

This is an extract from:

*The Economic History of Byzantium:  
From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*

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Published by

*Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection  
Washington, D. C.*

in three volumes as number 39 in the series

Dumbarton Oaks Studies

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Trustees for Harvard University

Washington, D.C.

Printed in the United States of America

[www.doaks.org/etexts.html](http://www.doaks.org/etexts.html)



# Political History: An Outline

Angeliki E. Laiou

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The political history of the Byzantine Empire has been well studied by large numbers of scholars. This brief summary is intended simply to sketch the broad outlines of political events and their consequences.<sup>1</sup> It is self-evident that economic developments were greatly influenced by changes in the political life of the empire, and the reverse is also true, although somewhat less intuitively so.

The Byzantine state has its origins in the late Roman Empire, whose continuation it was, in the eyes of contemporaries and until at least the late twelfth century. Its inhabitants called it “the Empire of the Romans,” and, especially in the early period, the emperors made concerted efforts to establish continuities with the Roman Empire. The third century was one of multiple crises, which, although they affected both the eastern and western parts of the empire, were much more acute in the West. The problem of the invasions of Germanic tribes was constant. The imperial office suffered a crisis of authority, as the problem of succession was never really solved. In the third century, a series of emperors were elected by the armies in the field and ruled for brief periods of time. The fiscal system was in disarray, resulting in low revenues for the state, the coinage suffered successive devaluation, and there was a raging inflation. Finally, there was a moral and religious crisis of considerable proportions.

Two emperors, Diocletian (284–305) and Constantine I the Great (324–337), undertook sweeping reforms on virtually all fronts. Diocletian approached the problem of succession through a division of the empire first into two parts, with Diocletian, significantly, retaining control of the eastern part. Eventually, with the appointment of two caesars, one in the East and one in the West, the division was into four parts. This system proved unstable, and Constantine I reunited the entire empire under his rule. However, on his deathbed he divided it again between members of his family. The division of the empire into East and West, corresponding to the different levels of development and the different needs of the two areas, was permanent.

<sup>1</sup> This chapter is not documented, for obvious reasons, except for a few references to particular scholarly works. For a more extensive review of Byzantine political history, consult G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1969), which is still the best survey in English. For the early period (4th–mid-7th century), a useful survey is that of A. H. M. Jones, *The Decline of the Ancient World* (London, 1977); an inspired comparative study of late antique eastern and western Europe is provided by P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity, A.D. 150–750* (London, 1971).

A number of reforms had to do with the administration of the state. The central bureaucracy was reorganized, while the provinces were increased in number and decreased in size, to provide for greater efficiency. Civil and military control were in separate hands, those of the governors and the *duces*, a separation that, despite occasional exceptions, remained in force until the institution of the exarchates and themes. The army underwent a series of changes, both by the strengthening of the defenses of the frontier and by the creation of strong mobile units, the *exercitus comitatensis*. The coinage was reformed, by both Diocletian and Constantine, who stabilized the gold coin, the *solidus*, and struck it at 72 to the pound of gold. It was a lasting reform. The system of taxation was profoundly altered, in a way that made it more flexible as far as the state was concerned, since the assessments (*indictiones*) were adjusted each year to reflect the expected needs of the state. The tax was collected in kind (although in the eastern half of the empire it sometimes took the form of cash) and was assessed upon a combined land and human fiscal unit, the *jugum* and *caput* together. One of the results of this reform was the acceleration of the process whereby peasants became virtually tied to the land they cultivated, since they had to stay in the villages, or on the large farms, in which the census registered them. In a period of shortage of labor, this became an instrument in the hands of the landlords, who used it to try to alleviate their labor problem.

In order to deal with inflation, Diocletian passed an unsuccessful measure, the famous *Edict on Prices* (302), by which he tried to fix the maximum price of various commodities, threatening with death those who did not follow the law. The *Edict on Prices* did not stem the inflation it was meant to stop. The reorganization of finances and the coinage was much more successful in that respect.

As far as the history of the eastern part of the empire is concerned, the two fundamental reforms were the recognition of Christianity as a religion not only legitimate but also adopted and supported by the emperor and the shift of the capital from Rome to Constantinople. Both were the work of Constantine I. The recognition of Christianity, in 313 (*Edict of Milan*), began the process that would make it the official state religion (in 381) and the church the richest and most powerful institution after the imperial office. It also meant a close relationship and interdependence between the church and the state, exemplified by Constantine's very active participation in the First Ecumenical Council, the Council of Nicaea, in 325. Partly because of this interdependence and partly because a long philosophical tradition demanded the elaboration of the tenets of the Christian faith, especially with regard to the natures and attributes of Christ, the legitimization of Christianity was followed by centuries of religious controversy, which pitted the eastern provinces, mostly Syria and Egypt, often supported by the pope of Rome, against Constantinople. Arianism became a particularly important heresy, since it was adopted by the Germanic tribes who inundated the western part of the empire in the course of the late fourth and fifth centuries. The end of the heretical movements and Christological controversies did not come until the loss of the eastern provinces.

As for the move of the capital to Constantinople, that came at the end of a process

by which various emperors made their headquarters outside the poor and fractious city of Rome. Diocletian himself had favored the eastern part of the empire, spending much time in Nikomedeia. Constantine, however, took the process to a qualitatively different point. He founded Constantinople as a conscious replacement of Rome, as the New Rome (a title first used in 381), that is, he envisaged a permanent shift of the capital to the East. Constantinople was built at a site of great geographic, strategic, political, and economic importance, for it governs communications between the Aegean and the Black Sea and its hinterlands, as well as between Asia and Europe. Constantine and his successors gave it all the trappings of old Rome, including a senate, a hippodrome, and many statues and monuments, among them the altar of Victory, brought to Constantinople from Rome by Constantine's son Arcadius. They also instituted free grain distributions as in Rome. Necessarily, the new capital also became the see of a patriarchate, whose bishop was said, in 381, to have the primacy of honor after the bishop of Rome. The fact of the foundation of Constantinople sealed the political, economic, and cultural fate of the eastern part of the empire for centuries to come. Its "birthday," the day of its inauguration (11 May 330), was rightly celebrated by the Byzantines for centuries afterward. The move of the capital also created two political and ideological problems that had a long life and development: the dispute between the sees of Rome and Constantinople regarding their respective positions and authorities, and the recurring disputes, between the emperors of Constantinople and those of the revived western empire, starting with Charlemagne, as to who legitimately held the title Roman emperor and the concomitant privileges and authorities.

The reforms of Diocletian and Constantine resulted in what has been termed the fourth-century revival, a period of relative stability and wealth throughout the empire. The eastern part was the richest and most populous and had the most diversified economy. The West also prospered in the fourth century, but with a development that favored the growing differences between the wealthy and the poor, the concentration of property into the hands of a few individuals, and the impoverishment of the peasantry. In the 360s and late 370s, the eastern part became involved in wars on two fronts: with the Sassanids in the East and with Germanic tribes (the Visigoths, Ostrogoths, and Vandals) along the Danube frontier and increasingly in the lands south of that region. The emperors of the late fourth and fifth centuries had to deal with these peoples, good soldiers and converts to Arianism. Theodosios I (379–395) approached the problem through a combination of arrangements: treaties, the settlement of some on imperial territory, the incorporation of many into the army. This solution proved unstable, as Gothic leaders were too ambitious, and a reaction on the part of the Byzantine court set in. Eventually the Germanic peoples moved to the West, where they sacked Rome (410), deposed the last Roman emperor (476), and established their own kingdoms, albeit under theoretical Byzantine suzerainty, in Italy (the Ostrogoths), North Africa (the Vandals), and Gaul and Spain (the Visigoths, eventually followed by the Franks in Gaul). Although these invasions did not result in fundamental territorial changes in the eastern part of the empire, there were ravages associated with the invasions of both the Germans and the Huns, especially in the 440s.

In the course of the late fourth and the first half of the fifth century, two ecumenical councils, the Council of Constantinople (381) and that of Chalcedon (451), further elaborated the tenets of the orthodox faith against the Arians, the Monophysites, and the Nestorians, without, however, putting an end to the religious controversies.

The rise of Anastasios (491–518) to the imperial office ushered in a period, lasting through the reign of Justinian I (527–565), during which the eastern part of the empire was, and looked, prosperous, even brilliant, with great achievements in letters, jurisprudence, and the arts. Anastasios had been a fiscal official and seems to have run imperial finances with a firm and competent managerial hand, so that, upon his death, he left in the treasury a large surplus (320,000 pounds of gold), despite the fact that he had abolished an urban tax, the *chrysargyron*, which had been levied on commercial and industrial enterprise. Anastasios was a moderate man in religious matters, but his reign was punctuated by popular unrest.

The reign of Justinian I is unquestionably the high point of the late antique period, as a number of indicators suggest. The state was rich, through the efficient, even ruthless collection of taxes and through its own monopolies. Justinian had inherited the surplus collected by Anastasios I as well. The society also was rich, with considerable industrial production and commercial activity. With these considerable resources, Justinian carried out a policy of reconquest of the western provinces and, by the end of his reign, very considerably enlarged the areas under direct Byzantine control. In the 530s, Belisarius reestablished Byzantine sovereignty over the kingdom of the Vandals in North Africa and the Ostrogothic kingdom in Italy. The 540s were more difficult years, for the Persians, under Chosroes I Anushirvan, invaded the eastern territories, including Syria, Armenia, and Lazica. The resurgence of Ostrogothic power in Italy led to lengthy and devastating warfare, which lasted until the Byzantines emerged victorious once again in 554. The northeastern part of Spain was recovered from the Visigoths. The eastern Roman Empire now extended over all of Italy, most of North Africa, and part of the Iberian peninsula. But in the East the Persians retained their power, which, for the moment, was held in check by a series of fortifications and peace treaties. In the Balkans, Slavic, Bulgar, and Avar raids were harbingers of the future; here, too, a considerable line of fortifications was erected, though it eventually proved ineffective.

