

**Foreign Relations and the End of Byzantium: The Use of Personal Diplomacy
during the Reign of Constantine XI Palaiologos (1448 – 1453)**

by

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*For Mom and Dad
Thanks for Everything*

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The study of Byzantine diplomacy often focuses upon the empire at the height of its power and influence, when emperors and their extensive bureaucracies could use their vast resources to neutralize any opponents.¹ Even after the sack of Constantinople and the empire's reconstitution in 1261, such Byzantine emperors as Michael VIII Palaiologos used the state's legacy and resources to their advantage in diplomatic negotiations.² However, the later period of Byzantine diplomacy and foreign policy, especially under the final emperor, Constantine XI Palaiologos, has received less attention. In fact, each of the major works detailing Constantine's life places very little emphasis upon his diplomatic activities. Instead, scholarship of Byzantium's final years portrays the emperor and his advisors as merely victims of the events surrounding Constantinople's fall. Therefore, this thesis will show how Constantine XI and his court created foreign policy toward other powers, particularly the Ottoman Empire, the Papacy, and the Venetian Republic, centering on the imperial administration's use of personal diplomacy. When the emperor and his councilors had access to the expertise of foreigners, they were able to create cohesive, effective policies toward other states. However, when the Greeks did not have access to foreign elites who could both advise the court and intercede on their behalf within their respective states, Byzantine foreign policy faltered.

¹ Jonathan Shepard. "Byzantine Diplomacy, A.D. 800 – 1204: Means and Ends." *Byzantine Diplomacy*. Eds. Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1992) 41-70.

² N. Oikonomides. "Byzantine Diplomacy, A.D. 1204 – 1453: Means and Ends." *Byzantine Diplomacy*. Eds. Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1992) 73-88.

Each of the three main works on Constantine XI Palaiologos' life overlooks his diplomatic practices and his administration's construction of foreign policy. Chedomil Mijatovich, author of *Constantine Palaeologus (1448 – 1453) or The Conquest of Constantinople by the Turks*, wrote his analysis of the final Byzantine emperor with a very specific intention. In 1892, when Mijatovich authored his work, tensions between the fledgling Kingdom of Greece and the Ottoman Empire were rising, and war appeared to be a likely possibility. Therefore, Mijatovich, who was sympathetic to Greek interests, wrote his biography of Constantine XI as a form of propaganda to build support for the Greek cause. In fact, the diplomat even dedicates his work to the young Prince Constantine, who was the heir to the Greek throne. The author explains in his preface that "Constantinople may soon again change masters," alluding to the possibility of the Greek nation re-conquering the Ottoman capital city.³ As a result of these motives, Constantine XI is portrayed as a tragic victim of the events around him. Mijatovich even describes him as such: "Constantine Dragaš was in fact rather a simple, honest soldier than a skillful diplomatist."⁴ Since he wanted to maintain an image of Greek helplessness to motivate his contemporary readers, Mijatovich only cursorily examines the reasons behind Constantine's actions and their effects upon the fall of Constantinople in 1453. As a result, Mijatovich's biography neither analyzes the emperor's diplomatic relations nor discusses the development of Byzantine foreign policy during his reign.

Sir Steven Runciman's *The Fall of Constantinople 1453* follows the Serbian diplomat's example by characterizing Constantine through the siege of Constantinople. The British historian used this tactic before as he characterized Emperor Michael VIII by

³ Chedomil Mijatovich. *Constantine Palaeologus (1448 – 1453), or The Conquest of Constantinople by the Turks* (Chicago: Argonaut, 1892) xii.

