers" are often mentioned in the *Chronographia*.

Robert Crispin, a commander of western mercenaries, is even treated with a kind of sympathy insofar as "in the beginning he was an enemy of the Romans, but later changed his mind, and he likes us now no less than he hated us before" (Psellos 169 – 170). Michael Attaleiates praises Hervé Franco-poulos, another mercenary commander, whom he pronounces to be an able general (347). Kekaumenos records the story of Harald Hardrada only to demonstrate that good soldiers from the north could be hired to benefit the Empire without being paid too much (Litavrin 282 – 285). He further advises Byzantium's rulers to recruit westerners in their armies because they are strong and experienced warriors. Attaleiates also supports such a policy.

Other people, such as John Oxeites, Patriarch of Antioch, did not approve of this policy, and preferred to warn rulers and their entourages of potential dangers (Gautier 41 – 45). Thus, some features of the future clash were apparently already discernible. Psellos, who is usually quite indifferent to things and events, which do not concern his own career, so immodestly described in *Chronographia*, discusses the "two Romes," and goes on to pronounce the first one, "Old Rome," the weaker of the two, and the second one, "New Rome," the stronger by far (138). A very strong element of imperial propaganda is in evidence here. Psellos laments the severance of Italy from the Empire, which deprived Byzantium of its best province.

Attaleiates adopts a decidedly negative attitude to Latins: for him they are "a race treacherous by nature" (125). A common prejudice is to be discerned in this statement, and also some disappointment since "even our former allies and partakers of an equal commonwealth with us, being of the very same religion, Albans and Latins, who from the side of the western Rome live near the Italian regions, became most unexpected enemies" (328).² Apparently, the destruction of imperial unity was still a cause of regret in the 1070s. Negative feelings were accumulating, and a denigratory view of anyone, who came from the west, was starting to take shape, as is demonstrated by Anna Komnena's *Alexiad*. Greed, treachery, fickleness, cruelty, and arrogance are among the vices attributed to westerners in Byzantine narratives from the end of the eleventh century onwards. For Patriarch John Oxeites, Roussel de Bailleul, a mercenary commander, who rebelled against the Constantinopolitan government, is "that Frankish dog who raged against the Romans" (quoted in Gautier 23).

In the period before the First Crusade, contacts between Byzantines and western Europeans were not so frequent as to encourage mutual knowledge and understanding or to provoke any significant emotional reaction. The only exceptions were merchants from Italian city-states, and especially Venetians, who were well known in the big cities of the Empire. Besides, authors and courtiers like Psellos and Attaleiates and ecclesiastical figures and generals like John Oxeites and Kekaumenos were primarily concerned with their own world and its problems, and for this reason foreigners did not constitute a particularly important subject of discussion, or object of representation, for them. Western Europeans resided in the Byzantine capital in the capacity of ambassadors, merchants, mercenaries and even slaves,

² It is noteworthy to mention that the generalized notion of "Latins" for people from western Europe began to be used in the second half of the eleventh century and turned into a norm later on. Thus, the west was presented as a unitary entity, often hostile to Byzantines, and not a mosaic of nations and political entities. The Crusades were instrumental in triggering that kind of (quite misleading) attitude. See Alexander Kazhdan, "Latins and Franks in Byzantium."

and their presence was also noticeable in the provinces. Nevertheless, encounters and interchanges with them were far from frequent or numerous in the eleventh century when the position of Byzantium was relatively stable and no danger of invasion was in evidence. Foreigners, living somewhere in the “outer world,” escaped the attention of Psellos and Kekaumenos altogether, and were presented in a highly contradictory manner in the writing of Attaleiates. Worthy of notice is the fact that even the active theological disputes of the eleventh century, following the so-called “schism” of 1054, did not provoke a great desire for opposition and confrontation in the more prominent historical texts and moralizing *tractati* of the period (Hergenroether 139-181). Byzantine perceptions of the “outer world” were, on the whole, negative, but they are not given pride of place either in Psellos’ *Chronographia*, or in Attaleiates’ *History* and Kekaumenos’ *Book of Counsels*. The final split was yet to come. The gap was discernible, but it was not an abyss yet.