Within the empire itself, the reign of Justinian left a lasting legacy. One of the most important is the great codification of Roman law and jurisprudence in the *Corpus Juris Civilis*, the second codification after that of Theodosios II, and by far the most extensive and complete. Justinian himself issued a large number of novels in Greek. The use of the Greek language symbolizes the great changes that were taking place in the eastern Roman Empire, firmly founded in a Greek intellectual and cultural milieu. There was considerable building activity and artistic production of very high caliber, both monumental (e.g., in Hagia Sophia and the churches of Ravenna) and in the form of icons, ivories, and the products of the minor arts.

There were also grave problems, however. The brilliant reign of Justinian and Theodora was also an increasingly autocratic one, to which the old aristocracy was opposed. The wars had proved very costly, and Italy was devastated. On top of this, there was a

severe outbreak of the plague in 541–542, which, attended by other diseases, and recurring throughout the sixth century and even later, had powerful and negative demographic results.<sup>2</sup>

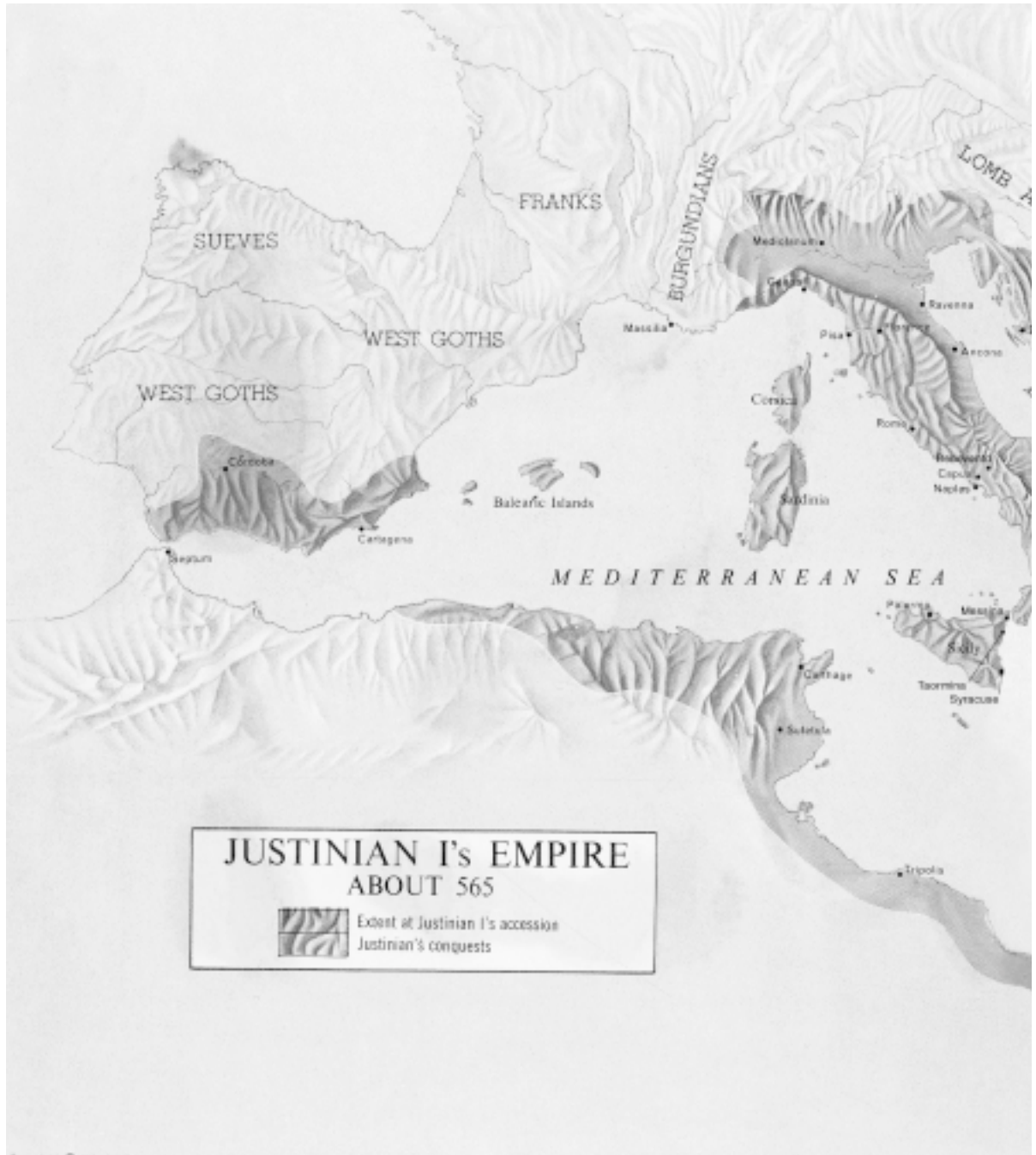
The late sixth century and the beginning of the seventh were catastrophic, as the brilliant edifice crumbled and the Justinianic world order began to come to an end. Both the Balkan and the eastern frontiers collapsed, while the Visigoths started to recover their possessions in Spain, and the Lombards in Italy and the Berbers in North Africa attacked the newly recovered provinces. Internally, civil unrest erupted in the major cities of the empire, taking the form of wars between the circus factions and their followers. The very capable emperor Maurice reorganized the Byzantine possessions of North Africa and Italy into the two exarchates of Carthage and Ravenna. This reorganization gave both civil and military command to the exarch, a military man. Intervening in a Persian dynastic conflict, Maurice was able to reach a very favorable arrangement with Persia in 591. Eleven years later, his army, fighting against the Avars and angry at being forced to winter beyond the Danube, rebelled and overthrew him.

The next few years brought the empire to a very low point, menacing its very existence. Under Phokas, civil unrest continued unabated, while the Persians attacked once more, easily conquering Armenia, Syria, Egypt, and much of Asia Minor. The Slavs and Avars had already been attacking the Balkans south of the Danube, destroying their urban fabric, and the Slavs were starting to settle in the Balkans. They attacked Thessalonike in 586, 604, 615, and 682 and the Peloponnese after 582. The raids were followed by settlements. By 626 the Persians and the Avars and Slavs laid a terrible siege to Constantinople by land and by sea; the city was saved by Patriarch Sergius and a Byzantine victory against the enemy forces at sea.

By then the government was in the hands of Emperor Herakleios (610–641), who was a first-rate general. He managed to muster and reorganize the remaining military forces, and in a series of brilliant campaigns brought the war to Persia and recovered the territory that had been lost to the Sassanids. By 634, however, the Arabs began their astonishingly rapid advance into the eastern territories of the Byzantine Empire as well as into Persia. The battle of Yarmuk (636) sealed the fate of Syria. Syria, Palestine, Armenia, and Egypt fell by 642, and conquests in Asia Minor followed. By the late seventh century, North Africa had been conquered, and by 711 the conquest of Gibraltar brought the Arabs into Spain. Meanwhile they had acquired sea power and set their sights on Constantinople. The city was besieged unsuccessfully in 678; the failure of the Arabs to take the capital then and later, in 718, stopped their advance into European soil from the east, as the victory of Charles Martel, a few years later, was to do in the West.

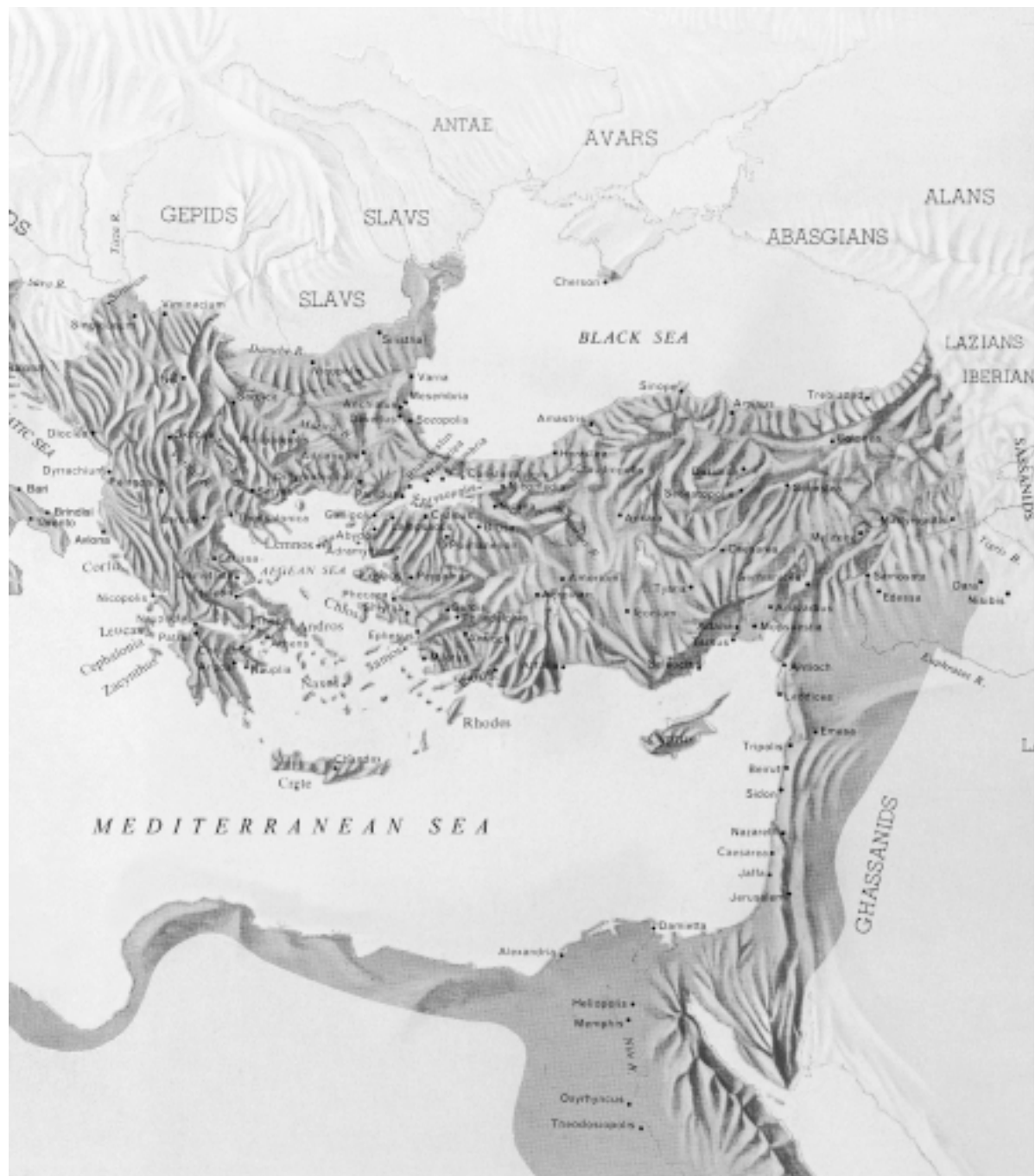
These developments were of fundamental importance for the Byzantine Empire. Its control of the Mediterranean, established by Justinian I, was gone forever. Its territories were reduced very considerably indeed. The loss of the eastern provinces was of