⁴ Mijatovich 108.

analyzing his participation in the “Sicilian Vespers” of the thirteenth century. Unlike Chedomil Mijatovich, Runciman was not interested in creating a work of propaganda intended to spur Greek nationalism. However, Runciman’s narrative does portray the emperor primarily as a tragic figure through detailed descriptions of his diplomatic efforts to save the empire from destruction. His account does not dismiss Constantine XI’s responsibility for antagonizing the Turks, eventually leading to their assault upon Constantinople. He states: “The emperor himself was to blame for a worsening of the relations between the empire and the Turks.”⁵ Like Mijatovich’s monograph, Runciman is not concerned with the historical background of the emperor’s decisions, but merely that they were a part of his larger story involving the fall of Constantinople.

The most recent analysis of Constantine XI, Donald Nicol’s *The Immortal Emperor*, departs from the previous works’ structures. Instead of characterizing the emperor through the lens of the siege of Constantinople in 1453, Nicol highlights some themes and trends that appear throughout Constantine’s life. Using source material from Constantine’s reign as despot of the Morea before his accession to the imperial throne, Nicol thoroughly analyzes the various trials that the last Byzantine emperor faced. However, like the other accounts, his work does not explain how Emperor Constantine XI and his court formulated foreign policy actions while attempting to end the Ottoman threat to Constantinople. Nicol places less emphasis upon the impact that individuals, aside from the emperor, had on Byzantine policy during this period.

This thesis intends to help fill a gap in the scholarship of Byzantine Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos. The major works on the last emperor do not focus upon the creation of diplomatic discourse or foreign policy during his reign. Each of them uses the

⁵ Steven Runciman. *The Fall of Constantinople 1453* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 64.

events surrounding the end of Byzantium for different purposes. Mijatovich uses them for propaganda, Runciman weaves them into an engaging narrative detailing Constantinople's fall, and Nicol places them into the context of the emperor's life in general. None of them analyzes or acknowledges the importance that personal diplomacy played in Byzantium under Constantine XI. In addition, the three works overlook the successes that the imperial administration had during this period because of that personal diplomacy. Therefore, this thesis will examine the events surrounding Constantinople's fall through their implications on diplomacy and foreign policy during the last emperor's reign.

Before examining these issues, it is important to place Constantine's empire into its historical context. By the fifteenth century, Byzantium had been reduced to only a fraction of its former grandeur. The major catalyst of this decline came during the eleventh century. After Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes failed to prevent the Seljuk Turks' entry into Byzantine territory in the Battle of Manzikert in 1071, much of Asia Minor and all of the eastern provinces were quickly lost to the empire.⁶ While subsequent emperors, such as Alexios I Komnenos and Manuel I Komnenos, were able to recover some of these lost territories as a result of Western crusades, these gains were only temporary. The Turks had permanently settled in Anatolia. As a result, Byzantium lost access to its most fertile, wealthy, and populated region, throwing the empire into a sharp economic decline, especially in the late twelfth century.⁷

This economic turmoil also led to political troubles during this period. The end of the Komnenos' imperial dynasty led to quarrels between the Byzantine aristocratic

⁶ George Ostrogorsky. *History of the Byzantine State*. Trans. Joan Hussey (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002) 349.

⁷ Ostrogorsky 401.

families seeking to control the throne, while they simultaneously consolidated their economic holdings throughout the empire. Often these quarrels degenerated into civil war, further destabilizing the political situation in Byzantium. Even when the Angelos family prevailed and took the imperial throne, disputes within that clan led to further instability. In fact, a disgruntled member of the Angelos family approached the Frankish and Venetian military forces at Zara along the Adriatic coast in 1203, asking for assistance in claiming the Byzantine throne.⁸ These political intrigues led to the impromptu capture and sack of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade in 1204.