Menace

At the very end of the eleventh century, the situation changed drastically. The Byzantine Empire faced the challenge of the First Crusade and was involved in it to a certain extent. In contrast with the previous period, Emperor Alexios I Komnenos had to deal with a considerable number of western Crusaders from different regions of Europe and of different social strata. The task was not easy as the Emperor had to maintain a balance between the leaders of the Crusade in order to guarantee the safety of the Empire and gain as much profit as possible from the Crusaders. What made things even more difficult was that Alexios had to meet, in his own capital, old and traditional enemies of Byzantium, such as the leaders of the Normans Boemund and his nephew Tancred. The imposing spectacle of the Crusaders, moving in large numbers from west to east, impressed the Byzantines and also put them into direct contact with people from western Europe. The recent war with the Normans (1081 – 1085) was not forgotten, and the revolt of Roussel de Bailleul was kept in mind as well, heightening the negativity of traditional attitudes. In 1082, during the war with the Normans, Alexios gave commercial privileges to the Venetians, who were old and traditional allies and subjects of the Empire. They became strong enough to demand conditions from Byzantium, and their commercial activity in Constantinople and other Byzantine cities provoked envy among strata of the local population for whom manufacture and commerce were their main sources of livelihood (Nicol 68 – 104).

The imperial princess Anna Komnena was possibly an eye-witness, as a young girl, of some of the events connected with and following the First Crusade. The observations of the princess, who was well-educated and highly intelligent, show the influence of received imperial ideological *topoi*, literary conventions, and some personal factors. As far as one can judge from *The Alexiad*, for Anna, the Empire is the centre of the world. She exhibits the typical negative Byzantine attitude towards barbarians as well as deplorably poor knowledge of geography. As already remarked, her history of the reign of her father Alexios, which was dedicated to his memory, was probably written in the 1140s, when Anna was a considerably older woman. However, the vivid descriptions that she provides suggest a fresh and ready memory. A search for truth is also in evidence. Apparently, this search was not completely hampered by the demands of the sophisticated literary style that the author had to employ. Altogether, Anna’s vivid narration sets her apart from a lot of earlier authors.

Anna emerges as a zealous defender of the imperial and ecclesiastical foundations of Byzantine ecumenical doctrine. The idea of the Popes of Rome as heads of the universe is for her only another manifestation of the impudence of Latins: “But when the imperial insignia, the Senate, and the entire power were transferred from there [ancient Rome] to here, that is, to our land and our imperial city, thus, together with them the primacy of the archiepiscopal see was also transferred” (2: X, 48). Anna is apparently prepared to disregard the famous Canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon, according to which the Patriarch of Constantinople is second in honour to the Pope of Rome. The princess’s attitude to the status and customs of the Church of Rome is generally negative. When describing a bellicose priest, who fought against the Byzantines in a skirmish, she makes the remarkable observation that

we have a very different notion of priesthood in comparison with the Latins. Our priests follow the canons, laws and the evangelical dogma...while the Latin barbarian administers the divine

mysteries, bearing a shield in his left hand and shaking a spear in his right one...a man of blood as in the Psalms of David. (2: X, 218)

For the Byzantines, war is a task for the Emperor, thus preserving the old Roman tradition. This is also the central point from which misunderstandings about the Crusades arose (Ahrweiler 89 – 99; Magdalino 1 – 38).³

Anna generally disapproves of customs and practices, which differ markedly from her own. For her, they are instances of “barbarism.” *The Alexiad* provides numerous examples demonstrating the extent to which eastern Christendom had become alienated from its western counterpart. Anna makes a point of not omitting anything that could be regarded as indicative of the difference between the two: she even goes so far as to mention the shaved faces of the Latins. Of special interest is an incident which occurred during the negotiations of Alexios I with the leaders of the Crusade. Feeling tired, one of the knights, who remains anonymous, sat on the imperial throne. When this man was reminded that this was not proper, he vilified the Byzantine custom of standing in the presence of the Emperor. “‘What nonsense!’ he said. ‘One is seated while so many commanders are standing around.’” In response to the Emperor Alexios, who attempted to be diplomatic, the offended knight mentioned a custom from his own country according to which conflicts of precedence were usually resolved through combat. Not only misunderstanding is to be noticed here, but also a clash between chivalric provincialism, on the one hand, and eastern imperial traditionalism and universalism, on the other. Anna ends her story on a didactic note by representing Alexios as a wise mentor, who gave valuable advice to the unknown knight; as the latter chose to disregard it, he came to a bad end in Asia Minor where he fought against the Muslims (2: X, 228-229).