<sup>2</sup> For this, and the reign of Justinian in general, see C. Morrisson and J.-P. Sodini, “The Sixth-Century Economy,” *EHB*.



1. The empire of Justinian I, ca. 565 (after G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* [New Brunswick, N.J., 1957], frontispiece)





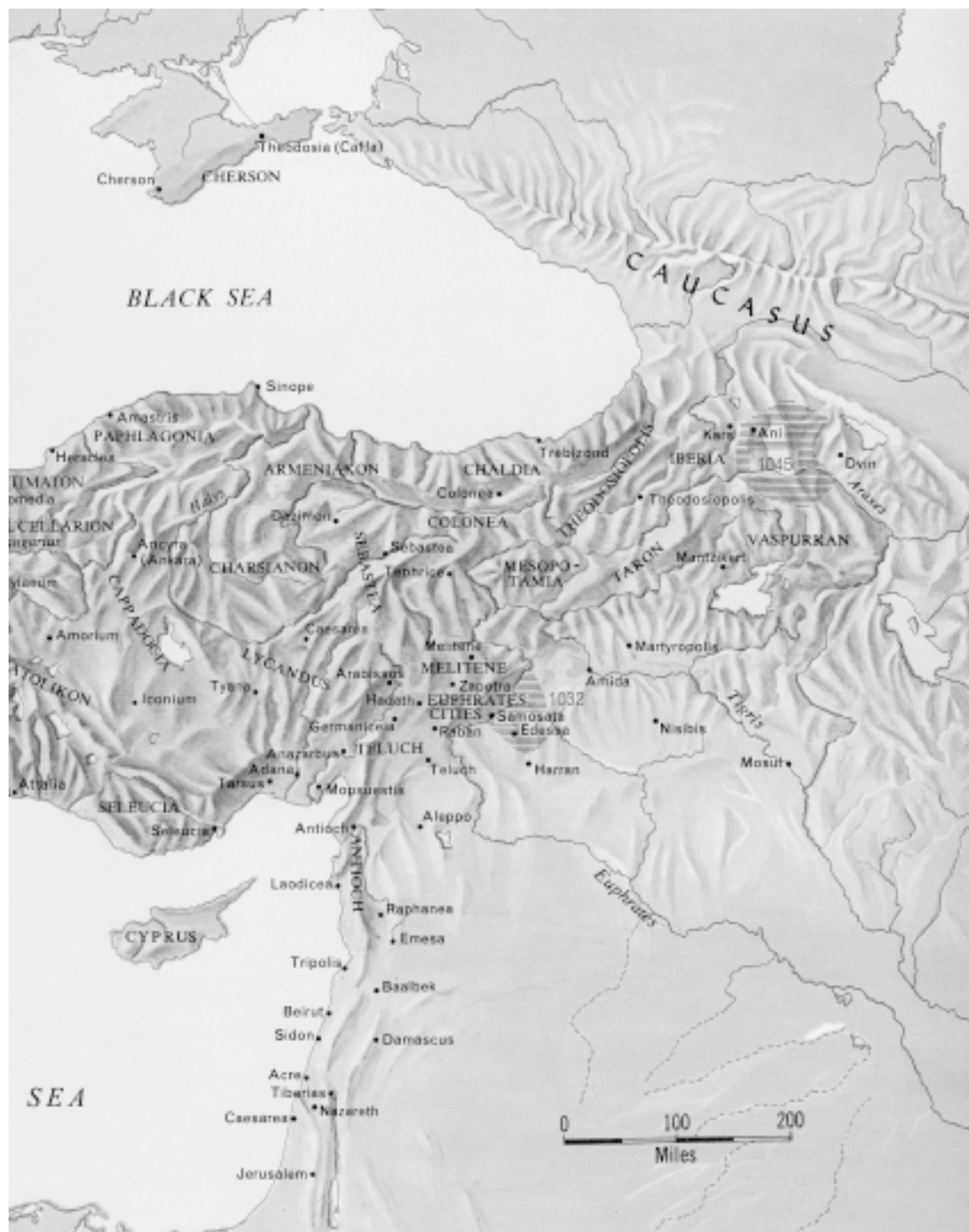


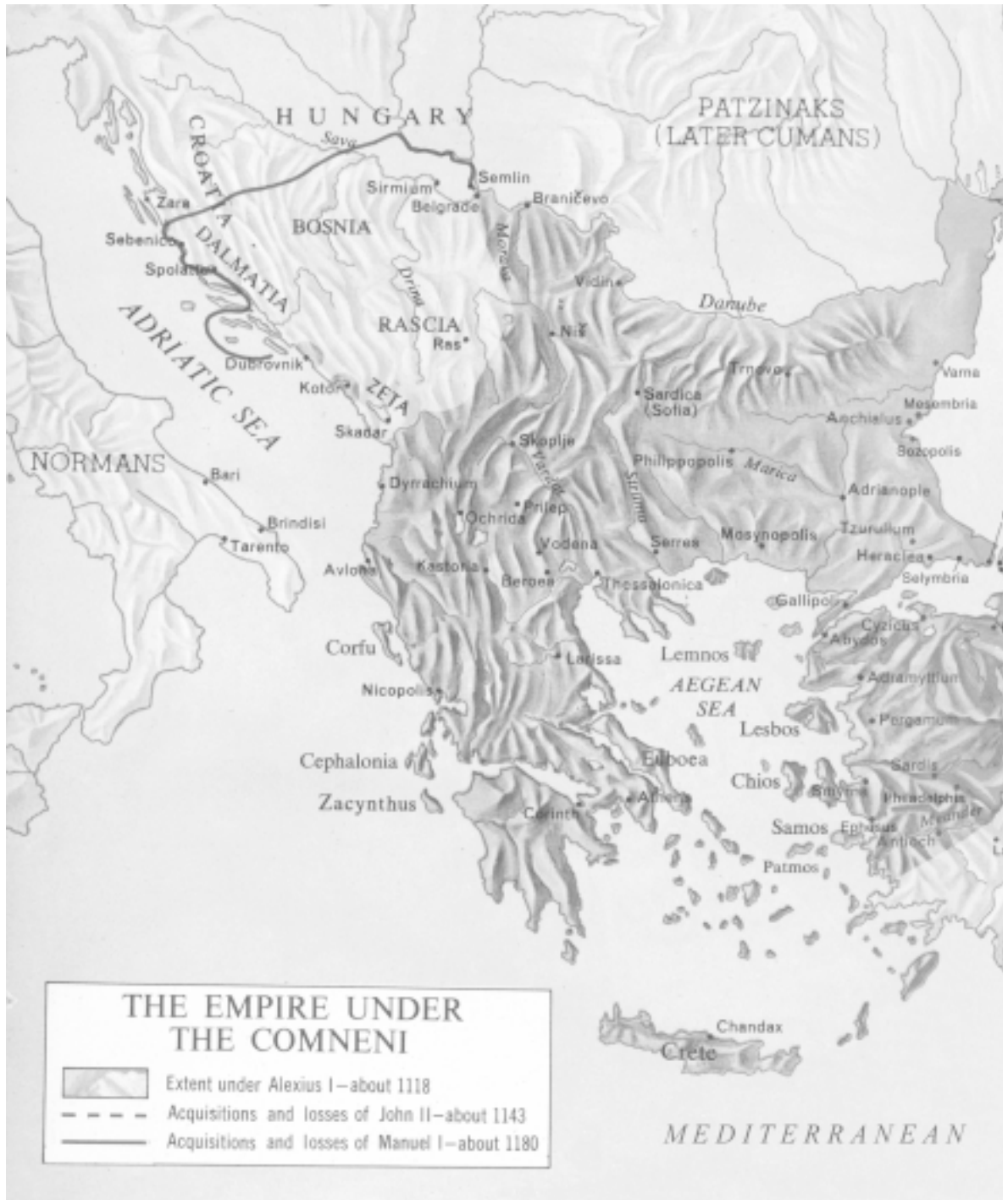
2. The Byzantine Empire, ca. 780 (after W. T. Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* [Stanford, Calif., 1997], 368)