The establishment of a Latin Empire in the Aegean following the sack of Constantinople also significantly handicapped Byzantium, even though the Greeks were able to re-conquer much of their former empire in less than sixty years. The government-in-exile, based in Nicaea across the Aegean Sea from Constantinople, slowly pushed the Latins from Thrace and the southern Morea, forcing them into Thessaly and Attica. Under the leadership of Michael Palaiologos, the Byzantines recaptured Constantinople in 1261 and began to consolidate their position. The now-Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos deftly defended the empire from the Western Christians, eager to retake Constantinople and rebuild the Latin Empire, throughout his reign.⁹ However, his focus on the Latins gave the Turks the opportunity to expand into the rest of Asia Minor, taking the remainder by the beginning of the fourteenth century, with a few exceptions.¹⁰ After Michael VIII and his immediate successors, the empire suffered more periods of civil war

⁸ Ostrogorsky 415-416.

⁹ For a detailed study of Michael VIII's reign and his diplomatic maneuvers with Charles of Anjou, the Papacy, and the Aragonese, see Deno John Geanakoplos. *Emperor Michael Palaeologus and the West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959.)

¹⁰ Ostrogorsky 548: The city of Philadelphia, in southern Anatolia, resisted the Turks well into the fourteenth century. In fact, Manuel II, acting as a vassal of the Ottoman sultan, was forced to participate in the city's siege and capture in the late fourteenth century.

between rival claimants to the throne. While the Palaiologan dynasty was eventually victorious in the late fourteenth century, the damage to the empire was irreversible. The rival claimants had relied extensively upon Turkish mercenaries to fight their battles, and these soldiers refused to return to Anatolia after their service. In addition, the Ottomans took advantage of Byzantine political chaos to establish a permanent foothold in Europe at Gallipoli. By the fifteenth century, the Ottomans had reduced the Byzantine Empire to a strip of land along the Black Sea, the Morea, and the imperial capital of Constantinople. While the emperors tried to exert their independence from the Ottoman sultan at every opportunity, they were forced into servitude, functioning as his vassals. This was the situation that Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos entered upon his accession in 1448.

Constantine Palaiologos was born on February 8, 1405 to Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos and Serbian princess Helena Dragaš, their fourth son.¹¹ Constantine was raised in Constantinople and remained there alongside his father Manuel and his elder brother John, witnessing the failed Ottoman siege of 1422. The young Constantine, only eighteen years old, so impressed his father and brother during the siege that he was chosen to serve as regent during co-Emperor John VIII's journey to Hungary, seeking aid for Byzantium in late 1423.¹² After his successful regency, Constantine was awarded a small strip of territory in Constantinople's hinterland, extending from the port of Mesembria in the north to the port of Selymbria to the west of the capital. While small,

¹¹ Donald Nicol. *The Immortal Emperor: The Life and Legend of Constantine Palaiologos, last Emperor of the Romans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 2; George Sphrantzes dates the year of Constantine's birth at 1404, but other sources confirm that he was born in 1405.

¹² George Sphrantzes. "Chronicon Minus." *The Fall of the Byzantine Empire*. Trans. Marios Philippides (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980) 30.

this fief was strategically important since it covered the land approaches to Constantinople, proving that both his father and elder brother trusted his abilities.¹³

While the son of the philosopher-Emperor Manuel II, a prolific writer and theologian, Constantine did not share his father's deep interest in scholarship and learning. Scholars in the service of Manuel II tutored Constantine in the Byzantine capital until he was seventeen years old, but he was more interested in hunting and the martial arts. He was praised for his marksmanship, hunting prowess, and martial abilities as a child.¹⁴ Constantine had no interest in theology or philosophy, but he did patronize philosophers and other scholars.¹⁵ For instance, he was close friends with the renowned scholar George Gemistos Plethon, and bestowed honors upon him while despot of the Morea.¹⁶ Constantine showed the same proclivities when an adult as he did as a child. He was much more comfortable riding into battle than debating philosophy or negotiating trade agreements with foreign ambassadors.¹⁷ Nonetheless, he was a prudent man, and heeded his councilors' advice on important matters of state. He was also a competent administrator, following his father's advice while serving as regent in Constantinople in 1423, and learning from his tenure ruling various fiefs around the empire.¹⁸ As a result of these experiences, Constantine was well prepared for the imperial throne upon his accession in 1449.