Anna also exhibits a certain amount of xenophobia and aristocratic disdain when making pronouncements upon people from the west. In her view, the Latins (or “Celts,” as she persists in calling them) are avaricious, fickle, unsteady, impudent, and verbose (quoted in Impellizzeri 377-390). Insofar as they are insolent, cruel, fickle and aggressive by nature, they are incapable of abiding by the conditions of any contract, and their avarice is the main reason for such an instability and inclination towards dishonesty and treachery (2: X, 121).

Anna further apprises her readers of her inability to pronounce the “inarticulate sounds of the barbarians,” and claims to be dismayed by their “mass of barbaric names” (2: X, 228). The languages, spoken by the Crusaders, are thus not only deemed to be incomprehensible and therefore inferior, but Anna does not even regard them as *languages*. They are reduced to sounds without articulation, which are totally disconnected and meaningless. Although there was still awareness among educated people in Byzantine society of the important role that classical Latin had played in their own Roman past, an incipient tendency was already in evidence to view even this language as “barbarian.” Of course, the “vulgar” Latin of the mob was an object of unmitigated contempt, and the Germanic languages inspired fear and uncertainty. Anna’s jaundiced view of the languages of foreign others reflects the new position of Greek as a tool for the expression of cultural superiority.

Despite her prejudices, Anna attributes a number of admirable traits to the westerners with whom she came into contact. Thus, she compliments western knights on their courage and understanding of warfare. There is undoubtedly a trace of respect in her portrayal of their arms and knightly strength. On the other hand, she decidedly misunderstands the chivalric ethos behind some of their actions (2: X, 28). Anna is greatly impressed with the Norman Princess Sigilgaita (Gaïta in *The Alexiad*), who commanded her own troops. She calls her a “second Pallas, although not Athena”(2: X, 160). Anna compares the warlike spirit of the “Celts” with that of the Varangians, and especially notes the courage and bellicos-

³ Paul Magdalino argues convincingly that the Byzantine Empire of Michael Doukas and Alexios Komnenos played an important role in bringing about the First Crusade and that Anna Komnena distorted the picture later on in order to blacken the reputation of westerners. Even if true, we have to recognize the fact that the very idea of the Crusades was never fully acceptable from a Byzantine perspective. The Byzantines adopted a more practical approach to Muslims and succeeded in establishing a long tradition of coexistence. In addition, for them war was a state deal conducted by the Emperor.

ity of their women. When describing her father's chief enemies Robert Guiscard and Boemund, Anna expresses a fair amount of admiration, demonstrates her knowledge of dialectics, and even manages to convey some of the excitement that she must have felt as a young girl during and after the First Crusade. It is within the realm of possibility that she met Bohemund in Devol, a fort in present-day Albania, to which she accompanied her father, who signed a peace treaty with him. The signing of the treaty is described in detail in *The Alexiad*. Bohemund, according to Anna, possesses a mixture of contradictory traits: he is handsome, manly and charming but also pugnacious and truculent (2: X, 122 – 123). There is hardly any other description in Byzantine literature in which extremes are combined in such a skilful way. Anna evidently followed the tradition of ancient Greek dialectics but it is also logical to assume that her personal impressions played a certain part in her portrayal of the Norman leader.