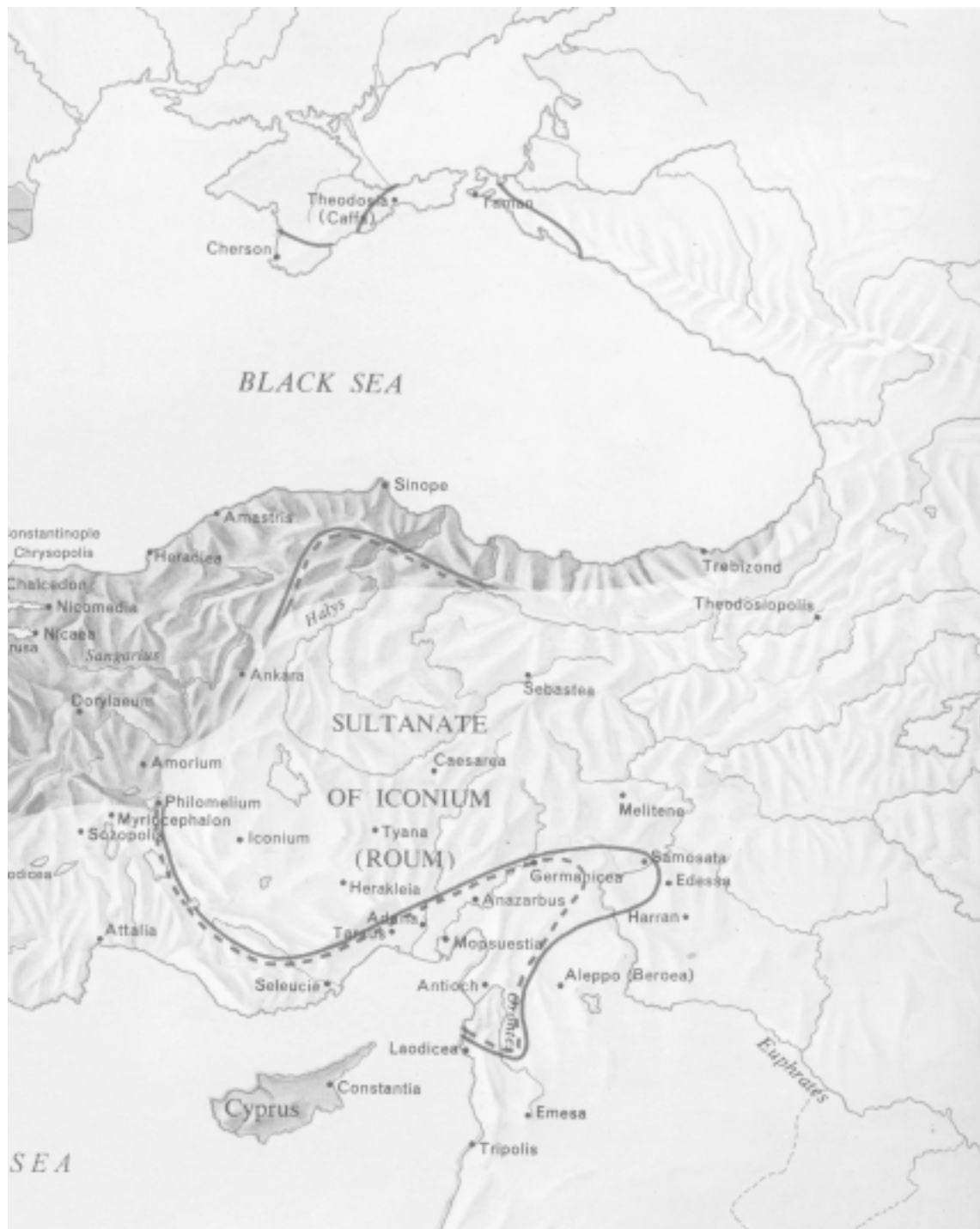


3. The empire of Basil II (after Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*)





4. The empire of the Komnenoi (after Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*)

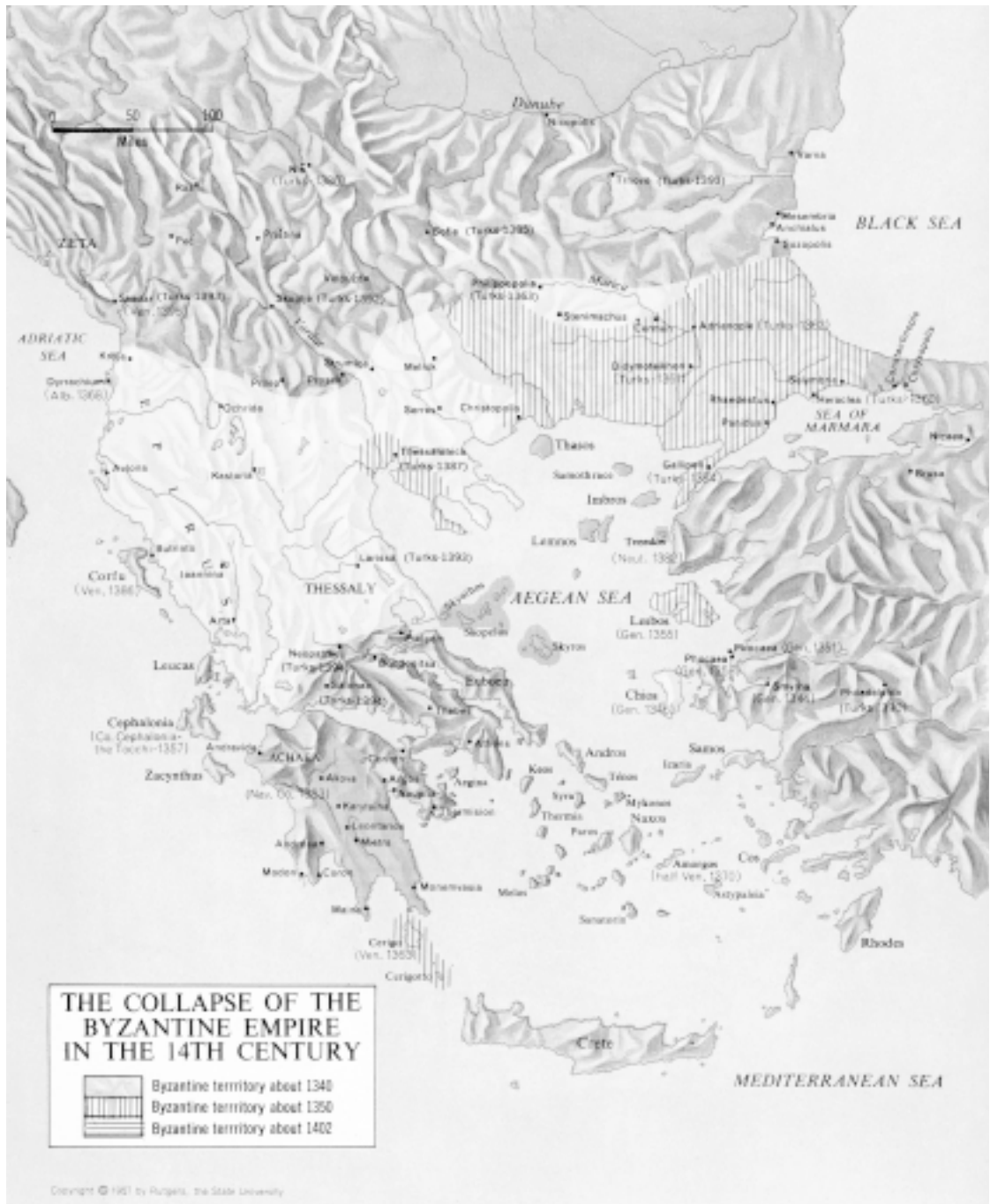




5. The Byzantine Empire in 1328 (after A. E. Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins: The Foreign Policy of Andronicus II, 1282–1328* [Cambridge, Mass., 1972], 286–87)







6. The Byzantine Empire after 1340 (after Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, map 1 from “Collapse of the Byzantine Empire”)

primary significance, for those were the richest and most urbanized parts of the state. The Balkans had suffered greatly from the invasions of the Slavs, and it took some time for effective Byzantine control to be reestablished in Thrace and Macedonia. In 681 a momentous development took place, with the recognition, by the Byzantine emperor, of the establishment of an independent state, the kingdom of the Bulgarians, on what had, in the past, been Byzantine soil. Military and political relations between Byzantium and Bulgaria remained very important throughout the subsequent history of these states.

All of this entailed fundamental reorientations. In geographic terms, a brief interlude of flirtation with the western half of the empire in the 660s cannot conceal the true orientation of the empire. Its center and kernel now became Asia Minor, a shift that was to persist until the eleventh century. Asia Minor was very much coveted by the Arabs, who launched periodic invasions and incursions by land, while piratical attacks took place by sea, disrupting communications. Here was the scene of the struggle for the survival of the Byzantine state, and from here would eventually begin the Byzantine counterattack.

With the loss of the eastern provinces, and the destructive raids and demographic shifts in the Balkans, the late antique structures collapsed, and a new state and society emerged that may properly be termed medieval. It was a society where the countryside was of primary importance, the cities being few in number and small in size. The state became more centralized, and the relative importance of Constantinople increased. The old aristocracy declined; society became relatively flat, its basis being the free landholding and taxpaying peasant. The role of religion also increased. The changes were so significant that the seventh century is frequently considered a true watershed, and it is so considered in this book. In particular, the economic structures in the seventh century and after were different indeed from those of the late antique period.