After Manuel II's death in 1425, John VIII offered his younger brother Constantine a new fief in the northwest Morea, where he would be charged with re-

¹³ Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 7.

¹⁴ Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 4.

¹⁵ Runciman *The Fall of Constantinople 1453* 53.

¹⁶ Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 22-23.

¹⁷ Sphrantzes 36: Constantine charged into battle on horseback against the defenders of Patras while despot of the Morea on March 26, 1429. His horse was killed from under him and he was also nearly killed.

¹⁸ Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 6.

conquering the region from its Latin overlords. Upon their arrival, John and Constantine utterly defeated the Latin ruler of Epiros, Carlo Tocco.¹⁹ In order to save his dignity, he offered his daughter Maddalena to Constantine in marriage, providing several Moreote ports and villages as her dowry. Unfortunately, she died childless less than eighteen months later.²⁰ Constantine proceeded to conquer various territories throughout the Morea, culminating in the capture of the major city of Patras in 1429. Constantine's successes, and Emperor John VIII's obvious preference for his talented younger brother as his successor (John had no children), angered his other brothers. This was especially true of Manuel's second son Theodore, co-despot of the Morea based at Mistra, who was extremely jealous of Constantine's ability and popularity.²¹ At the request of his mother Helena, Constantine was chosen to serve as regent in Constantinople again during John VIII's trip to Italy for the Council of Florence in 1437.²² Constantine was clearly her favorite son, and she actively advocated that he be chosen as John's successor. When John returned from Italy in 1440, Constantine traveled back to the Morea, where he first arranged to marry the daughter of the Genoese lord of Mytilene, Caterina. However, this marriage would also be shortlived, as Caterina died while visiting the island of Lesbos in 1442.²³

Once Constantine returned to the Morea, he focused upon its defense from Turkish invasions, and planned his next wars of expansion against the Ottoman-controlled principalities to the north, centered on Athens. He knew that the successful conclusion of the Council of Florence in 1439 meant that the pope was organizing

¹⁹ Sphrantzes 33.

²⁰ Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 8-9, 13.

²¹ Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 14.

²² Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 15.

²³ Sphrantzes 53.

another crusade to help the Greeks, and planned to take full advantage of it.²⁴ Constantine refortified the Isthmus of Corinth, and prepared to invade the Latin principalities of Athens and Thebes, technically under the suzerainty of the Ottoman sultan. Once Constantine heard that the crusade had left Hungary in 1444, he quickly invaded and occupied the two cities. However, the crusade's destruction at Varna later that year meant Constantine's gains would be short lived. In 1446, Sultan Murad II marched against Constantine's isthmian fortifications, the *Hexamilion* wall, and smashed them. He also advanced into the Morea and ravaged it before withdrawing back into Greece.²⁵ Constantine spent the remainder of his time rebuilding the Morea, eventually being informed of his brother's death and was proclaimed Roman emperor, the eleventh of the name Constantine, in the palace at Mistra in November 1448.

Constantine arrived in Constantinople in early 1449, and after a brief succession struggle with his younger brothers Thomas and Demetrios, was acclaimed emperor by the Constantinopolitans. His mother Helena was instrumental in securing Constantine's accession over his other brothers.²⁶ Forgoing a traditional coronation, the emperor immediately focused upon the immediate threat posed by the Ottomans toward Constantinople, seeking aid from the various western principalities. He delicately handled Byzantine relations with the Papacy by implementing convenient portions of church union, and actively courted Venetian support for the city's defense. While Constantine succeeded in gaining some support from the west, he and his advisors misjudged the determination of the new Ottoman sultan, Mehmed II, upon his accession in 1451. Soon after taking the throne, young Mehmed invested Constantinople with a vast army and

²⁴ Sphrantzes 54.

²⁵ Sphrantzes 56.