In the Grips of Bitterness and Despair: John Kinnamos, Eustathios of Thessaloniki, and Niketas Choniates

The *History* of Kinnamos was probably written in the early 1180s (Cinnamus 4 – 5).⁴ Emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143 – 1180) is the text's hero. Despite Manuel's allegedly "Latinophile" policy and Kinnamos' eulogy of the Emperor, the *History* is predominantly anti-western. Appreciation is only expressed for the physical strength of Germans in particular and the military skills of western warriors in general (Cinnamus 62, 99). As far as terminology and *topoi* go, Kinnamos is very close to Anna Komnena. Like her, he presents westerners as "barbarians," who would not give up any of their silly customs. For him, too, they are avaricious, arrogant and cruel (Cinnamus 74 – 75, 109, 110 – 111, 117 – 118). The statement that "in prosperity the barbarian is likely to be exalted and boasts beyond measure, but in disaster he is downcast more than is suitable and is immoderately humbled" (Cinnamus 67) is very similar to Anna's observation on the fickle nature of westerners. Like her, Kinnamos adheres strictly to the Byzantine imperial idea. In the letter of Emperor Manuel I to the German King and Holy Roman Emperor Conrad II, cited and, probably, *forged* by Kinnamos, the Byzantine Emperor presents himself as a descendant of the Roman emperors of the past who had conquered all the *oekumene*, including the lands of the Germans (Cinnamus 66 – 67; Asdracha 36 – 37). The author strongly argues against the right of German monarchs, or anyone else for that matter, to usurp the imperial title in a tyrannical way. According to Kinnamos, insofar as Rome had not been the capital of the Empire for many centuries, but only a city included within its boundaries, it currently exists in a state of revolt, *apostasia*, against the true Romans, that is, the Byzantines (Cinnamus 165 – 167). In fact, the author includes this argument in his narrative in order to defend the Byzantine position against both the German emperors and the Papacy.

Kinnamos's criticism of the Venetians is even harsher. He describes them as a "nation corrupt in character, jesting and rude more than any other, because it is filled with sailors' vulgarity" (Cinnamus 210). It is not difficult to read this passage as a reflection of Emperor Manuel's conflict with Venice and the arrests of Venetians in March 1171 (Cinnamus 210; Brand 15 – 16; Nicol 96 – 103).

Curiously, Kinnamos adopts a negative attitude to Pope Hadrian IV (1154 – 1159), who is otherwise known for his attempts at reconciliation with Constantinople in matters of theological difference and problems of ecclesiastical organization (Cinnamus 131; 165 – 166). According to Kinnamos, Pope Hadrian claimed that "there was nothing in common between the newer Rome and the older one, since they had anciently been broken apart" (Cinnamus 131). Thus, the *History* portrays the Pope as an openly anti-Byzantine public figure and a dangerous person in general.

In Anna Komnena's *Alexiad*, the First Crusade is an inexplicable and, to a great extent, perilous phenomenon. The Second Crusade, which Kinnamos witnessed, was at least as shocking an event for the Byzantines as the first one had been (Magdalino, *The Byzantine Background* 46 – 53; Constable 213 – 279; Arbabi 195 – 204). Describing the outset of the Second Crusade, Kinnamos is already set in his opinion that the reason for the crusading movement is to pillage and capture the Byzantine lands, and the liberation of the Holy Land is only a pretext (Cinnamus 58). The hostile collisions between Crusaders and Byzantines are presented in detail. However, unlike Choniates, Kinnamos stresses only the

⁴ On John Kinnamos, see M. M. Freydenberg, Herbert Hunger, esp. pp. 409 – 416, and Catherine Asdracha, "L'imidge de l'homme occidental."

pugnacity, cruelty and dishonourable behaviour of the Crusaders, consciously omitting the faults of the Byzantines. Significantly, Kinnamos represents the Germans of Conrad II and Frederick I Barbarossa in a negative light whereas the Frenchmen of Louis VII, who are mentioned only sporadically, without openly unfavourable connotations. This can be explained with the political conjuncture at the time. In the early 1180s, when Kinnamos's *History* was written, Agnes-Anna, the daughter of the French king, was the wife of the young Emperor Alexios II, while Frederick Barbarossa appeared to be one of the most dangerous enemies of the Byzantine Empire.