By the end of the seventh century, the Byzantine state was small, under constant threat, and with its productive resources greatly reduced. That it managed to survive is due in large part to what may be termed a girding of the loins, a mustering of the forces of the state around the emperor and the church, associated with a series of reforming actions undertaken by Herakleios and his successors and continued by the Isaurian emperors. In some ways, the reforming period may be said to have lasted from the 620s through the 780s.

Given the military situation, which had been acutely dangerous since the late sixth century, major aspects of the restructuring were connected with the army. Asia Minor first, the rest of the empire eventually, was organized into military, territorial, and administrative units called themes. Originally, the term *theme* meant military roll, and the first themes took the name of the army corps that was stationed there. In a reversal of the administrative system of Diocletian and Constantine, and in a development similar to that of the exarchates, civil and military command were united in the hands of the *strategos*, the military leader of the army. The chronology of the establishment of the theme system is one of the most disputed topics of Byzantine political history. It seems, however, very likely that the first themes were instituted by Herakleios, although the

full development of the system took time to mature.<sup>3</sup> The first themes, introduced in the seventh century, were the Armeniakon, the Anatolikon, the Opsikion, and that of Thrace (Thrakoon). The theme of Hellas was created in 695. The recruitment and financing of the army also changed, since the resources of the state had declined precipitously, and ready cash was hard to find. In brief, the vast bulk of the military forces now consisted of free peasant smallholders who held land that enjoyed (limited) fiscal privileges, in exchange for which they (or one person per household) had to give military service. The peasant-soldiers, as they are commonly called, also drew a salary, every four years. They owned their horse and military equipment. Although the “military holdings” do not appear in the sources under this name for a long time, it has been established that the institution existed at least by 741 and was probably in place earlier.

The military effectiveness of both the theme system and the institution of the peasant-soldier has been disputed. It remains a fact that both systems remained in full force through the tenth and the early eleventh century (the theme system for longer than that), and that it was with this military organization that Byzantium carried out its struggle for survival as well as the great tenth-century expansion.

The Isaurian emperors, especially Leo III (717–741) and Constantine V (741–775), also undertook major reforms. Among them one must mention the promulgation of a new law code, the *Ecloga* (741), to replace the unwieldy Justinianic code, which could no longer be used because the judges lacked the necessary jurisprudence, and perhaps because the emperors felt the need to take account of social change.<sup>4</sup> The *Ecloga* is a suitably brief text, since it was meant to be eminently practical. It is imbued with the medieval Byzantine idea of justice, which means good and impartial administration and just fiscality, coupled with special protection for the weaker members of society. Much of this ideology is couched in religious terms in the *Ecloga*. This code is clearly Roman law, but it flattens social distinctions, and it innovates both in marriage law (in part following canonical traditions) and in penal matters, where capital punishment is often replaced by mutilation. The usefulness of the *Ecloga* is indicated by the very large number of manuscripts in which it has survived, and by the fact that it was translated into Slavic languages, Armenian, and Arabic, and that some of its provisions, especially the penal ones, remained in force in subsequent legislation.

To the Isaurian period belong two other very important practical codes: the *Farmer's Law* and the *Rhodian Sea Law*. The first deals with relations between the inhabitants of a village and, to some extent, between them and the fisc; it deals primarily with peasants who are free and either own or rent land. The free landowning and taxpaying peasantry is the group that forms the basis of rural society from this point (and possibly much earlier, perhaps from the middle of the 7th century) until some time in the eleventh century. The *Rhodian Sea Law*, which rules on matters of navigation and trade,

<sup>3</sup> N. Oikonomides, “Les premières mentions des thèmes dans la chronique de Théophane,” *ZRVI* 16 (1975): 1–9.

<sup>4</sup> On the *Ecloga*, and all subsequent legal texts, see the very useful book by S. N. Troianos, *Οι πηγές του βυζαντινού δικαίου*, 2d ed. (Athens–Komotini, 1999), *passim*.

constitutes the first medieval commercial law code of the Mediterranean basin. With some changes, it remained in force throughout the Byzantine period.

In a period of profound religiosity, which is evident even in the legislation, the Isaurians also tried to carry out major reforms regarding the veneration and worship of icons. Leo III and Constantine V forbade the display and veneration of icons, accepting the cross as the Christian visual symbol. Quite apart from its theological and philosophical aspects, Iconoclasm has been interpreted variously as a movement aiming to reduce the property of the church and stop the drain of manpower to the monasteries and as a conflict between the eastern and western provinces of the empire. In any case, it was an imperial enterprise, whose effect was the strengthening of the imperial office and eventually of the organized church. Internally, the population was split, and there were problems with a large part of the clergy. The veneration of icons was first restored in the second Council of Nicaea (787) and, after another iconoclastic interlude, in 843 by Empress Theodora.

The first two Isaurians were spectacular generals, fighting on both the eastern and western fronts against the Arabs and the Bulgarians. The Byzantine armies penetrated deep into Muslim territory, reaching as far east as Germanikeia, Melitene, and Theodosiopolis (Erzerum), places from which the Byzantines subsequently retreated, not to conquer them until the tenth century. In the north, Constantine V waged unremitting and highly successful wars against the Bulgarians. The situation was reversed on both fronts under their successors, so that by 813 the Bulgarian leader Krum, after having ravaged Thrace, appeared before the walls of Constantinople. By contrast, Byzantine control over the Slavs in the Peloponnese was firmly established in this period.

An event of significant historical and symbolic importance was the coronation of Charlemagne as Roman emperor on Christmas day of the year 800. It meant an end to the Byzantine monopoly of the Roman imperial title, and was the first of a series of events that would lead to troubles with the western emperors.

By the very late eighth or early ninth century, although foreign affairs remained fraught with danger, the Byzantine Empire was entering the early stages of a virtuous cycle, which would lead to the expansion and prosperity of the late ninth and tenth centuries. The beginnings of political recovery may be seen in the successful wars of Constantine V, the successful campaigns against the Slavs in central Greece and the Peloponnese under Irene and Nikephoros I, the reorganization of the themes of Macedonia and Hellas, and the creation of the themes of Kephallenia and the Peloponnese under Nikephoros, all marking the reestablishment of Byzantine administrative control. The aftereffects of the plague had worked themselves out, and there is evidence of a reversal of the demographic curve. Interestingly, the early phases of recovery are somewhat more solid in economic than in political terms, since the political affairs were to suffer a number of reverses.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> On the economic developments, see J. Lefort, "The Rural Economy, Seventh–Twelfth Centuries"; A. E. Laiou, "The Human Resources" and "Exchange and Trade, Seventh–Twelfth Centuries"; C. Morrisson, "Byzantine Money: Its Production and Circulation"; and N. Oikonomides, "The Role of the Byzantine State in the Economy," all in *EHB*.

By the 860s the recovery was entering a much more rapid phase, becoming irreversible in the medium term. From now until the first half of the eleventh century, there was great territorial expansion, which enlarged the Byzantine frontiers to their medieval maximum. The new territories, especially in Asia Minor and northern Syria, were rich, while the eventual pacification of the Balkans increased the human and natural resources of the empire.

In the realm of foreign affairs, certain key dates and events deserve mention. The wars against the Arabs were carried out vigorously during the reign of Michael III. Basil I (867–886) attacked and destroyed the power of the Paulicians, a religious sect in eastern Asia Minor that constituted an important military threat for Byzantium; its capital, Tephrike, fell in 879. The attack of the Muslim pirate Leo of Tripoli on Thessalonike and the terrible sack that ensued (904) serve as a reminder of the importance of controlling the sea-lanes.

Byzantine control of sea communications was being reestablished in the tenth century and became firm with the reconquest of the island of Crete by Nikephoros Phokas in 961. On the eastern frontier, the conquest of Melitene (934) and Tarsos (965) destroyed two important Arab bases in Mesopotamia and Cilicia. In 943–944, the general John Kourkouas took Martyropolis, Amida, Daras, and Edessa. In the 960s and 970s, the great soldier emperors Nikephoros II Phokas (963–969) and John I Tzimiskes (969–976) pursued the war in Syria and Mesopotamia. Phokas took Mopsuestia and Cyprus in 965. Antioch, a city important in itself and because it commanded communications, fell in 969; Aleppo, another important Arab base, was conquered in the same year, and Nisibis in Mesopotamia was taken in 972. In the 1020s, Emperor Basil II turned to Armenia and Georgia, parts of which were annexed to the Byzantine Empire; with the annexation of the kingdom of Ani in 1045, the Byzantine presence in this region reached its apogee. By that time, all of Asia Minor and parts of Syria, Mesopotamia, and the Caucasus area were in Byzantine hands.

Relations between the Byzantines and their northern neighbors, the Bulgarians and the Rus, ran the gamut of conversion, influence, bitter warfare, conquest, and alliance. The conversion of the Bulgarians in 864 was a major success of the reign of Michael III, ushering in a period of peace; the Serbs, too, embraced Orthodox Christianity between 867 and 874; the conversion of the Rus in 989 is an event of fundamental importance. The Bulgarians posed great danger to the empire in two different periods. In 894 Symeon began hostilities whose ultimate aim was the conquest of Constantinople. The war lasted, with interruptions, until 924 and ended with a compromise. Symeon did not achieve his aims, but he had devastated Thrace and launched destructive attacks on Byzantine territories as far south as the Gulf of Corinth. The second important period began with the rebellion of the Bulgarians soon after the death of John Tzimiskes. Taking advantage of the weakness of the central government and the rebellions of magnates in Asia Minor, the Bulgarians under Tzar Samuel created a large ephemeral state, which included Macedonia, Epiros, part of Albania and the Serbian lands, Thessaly, and Greece up to the Peloponnese. To a significant extent, these victories were made possible by the fact that Basil II had to interrupt his war against the Bulgarians several times to fight in Asia Minor against the rebel magnates and the Arabs.