²⁶ Donald M. Nicol. *A Biographical Dictionary of the Byzantine Empire* (London: Seaby, 1991) 29.

fleet. After a brief but intense siege, the Ottomans succeeded in storming and capturing the Byzantine capital on May 29, 1453. Emperor Constantine XI was killed fighting at the walls, and the Byzantine Empire came to an end.

The Byzantine capital's status in the fifteenth century under Emperor Constantine XI is also important for understanding Greek diplomacy during this period.

Constantinople had drastically changed since its sack by Latin crusaders in 1204. The Western army had destroyed much of the city's former glory during the Fourth Crusade, both by fire and greed.²⁷ As a result, the city became a "ruralized network of scattered nuclei" by the fifteenth century.²⁸ The mass exodus from the city under Latin rule left wide spaces between groups of settlements inside Constantinople. The city consisted of groups of workshops and stores with residential districts and other buildings around a shared court, essentially individual villages within its walls.²⁹ As a result, the city's traditional civic center near the Acropolis fell into decay. The Great Palace, home of Byzantine emperors since before the time of Justinian, fell into disrepair and was abandoned, especially after crusaders stripped the roof of its lead and exposed its interior to the elements.³⁰ Many of the city's palaces, churches, and other public buildings were in a similar ruinous condition by the mid-fifteenth century.

However, some sections of Constantinople did prosper during this period. While the traditional sections of Constantinople were in decline by the fifteenth century, several merchant sections around the Golden Horn still prospered. The Western traveler Clavijo,

²⁷ Jonathan Phillips. *The Fourth Crusade and the Sack of Constantinople* (New York: Viking, 2004) 208.

²⁸ Paul Magdalino. "Medieval Constantinople: Built Environment and Urban Development." *The Economic History of Byzantium*. Ed. Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002) 536.

²⁹ Klaus-Peter Matschke. "The Late Byzantine Urban Economy, Thirteenth – Fifteenth Centuries." *The Economic History of Byzantium*. Ed. Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002) 471.

³⁰ Magdalino 536.

visiting Constantinople around 1403, marveled at the prosperity of these quarters amid the ruin and desolation surrounding them.³¹ Clavijo noted that the Venetian commercial district, situated along the shore of the Golden Horn, the Genoese suburb-colony of Galata, across the Golden Horn from the city proper, and the immediate area around the Byzantine imperial residence along the city walls, the Blachernae Palace, still thrived. The Italian sectors prospered because they were free from taxation, as emperors of the Palaiologan dynasty guaranteed their privileges in Constantinople, beginning with Michael VIII and the Genoese after the Greeks recaptured the city in 1261.³² The area surrounding the Blachernae Palace flourished because it served as the new civic center of Constantinople. Since the emperor needed to remain near the land walls in case of attack or other crises, this palace became his primary residence. As a result, many Greek nobles and courtiers shifted their residences to the Blachernae section. This prompted a small but vigorous commercial district which supplied the imperial court and Greek elites with wares and supplies. Each of these prosperous areas starkly contrasted with the ruined churches, hamlets, and vast grain fields and orchards inside Constantinople's city walls.

The trends in the city's population followed the trends of its infrastructure in the fifteenth century. Even though Constantinople's population had significantly decreased

³¹ Clavijo. *Embassy to Tamerlane 1403-1406*. Ed. Guy le Strange (London, 1928) as cited in Joseph Gill. *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959) 85: "Though the circuit of the walls is thus very great and the area spacious, the city is not throughout very densely populated. There are within its compass many hills and valleys where corn fields and orchards are found, and among the orchardlands there are hamlets and suburbs which are all included within the city limits. The most populous quarter of the city is along the lower level by the shore towards the point that juts into the Sea [of Marmara]. The trading quarter of the city is down by the gates which open on the strand [of the Golden Horn] and which are facing the opposite gates which pertain to the city of Pera [Galata], for it is here that the galleys and smaller vessels come to port to discharge their cargoes, and here by the strand it is that the people of Pera meet those of Constantinople and transact their business and commerce. Everywhere throughout the city there are many great palaces, churches and monasteries, but most of them are now in ruin. It is however plain that in former times when Constantinople was in its pristine state it was one of the noblest capitals of the world."