Let us pass on to Eustathios of Thessaloniki and Niketas Choniates. They were both prolific authors, but Eustathios owed his fame mostly to his chronicle *The Capture of Thessaloniki* whereas Choniates was widely recognized as the author of yet another *History*. Niketas Choniates was Eustathios's student, and this might explain the similarities in style and *topoi* used by both of them. Eustathios and Choniates possessed strong personalities and distinguished themselves in both the political and religious spheres in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. As Bishop of Thessaloniki Eustathios witnessed the capture and plunder of the city by the Normans in August 1185 (Maricq 81–87; Kazhdan, "Vizantiskii" 68–84; Wilson 196–204; Kazhdan and Franklin 115–195). His descriptions of events are vivid and fascinating. Predictably, he represents the Norman invaders as a gang of rude and ignorant barbarians. His outlook was evidently moulded by the imperial idea and his Hellenic education. Interestingly, Eustathios's portrayal of the events that he must have witnessed is rendered more complex by his critical attitude to his own compatriots.

In contrast to Eustathios, who deals with a single episode of Byzantine history, Choniates presents an account of a lengthy period of time, starting with the reign of John II Komnenos (1118–1143) and ending with the two unhappy years following the fall of Constantinople in 1204 (Hunger 256–286). Writing from the perspective of his own misfortunes, Choniates is a wise, albeit deeply chagrined, observer and interpreter of the clash between Byzantium and the Christian west. He speaks of the hatred and disagreement, provoked by both sides, which allow for no human feeling between Romans and Latins (Choniates, *Nicetae* 312; van Dieten 568).

As already indicated, Eustathios was quite hostile to the Normans. For instance, the Norman King of Sicily is pronounced to be a tyrant (*tyrannos*) insofar as he rules territories, which were part of the Roman Empire once, in a way comparable to those of the notorious ancient tyrants Dionysios and Phalaris (Choniates, *Nicetae* 49, 58). However, Eustathios adopts a more positive attitude to a number of other western dignitaries, including the Pope of Rome. The Crusader King of Jerusalem is also praised since he "strove so royally for the sake of the good cause" (Choniates, *Nicetae* 48). Frederick Barbarossa is celebrated as the "mighty Alamanos," who provided protection to the Byzantine fugitives, who had escaped from Andronikos' tyranny (Choniates, *Nicetae* 56). Relating the course of the events, Eustathios makes the reader aware of the fact that wickedness and treachery could be found on both sides, and the cases of treachery related were more frequent among the Byzantines than among the Normans. Nevertheless, special emphasis is laid on Byzantine cultural superiority, which is valorized by far more highly than either military prowess or good political organization.

Choniates uses even stronger language and spares neither foreigners nor his own compatriots. For him, the Latins are arrogant, drivelling and money-loving. The Venetians especially are cunning vagabonds, while the Normans are cruel and altogether unbearable. In his discourse, "barbarians, haters of the beautiful" is not merely a *topos*, but also a reflection of the stolen and destroyed monuments of Constantinople, following the taking of the city by the Crusaders (Choniates, *Nicetae* 357–362; 647–655). Choniates likens the Latins to birds of prey, and places their actions within an apocalyptic framework.

In regard to the Crusades, Choniates' view is not very different from that of Anna Komnena and Kinnamos. The Crusaders, according to him, are "a cloud of enemies, a dreadful and death-dealing pestilence which fell upon the Romans: I speak of the campaign of the Germans joined by other kindred nations" (Choniates, *Nicetae* 60, 35). However, Choniates was in a better position than his predecessors to present the (Third) Crusade in a more objective light. In spite of his anti-Latin bias, he allows himself to admire the personal qualities of Frederick Barbarossa and to list the faults of the Byzantines, including the mistreatment of certain Crusaders by local people and imperial administrators as well as the

inconsistent and perfidious policy of the emperors of Constantinople (Choniates, *Nicetae* 66, 39; Brand 167 – 181).