Eventually a great Byzantine victory at the battle of Kleidion (1014) was followed by the death of the tzar and the dissolution of his state. Bulgaria was annexed to the empire; the entire Balkan peninsula was now under Byzantine sway. Despite rebellions, uneasy alliances, and, in the late eleventh century, Pecheneg raids, the Greek lands of the Balkans never again had to suffer the sustained periods of destructive warfare they had experienced during the reigns of Symeon and Samuel.

Finally, in the West, that is, in Italy and Sicily, the Byzantines had to face both the Arabs and, after 962, the reconstituted western empire with its Italian ambitions. They also had to deal with the papacy. In this area, the ninth century saw reverses and losses of territory to the Arabs, although Bari was recovered in 876. In 867 a first and short-lived schism occurred between the churches of Rome and Constantinople, ostensibly on the issue of the procession of the Holy Spirit (the *filioque*). Venice had remained under the nominal authority of Byzantium, a position reaffirmed in 879. Although in fact the city was independent, its rulers continued to bear Byzantine titles. The importance of Venice is indicated by the chrysobull of 992: Basil II granted trade privileges to the Venetians in return for their continued help in Italian waters.

The reestablishment of the western Roman Empire with the coronation of Otto I in 962 created tensions and rivalries, only partly resolved through the marriage of Otto II to a niece of Tzimiskes. Basil II consolidated the Byzantine possessions in southern Italy, while the western coast of Sicily was recovered under his successors. He was also able to bring the papacy under his control for a number of years.

In terms of domestic developments also, this was a period of recovery, expansion, and consolidation. The state of the economy is discussed in detail in the chapters that follow. Intellectual development had proceeded throughout the iconoclastic period, which had stimulated discourse. In the first half of the ninth century, the figures of John the Grammarian and Leo the Mathematician stand out. Photios was a dominant figure in the recovery and registration of knowledge. The creation of the university at the palace of the Magnaura in the 850s was an important event. The process of what Paul Lemerle has termed the first Byzantine humanism continued throughout the late ninth and tenth centuries. It is characterized by a stress on education, classicism, the edition of texts, and the systematization of knowledge, both ancient and more recent, as exemplified by the large number of compendia and compilations associated with the reign of Constantine VII (913–959).

This is also a period of the rebirth of jurisprudence; indeed the late ninth century has been called a revolutionary one in terms of law. What was at issue was the reorganization of the Justinianic legal system, in both content and form, and its adaptation (never complete) to the needs of the day. The first two Macedonians, Basil I and Leo VI, issued two compact codes, the *Procheiros Nomos* and the *Eisagoge*. The *Basilics*, a large compilation in sixty books based on the entire Justinianic corpus, was issued in its first form by Leo VI; with its derivatives and abridgments, it became the governing body of law, remaining in force for centuries to come. To the same period belongs the extant form of the *Book of the Eparch*, probably issued in 912, which deals with the corporations of Constantinople. Emperor Leo VI also issued 113 novels.

The Byzantine Empire of the tenth century was strong and prosperous within and powerful in the eyes of the world around it. The emperor was at the center of government; power and authority emanated from his person. The Byzantines recognized only one true emperor, one sovereign authority over the Christian world, as there was only one God in heaven. The coronation of the emperor by Christ, as represented in Byzantine art, expresses this view of the imperial office. The large civil bureaucracy and the military derived their power from the emperor. The imperial court was ruled by an elaborate ceremonial, which in some ways was an instrument of government. Projecting order and dignity, it fixed the place of the members of the ruling class in a system dominated by the emperor. The civil and military officials owed both their office and their prosperity to the emperor. In this tax-gathering state, much of the surplus was accumulated in the imperial treasury. It was then distributed in the form of salaries and also spent on buildings, luxuries, and works of art, which in turn enhanced the image of the emperor. Public works, roads, and bridges were in the purview of the state. To his subjects, the taxpayers, the emperor owed justice and protection, in an unwritten and unspoken contract. Protection he certainly provided, through military gains and highly successful diplomacy. The insistence on justice, meaning equity, and frequently associated with fiscality, is an important component of this system.

Society was still relatively flat. The peasant freeholder, paying his taxes to the state, remained at the basis of the fiscal and military system, although revenues from trade had become important. However, peace, expansion, and prosperity also resulted in property accumulation and social differentiation. A powerful aristocracy emerged, which originally owed its strength to imperial office, and now combined that with large landholdings. A series of laws issued by the Macedonian emperors, starting with Romanos Lekapenos' novel on *protimesis* (928) and culminating in Basil II's great novel of 996, marks the effort of these rulers to protect the peasantry, its lands, and its military holdings from encroachment by the powerful. The great aristocratic families were all based in Asia Minor, where the clans of the Phokades, their relatives the Maleinoi, and the Skleroi held vast tracts of land and military office. Eventually they rebelled against Basil II. After years of warfare, and with the help of Russian troops, Basil II was able to emerge victorious. He destroyed the might of the great clans, although the families themselves survived, and in the process gave office and support to a second rank of aristocrats, who were to form the nucleus of the eleventh- to twelfth-century aristocracy. The use of Russian troops, which remained in Byzantine service, is important, as one of the first instances where the medieval Byzantine state relied on preformed troops of soldiers rather than on the thematic armies.

The dynastic stability introduced by Basil I came to a substantive end with the death of Basil II's brother, Constantine VIII, in 1028. Formally, and also in the eyes of the people of Constantinople, the Macedonian dynasty lasted until the death of Empress Theodora, Constantine's daughter, in 1056. However, in the absence of a male heir, after 1028 the dynasty was represented by Zoe and Theodora, who ruled either in their own name for very brief periods of time or through males who owed the throne to them. The period is punctuated by rebellions until 1081, when the accession of



Alexios I Komnenos brought dynastic stability once again. Despite troubles in the Balkans, including a rebellion by Samuel's grandson Peter Deljan, this was a period of peace until the late 1050s, and Byzantium reaped the rewards of peace. Intellectual activity was intense. A university was opened in Constantinople by Constantine IX Monomachos in 1045, with Michael Psellos and John Xiphilinos in charge of the faculties of philosophy and law respectively. Between 1040 and 1050, an unknown compiler put together a collection of the decisions of the imperial judge Eustathios Romaios. An important source for the administration of justice as well as for the social history of the eleventh century, the *Peira* may also represent an effort at legal innovation.

Because of the relative security, and following developments whose origins lay in the tenth century, the composition of the army changed, native forces being progressively supplanted by mercenaries. The advantage of professionalism must be weighed against the disadvantages of unreliability and cost (some of which was offset by the possibility of buying off one's military obligations). The economic developments of this period will be discussed in subsequent chapters. In social terms, there is a progressive stratification, which continues in the twelfth century, with the establishment of a diversified aristocracy and a strong merchant and artisan class.

Relations with western Europe became much more complex in the course of the eleventh century, because of developments that were to continue through the twelfth century and later. For one thing, western Europe was entering a period of expansion that took many forms—political, economic, and cultural. As far as Byzantium was concerned, the first impact came through the expansionism of the Normans, who had appeared in small bands in southern Italy and began to attack Byzantine possessions in the late 1050s. Under Robert Guiscard, they pursued their attacks, conquering Bari, the last major Byzantine possession, in 1071. Ten years later, they invaded the Byzantine mainland. The Venetians, too, were becoming a naval power to be reckoned with: in 1082, to reward them for their help against Robert Guiscard, Alexios I granted them a chrysobull that became the cornerstone of Venetian commercial expansion into the Byzantine Empire.

A development with important consequences for the future was the break of relations between the papacy and the Byzantine church in 1054. The Great Schism resulted from both long-standing political and theological differences and from circumstances of the moment: the reforming zeal of the pope and the uncompromising natures of Patriarch Michael Keroularios and the papal legate, Humbert of Silva Candida. At the time, the schism did not look permanent, and many efforts to reverse it took place in the eleventh and twelfth centuries as well as in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; but in fact it was never healed.

Important military, political, and territorial changes took place in the late eleventh century. In 1071, the year of the fall of Bari, the Byzantines suffered a great defeat in Mantzikert, in Armenia, at the hands of the Seljuk Turks. The Seljuks overran Asia Minor, and within a few years they had settled there permanently. Most of Asia Minor as well as Armenia, Syria, and Mesopotamia were forever lost to the Byzantine Empire. Antioch fell in 1084. Furthermore, the northern frontiers were subjected to nomadic

invasions, especially by the Pechenegs, who by 1090 threatened even Constantinople itself. Thus Byzantium had to face wars on three frontiers, something quite new.

In 1081 Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118) ascended the throne. A rebel general, he belonged to the aristocracy and married Irene Doukaina, offspring of the most important aristocratic family. His accession to the throne was a triumph for the aristocracy and also was to provide dynastic stability. The Komnenian period is one in which the high aristocracy, especially those families allied to the very large Komnenos-Doukas clan, came into its own.

Fortunately for the empire, the first three Komnenoi—Alexios, John II (1118–43), and Manuel I (1143–80)—were great soldiers and had considerable diplomatic ability as well. Alexios was able to repel the invasion of Robert Guiscard and, in 1108, the one launched by Robert's son, Bohemond. Italy and Sicily, however, were permanently lost to the Normans. Alexios also defeated the Pechenegs in 1091; their destruction was completed by John II. In Asia Minor he was able to launch a counterattack against the Seljuks, helped in part by the presence of the participants of the First Crusade. His son and grandson continued the wars in Asia Minor and Cilicia. They were able to recover all of the littoral and a considerable portion of the hinterland, running roughly from Trebizond to Ankara, to Amorion, to Philomelion. The Norman principality of Antioch became a vassal state, although it always caused problems to the Byzantines. The rest of Asia Minor remained in the hands of the Seljuk sultans of Rum. In 1171 Manuel I was defeated at Myriokephalon by the sultan Kilidj Arslan. Although the results of this event were nothing like those of the battle of Mantzikert, the emperor felt the defeat keenly, and in western Europe the Holy Roman emperor Frederick Barbarossa took it as an occasion to reopen the controversy regarding the title and authority of the two emperors.