³² Matschke, "The Late Byzantine Urban Economy" 476.

during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the city retained a diverse citizenry until the empire's collapse in 1453. The Black Death of 1347 killed nearly one-third of the city's population, which had already been shrinking as a result of the Latin occupation and Byzantine civil wars.³³ The citizenry had barely begun to recover from this outbreak when disease attacked the population again. Another outbreak in 1409 and 1410 killed nearly 10,000 people in the city, leaving less than 50,000 citizens of Constantinople by Constantine XI's reign.³⁴

Constantinople's citizenry consisted of several distinct groups by the mid fifteenth century. Even though many Greeks fled the capital amidst the turmoil of the fourteenth century, they remained a majority of Constantinople's residents during Constantine's reign. While the Greek exodus continued, a significant portion of the population was comprised of skilled craftsmen and artisans, as well as their families.³⁵ Emperors Manuel II and John VIII actively courted these skilled workers, as their expertise was needed to repair Constantinople's extensive defenses in the face of the Turkish threat. As a result, the Byzantines retained skilled masons for the land walls, and experts that could fortify and renew the city's ports and quays.³⁶ In addition, several Greek monastic orders established themselves near the Acropolis along the Sea of Marmara.³⁷ These monks sought the relative safety provided by Constantinople's walls, as several monastic communities outside the city fell under Turkish control in the fourteenth and early

³³ Michael Maclagan. *The City of Constantinople* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968) 119.

³⁴ Angeliki E. Laiou. "The Agrarian Economy, Thirteenth – Fifteenth Centuries." *The Economic History of Byzantium*. Ed. Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002) 317.

³⁵ Charalambos Bouras. "Aspects of the Byzantine City, Eighth – Fifteenth Centuries." *The Economic History of Byzantium*. Ed. Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002) 500.

³⁶ Klaus-Peter Matschke. "Builders and Building in Late Byzantine Constantinople." *Byzantine Constantinople: Monuments, Topography, and Everyday Life*. Ed. Nevra Necipoğlu (Boston: Brill, 2001) 316.

³⁷ Magdalino 536.

fifteenth centuries, most notably the center of Mount Athos. Aside from these skilled craftsmen and monastic communities, Greeks engaged in subsistence agriculture within the city walls, cultivating small fields and tending to modest orchards in the abandoned areas between the land walls and Hagia Sophia. These farmers grew enough to feed their families, but could not supply the needs of the entire city. This would become a major problem during the Ottoman siege in 1453.

The next largest groups living within Constantinople were Italians primarily from Genoa and Venice. Most of these residents were merchants, taking advantage of the lucrative trade routes leading through the Aegean and Black Seas into Asia. Both groups used the city as a waypoint between Italy and their major interests in the Black Sea: Caffa for Genoa and Trebizond for the Venetians.³⁸ In addition to these merchants, a large number of metalworkers lived in the city, primarily engaged in the manufacture of personnel armor and weaponry, since the Byzantines constantly needed war materiel.³⁹ While the Venetians in Constantinople came largely without their families, the Italians in the Genoese colony of Galata often brought their wives and children.⁴⁰ This would often lead to a difference of opinion over strategy during Constantinople's defense in 1453, as the Venetians often advocated a more aggressive stance than the Genoese, who were reluctant to risk the safety of their families. These Italians often allowed their conflicts in Italy to spill over into Constantinople as well. The emperor was constantly forced to dispel tensions and rivalries between the groups to maintain a tenuous peace within the

³⁸ Anna Avramea. "Land and Sea Communications, Fourth – Fifteenth Centuries." *The Economic History of Byzantium*. Ed. Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002) 87.