Disaster brings wisdom, and in the case of Eustathios and Choniates, the typical negative Byzantine outlook was changed somewhat by the flood of events. Thus, in the opening few pages of *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, there is a kind of sympathy with and compassion for the Latins, who were persecuted during the 1182 massacre in the Byzantine capital when Andronikos Komnenos took the city (Eustathios 28 – 30, 35 – 37; Brand 37 – 41). The Crusader states in the east are perceived as the natural allies of the Byzantines in their fight against the Muslims. Even the narrative of the atrocities and plunder by the Normans in the captured city of Thessaloniki provides examples of modesty and justice on the part of some of their leaders (Eustathios 48 – 56, 103 – 105, 117 – 119).

For Choniates, the Latins are capable warriors, who maintain good discipline and show courage in battle. He particularly admires their courage in the battle of Myriokephalon. Besides, the German knights of the Third Crusade appeared to him so imposing that he likened them to monumental bronze statues (Choniates, *Nicetae* 413, 227). The author of the *History* is also impressed with the discipline and sense of honour of western aristocrats. For instance, he points out that Henry of Flanders succeeded his brother Baldwin on the Constantinopolitan throne only after the death of the latter in the Bulgarian capital of Tarnovo had been proved beyond any doubt. This fact gave the author an opportunity to criticize his own compatriots severely for being cruel and untrustworthy (Choniates, *Nicetae* 642, 353). The lack of unity and mutual trust and the neglect of good organization were the reasons why “the barbarian nations regarded the Romans with contempt” (Choniates, *Nicetae* 453). “If the brother is not safe, then what man is?” is the bitter rhetorical question that Choniates repeatedly asks, following the deposition of Isaac Angelos by his brother Alexios (Choniates, *Nicetae* 453, 249; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium* 249; Angold 278 – 282).

Eustathios is highly critical of the maladministration of Andronikos I Komnenos in the capital and of David Komnenos, the governor of Thessaloniki, whom the author considers to be responsible for the fall of the city. In the texts of both authors, treachery often appears to be a Byzantine, rather than a western, failing. In addition, Choniates gives voice to certain attitudes typical of the Byzantine elite: for instance, he hates the Constantinopolitan mob, often regarding it as responsible for acts of utter foolishness with horrifying consequences.⁵ The mob is fickle and includes the least intelligent among the capital’s citizens: the “stupid and ignorant inhabitants of Constantinople” (Choniates, *Nicetae* 234, 132; 270, 150; 349, 193). This “wine-bibbing portion of the vulgar masses,” led by superstition, smashed the statue of Athena Promachos, which had stood on a pedestal in the Forum of Constantine, for it appeared to the “foolish rabble” that the goddess was beckoning on to the western armies (Choniates, *Nicetae* 558, 305). A number of Latins, who were authorized by Alexios IV to calculate and collect taxes and fees, “delighted in the simple-mindedness of the Romans and mocked the stupidity of the emperors” (Choniates, *Nicetae* 560, 306). Alongside with the Constantinopolitan mob, the Komnenoi are also blamed for the crisis of Byzantine society. The Angeloi are considered responsible for the fall of Constantinople and the Empire, and various imperial high officials also get their share of severe criticism. The author identifies corruption, egoism, fickleness, and perfidy as the worst failings of his compatriots. For Choniates, Byzantine society is incurably ill. He even claims that a considerable number of Byzantine captives, who were taken by the Turks in Asia Minor, opted for settlement among those “barbarians” instead of returning to their “Hellenic” homeland because they were disgusted with Byzantine tyranny and other excesses in political life (Choniates, *Nicetae* 495 – 6, 273). Choniates further finds fault with the indifference of the *Rhomaioi* in Asia Minor, who were insensitive to the sufferings of their compatriots in south-east Europe during the difficult years 1204 – 1206. Instead of getting organized and opposing their common enemies effectively, egotistical and irresponsible nobles fought amongst themselves, and, according to the author, “Polyarchy spread over the East, a three-headed monster constituted of the stupid” (Choniates, *Nicetae* 625 – 6, 342 – 3).