Along with Asia Minor, the Balkans were an important area of activity. Significantly, until the late part of the twelfth century it was the western rather than the eastern Balkans that were in the foreground. Here, Hungary was becoming a power to reckon with and had expansionary views on Croatia and Dalmatia. The Hungarians posed major problems for both John II and Manuel I, who dealt with them through a combination of diplomacy, marriage alliances, and war. The Serbian lands were also problematic, with Raška struggling to establish its independence. By the late years of the reign of Manuel, Stefan Nemanja, grand *župan* of Raška, had accepted Byzantine overlordship (1172), while the Hungarians had to return Dalmatia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Sirmium (1167). Thus the entire Balkan peninsula was once again in Byzantine hands. This, however, was not to last for long; during the reign of Andronikos I, Raška became independent, and the Hungarians retook the territories they had ceded.

Bulgaria, under Byzantine control since the days of Basil II, rebelled in 1185. By the end of the century, Kalojan had been crowned by the archbishop of Tŭrnovo, and in 1204 he was crowned by a cardinal of the Roman church. Thus the Second Bulgarian Empire was established, and both Bulgaria and Serbia came, temporarily, under Roman influence—one indicator among many of the political disintegration of the Byzantine state and the importance of western Europe. Political, though not ecclesias-

tical, developments in Serbia and Bulgaria proved irreversible, since neither state came back under Byzantine control.

Relations with western Europe during this period are dominated by the crusades and the Norman threat, which often intersected. The crusades, preached for the first time by Pope Urban II in November 1095, probably owe something to an appeal for help on the part of Alexios I. Help to the beleaguered Byzantine Christians may well have been foremost in the mind of Urban II. However, the crusades formed part of a movement belonging to the movement of expansion of Europe outside its old Carolingian frontiers; and the aim very quickly became Jerusalem, at least in the first instance. The Byzantine Empire saw the passage of large armies in the course of the First Crusade, the Crusade of 1101, and the Second and Third Crusades. Political problems were exacerbated by those of provisioning and currency exchange. Hostility developed very quickly between the Byzantine population, and eventually the emperors, and the crusading armies; calls for the conquest of Constantinople began in the course of the Second Crusade, in the army of the French king, Louis VII. Even earlier, the Norman leader Bohemond had couched his invasion of the empire in crusading rhetoric. The Norman question became intimately tied up with the crusades. One of the first crusader states to be set up in the East was the principality of Antioch, under the redoubtable Bohemond, so that the empire now had the Normans on either side. Furthermore, in 1147 the Norman king Roger II took advantage of the Second Crusade to sack Thebes and Corinth. During the Third Crusade, relations between Frederick Barbarossa (1152–90) and Isaac II Angelos (1185–95) so deteriorated that the German emperor not only sacked Thrace but asked his son to prepare for an invasion of the Byzantine Empire. The tragic events of the Fourth Crusade were not far off.

In the meantime, the Byzantine Empire had developed multifaceted relations with the Holy Roman Empire, the papacy, and the Italian maritime states. The trade privileges to Venice were followed by those to Pisa (1111) and Genoa (1155). However, a number of emperors tried to rescind such privileges or to reject requests that they be granted. This occasioned hostilities culminating in the expulsion of Venetian merchants and the seizure of their property in 1171 and a massacre of the Latins in Constantinople in 1185. Relations with the Holy Roman Empire were friendly as long as the common enemy, the Normans, were seen as the paramount threat. Hence the marriage of Manuel I to Bertha of Sulzbach, sister-in-law of Conrad III. Frederick Barbarossa, however, had ambitions that could not easily accommodate a Byzantine alliance. The strong interest of Manuel I in Italy may be seen in his very expensive and ultimately unsuccessful Italian campaign of 1155–56. It may also be found in his plan to restore the Roman Empire, with a sole civil authority (the Byzantine emperor) and a sole ecclesiastical authority (the pope).

Relations with western Europeans also include those with the kingdom of Jerusalem. Manuel made an alliance with Kings Baldwin III (in 1158) and Amalric (in 1164), both of whom had married Byzantine princesses. He was now the protector of the holy places. The alliance with Amalric involved plans for the conquest of Egypt, which the

king of Jerusalem tried to carry out on his own, and which backfired, as one might have expected.

During the Komnenian period, the Byzantines had very close relations and connections with the West. These included marriage alliances, diplomatic exchanges, travel back and forth, considerable numbers of westerners in the Byzantine army, and exchanges of influence in literature. Despite this close contact, hostility was evident and acute on many political fronts.

Internally, the government of the Komnenoi may be described as one of aristocratic centralization or feudal authoritarianism: its basis was aristocratic, but it retained the power, authority, and wealth of a central state. It was run primarily by the aristocracy allied to the Komnenian family, while the surplus was shared between the state and the aristocracy. Political affairs were stable for a long while, with few rebellions. The armed forces consisted primarily of mercenaries, including Turks, Pechenegs, and, especially under Manuel I, westerners, under the command of Byzantine aristocrats. The transition from a state of peace to a state of war also resulted in efforts to re-create an army that drew its sustenance from the land. The institution of the *pronoia* consisted of the grant (revocable and nonhereditary) of the revenues of particular pieces of land on condition of military service. It appeared in the late eleventh century and spread under Manuel I. Unlike the peasant-soldier of the earlier period, the *pronoia* holder was a privileged individual, who paid no taxes, collected the taxes of the peasants, and also received revenues from rents.

The Komnenian system worked well for a time, and this was a brilliant society, with considerable literary and artistic production. However, the government was extractive and bred disaffection in the provinces. Furthermore, it only worked as long as the aristocracy was satisfied. By the late twelfth century, it would seem that the cohesion between the ruling class and the government began to break down. Ominously, some magnates and aristocrats established independent rule over certain areas: such was the case with Isaac Komnenos in Cyprus, Leo Sgouros in Nauplia and Argos, and possibly Theodore Mangaphas in Philadelphia. There are signs of breakdown in the Byzantine Empire before the Fourth Crusade.

The Fourth Crusade was preached by Innocent IV in 1198. Its members were primarily French, but they were accompanied by Venetians, who also provided the ships. It was originally planned that it should go to Egypt, but a series of diversions eventually brought its armies to Constantinople, which was captured on 13 April 1204. The city was looted mercilessly. A Frankish nobleman, Baldwin, count of Flanders and Hainault, sat on the throne of Constantine, and a Venetian became patriarch. The capture of Constantinople and the events that followed were a profound shock for the Byzantines, who never forgot them.

The conquest of Constantinople altered the situation in the eastern Mediterranean in many significant ways. Most important was the fragmentation of the political space, which never was completely reunited until the Ottoman conquests. A number of small states were established on the soil of the former Byzantine Empire. The Latin Empire

of Constantinople was a very weak feudal state; the most important component was the principality of Achaia, in the Peloponnese, which survived after 1261. The Venetians had acquired a number of coastal and insular possessions, the most important of which were Coron, Modon, Crete, Euboea and other islands of the Aegean, and the Ionian islands. In western Greece, the despotate of Epiros extended over Epiros, Aetolia, and Akarnania. In Asia Minor, the empire of Trebizond had been established in 1204. The empire of Nicaea, created by Theodore I Laskaris, a son-in-law of Alexios III Angelos, came to include virtually all of Komnenian Asia Minor, except for the part that belonged to Trebizond.

The despotate of Epiros and the empire of Nicaea were the most important Greek states. The empire of Nicaea was quite powerful, especially during the reign of John III Vatatzes (1222–54). It was a well-organized state, which managed not only to hold its own against the Seljuks, but even to profit from the fact that the Mongol invasions weakened the power of the Turks. It was also an irredentist state, as was the despotate of Epiros, both aiming at the reconquest of Constantinople. The situation was complicated by the existence of the Serbian state (which received an autocephalous archbishopric from Nicaea in 1219, while Stefan the First-Crowned had been granted the title of king by Pope Honorius III in 1217) and especially the Second Bulgarian Empire, which reached a high point under John II Asen (1218–41). Thessalonike, a great prize, was conquered by Theodore Doukas Angelos of Epiros in 1224, and then by John Vatatzes in 1246. The Bulgarians, who had established in Tŭrnovo a patriarchate, recognized by Nicaea, entered the race for Constantinople. In the end, however, the city was reconquered by Michael Palaiologos, who was co-emperor along with the young John IV Laskaris of Nicaea (1261). Soon thereafter John IV was blinded and deposed. The last Byzantine dynasty, the Palaiologoi, was to rule until the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans.

With the reconquest of Constantinople, the orientation of Byzantine policy changed abruptly. Asia Minor, loyal to the Laskarids, was neglected and overtaxed, an easy prey to Turkish attacks. Michael VIII and his successors had to deal with recurrent aggressive schemes on the part of western Europeans, and at the same time were engaged in a policy of reconcentration of the fragmented territories over an area more or less that of the modern Greek state. Michael VIII was a consummate diplomat, who was able to thwart the dangerous plans of Charles of Anjou to retake Constantinople. Faced with the western threat, he was forced to accept the union of the Byzantine and Roman churches. The Union of Lyons (1274) was opposed by a large part of the population and was abandoned by his son. As for western plans for the reconquest of Constantinople, they lost their force after 1311.

The policy of reuniting the fragmented territories was vigorously pursued by Michael VIII, Andronikos II (1282–1328), and Andronikos III (1328–41). Michael fought against the principality of Achaia, recovering Monemvasia, Geraki, and Mistra. In Bulgaria, he was able to take a number of the Greek-speaking cities of the Black Sea coast, which were particularly important for the provisioning of Constantinople. He

also made alliances with the Mongols, both the Ilkhanids of Persia as a defense against the Turks, and the Golden Horde, against Bulgaria. The Mongol alliance was useful to his successor as well. On the other hand, Michael VIII and his successors gave extensive commercial, judicial, and other privileges to the Italian merchants, primarily the Genoese and the Venetians, who now dominated the commerce of the area. Michael gave to the Genoese quarters in Pera, which eventually became a powerful colony, and ceded to the Zaccaria family the city of Phokaia with its important alum mines. In 1305 the Zaccaria occupied the island of Chios, which remained in Genoese hands until 1556.

The Byzantine reconquest of splinter states in Epiros, Thessaly, and the Peloponnese continued under Andronikos II and Andronikos III. Thessaly was acquired piecemeal in 1333. The despotate of Epiros came into Byzantine hands by 1340; Ioannina had accepted Byzantine suzerainty in 1319. The Byzantine possessions in the Peloponnese were organized as the despotate of the Morea in 1349. When the rest of the empire crumbled, this remained as its most cohesive and vital part. To be sure, the Serbs had taken Dyrrachion in 1296, and part of Macedonia was given to Stefan Uroš II Milutin as the dowry of his Byzantine bride. But on the whole the reconquest of the splinter Greek states and the Peloponnese was achieved, with the exception of Attica and Boeotia, which formed the Catalan duchy of Athens that lasted until 1388. In Asia Minor, on the other hand, one disaster followed another. The Ottoman Turks emerged as an expansionist emirate on land in the late thirteenth century, while the coastal emirates were engaged in piratical activities in the Aegean. After the Byzantine defeat at the battle of Bapheus (1302), and despite the efforts of Andronikos II and Andronikos III, Asia Minor rapidly came under Turkish control. The fall of Prousa (1326), Nicaea (1331), and Nikomedeia (1337) sealed the fate of Bithynia, now firmly in Ottoman hands. The southern cities—Ephesos, Tralles, Smyrna, Miletos, and Sardis—were conquered by the Seljuk emirates in the first decade of the fourteenth century. Only Philadelphia remained, until 1390.

The Palaiologan state had a certain vitality until the middle of the fourteenth century. Despite the granting of privileges to the church and to private individuals, the state still had resources, exercised a heavy fiscality, and was able to undertake military expeditions and carry out a foreign policy that, given the complexities of the times, was successful. By comparison with the past, however, everything was small scale: the extent of the state, its revenues, its armed forces. When, in 1321, Andronikos II subsidized a campaign with 50,000 hyperpyra, this was impressive given the circumstances; but it was a very long way from the 2,160,000 gold coins spent by Manuel I on his Italian campaign. The army was also small, while the fleet was scuttled in 1285, although small fleets were later reconstituted upon occasion. The military forces consisted of mercenaries (with sometimes disastrous results) and native forces. The latter were made up of *pronoia* holders, who still received their *pronoiai* from the state, although some of these lands became hereditary. The aristocracy was powerful, and some families were very rich indeed. The church, especially the monasteries, was also

becoming very wealthy. The cities profited, to some extent, from trading activities, although there were considerable social tensions. Thessalonike was a very important political, economic, and cultural center.

There were, in this period, impressive intellectual and artistic achievements. Highly educated intellectuals produced works of philology, theology, astronomy, mathematics, geography, and rhetoric. Literary works were produced both in erudite Greek and in the popular language. Important works of art include the mosaics and frescoes of the monastery of the Chora (Kariye Camii) in Constantinople.

By the middle of the century, this entire edifice had crumbled as a result of two civil wars, the first between Andronikos II and Andronikos III in 1321–28 and the second and by far the most destructive one (1342–54) between John Kantakouzenos and the regency for the young John V. The second civil war, which began as a struggle for power in the center, soon spread throughout the state and acquired strong social overtones, as the landowning aristocracy by and large supported Kantakouzenos, while the merchants and sailors on the whole supported his arch-rival, the *megas doux* Alexios Apokaukos. The civil war ended with the victory of Kantakouzenos and the aristocracy; but in 1354 John V Palaiologos returned to the throne in Constantinople, and John VI Kantakouzenos was forced to abdicate. The most disastrous aspect of the civil war was that both sides, but most importantly that of Kantakouzenos, appealed to foreign powers for help. Serbia had been engaged in an expansionary policy since the last part of the previous century. Rich because of the exploitation of silver mines, its rulers could harbor great ambitions. Stefan Dušan took advantage of the civil war to intervene, ostensibly in favor of John Kantakouzenos, but, as it soon became evident, in truth to serve his own purposes. Within a few years he conquered much of Macedonia, Thessaly, Epiros, and part of Greece, without, however, being able to take Thessalonike. The conquest of Serres in 1345 allowed him to call himself emperor of the Serbs and the Romans. His ephemeral state did not survive his death in 1355. It split into a number of fragments unable to withstand the Ottoman advance. For the Turks were the real victors of the civil war. Both the emir of Aydin and the Ottomans, under Orhan, sent armies to help Kantakouzenos. By 1354 the Ottomans had established themselves at the strategic stronghold of Gallipoli and from there carried out their conquest of the Balkans.

After the end of the second civil war, Byzantium was an empire in name only. Its territories were greatly reduced and dispersed, consisting of the capital, Thessalonike and its hinterland, the islands of the northern Aegean and the despotate of the Morea. The second half of the fourteenth century was a critical one for the southern Mediterranean too. The Black Death, which had struck the Byzantine Empire as well as the Italian city-states and all of Europe, had brought about a grave demographic crisis. In politics, that translated into exacerbated antagonisms between Venice and Genoa, played out in the eastern Mediterranean. Such was the war of Tenedos (war of Chioggia), in 1377–81, which involved the Byzantines as well. The Byzantines, with no resources, few armed forces, and always embroiled in dynastic quarrels, were virtually

incapable of an independent foreign policy. The Ottomans, the Venetians, and the Genoese supported different factions of the imperial family.

Meanwhile the Ottoman advance continued. Didymoteichon fell in 1361, Philippopolis in 1363, and Adrianople, which was to become the first European capital of the Ottomans, in 1369. An important turning point was the battle of the Marica in 1371, in which the forces of John Uglješa of Serres were defeated. After that, the entire countryside was overrun by Ottoman armies. The Byzantine Empire became tributary to the Ottomans. In despair, Manuel Palaiologos took half the properties of the monasteries of Mount Athos and the church of Thessalonike in order to give them out as *pronoiai*. Some of these lands were returned to the monasteries after 1403. Thessalonike itself fell to the Ottomans in 1387; this first occupation lasted until 1403. The Ottoman victory against the Serb and Bosnian armies at the battle of Kosovo Polje, in 1389, opened the way into Serbia itself.

To all of this the Byzantines could counter very little. One approach tried by every emperor was to request aid from western Europe. But, except for small expeditions, and the disastrous crusade of Nikopolis (1396), little aid was forthcoming, since the support of the papacy was predicated upon the union of the churches, a very unpopular issue in Byzantium.

Among the important consequences of the crisis of the second half of the fourteenth century was the increased role of the church and, in particular, of the monasteries of Mount Athos. The church had already expanded its role in the earlier part of the century, for example, in the realm of justice. After the civil war, the Athonite monasteries profited from donations on the part of Stefan Dušan and privileges granted by the Ottomans. They also profited from the transfer of landed property that the aristocracy was unable to exploit. Mount Athos became the richest and safest part of the empire, whoever held political power over it. The church also enjoyed, throughout the Orthodox world, prestige and spiritual power, which it was to retain after the fall of Constantinople.

A long blockade of Constantinople by the sultan Bayezid in 1394–1402 almost spelled the end of the Byzantine Empire. The city was saved not from the West, but from the East: Bayezid was defeated by the Mongols under Timur (Tamerlane) at the battle of Ankara (1402), and this granted the Byzantines another half century of life. Indeed, the battle of Ankara led Bayezid's son Süleyman to sign a treaty with the Byzantines by which he gave up the tribute exacted until then and returned to Byzantium a strip of territory from Panidos in the Propontis to Mesembria, a few islands, a few coastal towns in Asia Minor, and, most importantly, Thessalonike and Chalkidike. Thus there was a political restoration of sorts between 1403 and the 1420s. But the respite was temporary. By the 1420s the Ottoman state had been reorganized, and their expansion continued. To avoid Ottoman occupation, Thessalonike surrendered itself to the Venetians, who held it until its conquest by the Turks in 1430. Ioannina fell in 1430 as well, while incursions had started into the Morea. In 1437 Emperor John VIII went to Italy to ask for help. On 6 July 1439, the union of the churches was proclaimed,



but accomplished little beyond exacerbating the divisions within Byzantium, where the union was much hated. Finally, after a fifty-two-day siege by land and by sea, the city of Constantine was conquered by Mehmed II, on 29 May 1453. The despotate of the Morea was taken in 1460, and Trebizond in 1461.

Constantinople, at the time of its fall, had become a phantom of its old self: a small, underpopulated, poor, fearful, and isolated city. Nevertheless, its conquest had a tremendous psychological effect on all the Orthodox populations and even in western Europe. For in the fall of the city of Constantine, they recognized the complete and permanent end of the Byzantine state.