Eustathios and Choniates belonged to the best-educated and most enlightened section of Byzantine society. Being members of the intellectual and political élite, they were more sensitive to foreign cultural

⁵ See especially Paul Magdalino, “Byzantine Snobbery.”

influences than the majority of the Empire's population. In their writings, westerners are represented as inferior to Byzantines, but the superiority of the latter appears to be mostly cultural rather than political. This emphasis on Byzantine *cultural* superiority undoubtedly reflected the political and military situation towards the end of the twelfth century, marked as it was by the wane of Byzantine political power. On the other hand, both authors tended to identify more closely with the foreign elite of royals and high-ranking military men rather than with the Constantinopolitan mob or with fanatical Eastern Orthodox monks.

Significantly, Eustathios and Choniates are highly critical of the policies of some of the Byzantine Emperors and the defects of Byzantine society while also being hostile to the enemies of the Empire. Choniates in particular appears to be haunted by a sense of impending doom. His *History* ends with the description of a sculptural composition, destroyed by the Crusaders during the sack of Constantinople, of a hyppopotamus fighting with a basilisk. The composition presented the mutual destruction of the two beasts, through strength and venom respectively, and, in the eyes of Choniates, made an excellent illustration of events occurring in his time:

This mutual destruction and killing has persuaded me to say that these death-dealing evils, ruinous to men, not only are portrayed in images and not only happen to the bravest of beasts but frequently occur among the nations, such as those which have marched against us Romans, killing and being killed, perishing by the power of Christ who scatters those nations which wish for wars, and who does not rejoice in bloodshed, and who causes the just man to tread on the asp and the basilisk and to trample underfoot the lion and the dragon. (Choniates, *O City of Byzantium* 362)

Choniates was primarily thinking of the enemies of the Empire but the passage could also be said to bear some reference to relations between Byzantium and the Latin west.

Conclusion

The texts discussed above were produced between the second half of the eleventh and early thirteenth centuries. They make it possible for us to trace significant changes in Byzantine attitudes to the Latin west. The imperial idea plays a major organizing role in all of them. Besides, their authors obviously shared a common intellectual tradition, despite the fact that their social backgrounds differed substantially. Different levels of sophistication in language and style are also observable in the texts. All of the authors under discussion perceived their culture as superior; the opposition "us versus them" is easily discernible in their texts. Some recurrent epithets and ideas about the people from the outer world could also be found in the texts, and this specific "terminology" would remain part of the Byzantine historical tradition for centuries to come. The priority of the Empire and the Orthodox Church was never in doubt for the texts' authors. Another feature that attracts the attention of present-day readers is the complete lack of interest in geography; the texts are structured through an opposition of the "civilized" (Hellenic) "centre" to the "barbarian periphery."

However, certain changes of attitude are also in evidence. In the works written in the eleventh century, there is relatively little interest in the west and westerners, and this contrasts with Orthodox theological activity following the schism of 1054. Apparently, contacts between Byzantines and Latins were not so frequent as in later times. Although there are some traces of hostility (especially in Attaleiates), conflicts did not become widespread enough to provoke general reaction of such a magnitude as that witnessed in later times.

A number of events, which took place in the twelfth century, made contacts between the two halves of Christendom more frequent. The Crusades played a crucial role in this respect. Later developments, however, led to the weakening of Byzantines power and prestige. Anna Komnena's writing, for instance, conveys a sense of doom. Obviously, the future of the Empire looked dark and uncertain to the royal chronicler. She writes: "the Empire of the Romans, being by nature the ruler of the other nations, has slaves who are hostile, and only seek an opportunity to attack it one after another, from land and

sea” (3: XIV, 7, 173). The writings of Eustathios and Niketas Choniates demonstrate not only hatred of the enemies of the Empire, but also an awareness of the internal problems that Byzantine society faced. Not least among those was Byzantine imperviousness to foreign influence. For Konstantinos Stilbes and Nikolaos Mesarites, two authors who wrote shortly after the capture of Constantinople, the abyss between Latins and Byzantines was already insurmountable. Stilbes, who held the position of *didaskalos* at the Patriarchal School in Constantinople and later on became Bishop of Kyzikos, went so far as to make an indirect comparison between the Crusades and Muslim *jihads* (Darrouzès 77, 85 – 86). Significantly, he opposed the very idea of killing people in battle and losing one’s life for the sake of the faith.

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