³⁹ Nicolò Barbaro. *Diary of the Siege of Constantinople 1453*. Trans. J.R. Melville Jones (New York: Exposition Press, 1969) 60.

⁴⁰ Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople 1453* 115.

city.⁴¹ While often troublesome, the Italians of Venice and Genoa were a sizeable presence in Constantinople during the mid-fifteenth century.

In addition, the Turks maintained a small presence in the city. An active Turkish merchant population settled around the Adrianople Gate, trading between Constantinople and the Ottoman capital beginning in the late fourteenth century.⁴² This population eventually became so prominent that Ottoman Sultan Bayazid forced Emperor Manuel II to establish a Turkish quarter in the city, where the Muslims would be subject to their own *kadi* (judge), and immune from many Byzantine customs duties.⁴³ However, these merchants were not long-term residents of the city. They often stayed only long enough to complete their transactions with the Greeks and Italians in their respective quarters. This transient Turkish population existed within Constantinople even during Constantine XI's reign. Doukas explains that the emperor arrested them after an Ottoman massacre of Greek farmers outside the city walls, but they were eventually released.⁴⁴ The emperor reluctantly ordered their execution in retribution for the capture and execution of several Italian ships' crews during the city's siege.⁴⁵

Several contenders to the Ottoman throne also resided in the Byzantine capital during the fifteenth century. For example, Emperor Manuel II sheltered the pretender Mustafa at the behest of Mehmed I, who wanted to keep the Turkish prince away from

⁴¹ Makarios Melissenos-Melissourgos. "The Chronicle of the Siege of Constantinople April 2 to May 29, 1453." *The Fall of the Byzantine Empire*. Trans. Marios Philippides (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980) 113.

⁴² Matschke, "The Late Byzantine Urban Economy" 473, 481.

⁴³ John Freely. *Istanbul: The Imperial City* (New York: Viking, 1996) 167; Matschke, "The Late Byzantine Urban Economy" 478.

⁴⁴ Doukas. *Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks*. Trans. Harry J. Magoulias (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975) 198.

⁴⁵ Melissenos 112.

Ottoman territory, but close enough to supervise.⁴⁶ During Constantine XI's reign, the Byzantines maintained Orhan, a grandson of the Sultan Suleiman, as well as his considerable retinue.⁴⁷ These pretenders were potentially great assets for Byzantine emperors in their negotiations with the Ottomans, as they could threaten to release the pretenders and ignite civil war among the Turks. While the Byzantine threat to release Orhan and spark civil war did not succeed, the prince and his retinue assisted with the defense of Constantinople in 1453.

Constantinople also possessed a small Jewish population in the fifteenth century. Many immigrated to the city as a result of the declining urban landscape throughout the rest of Greece, traveling to Constantinople looking for mercantile opportunities. While the majority of immigrants were Greek-speaking Jews, a significant section came from the Italian merchant republics as well.⁴⁸ As a result, many of these Jews resided in the three main commercial districts, along the Golden Horn, in Galata, and in the imperial quarter near the Blachernae Palace.⁴⁹ Most chose to do business in the Venetian quarter, because they enjoyed an exemption from taxes there. However, this led to resentment among the Byzantines, who viewed these Jews as agents undermining their authority within Constantinople.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, they remained within the city throughout Constantine XI's reign, as well as during Ottoman rule.

⁴⁶ John W. Barker. *Manuel II Palaeologus (1391 – 1425): A Study in Late Byzantine Statesmanship* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1969) 343, 355.

⁴⁷ Doukas 191; Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 52.

⁴⁸ David Jacoby. "The Jews of Constantinople and their demographic hinterland." *Constantinople and its Hinterland*. Eds. Cyril Mango and Gilbert Dagron (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1995) 230.

⁴⁹ Jacoby 230.

⁵⁰ Matschke, "The Late Byzantine Urban Economy" 476.

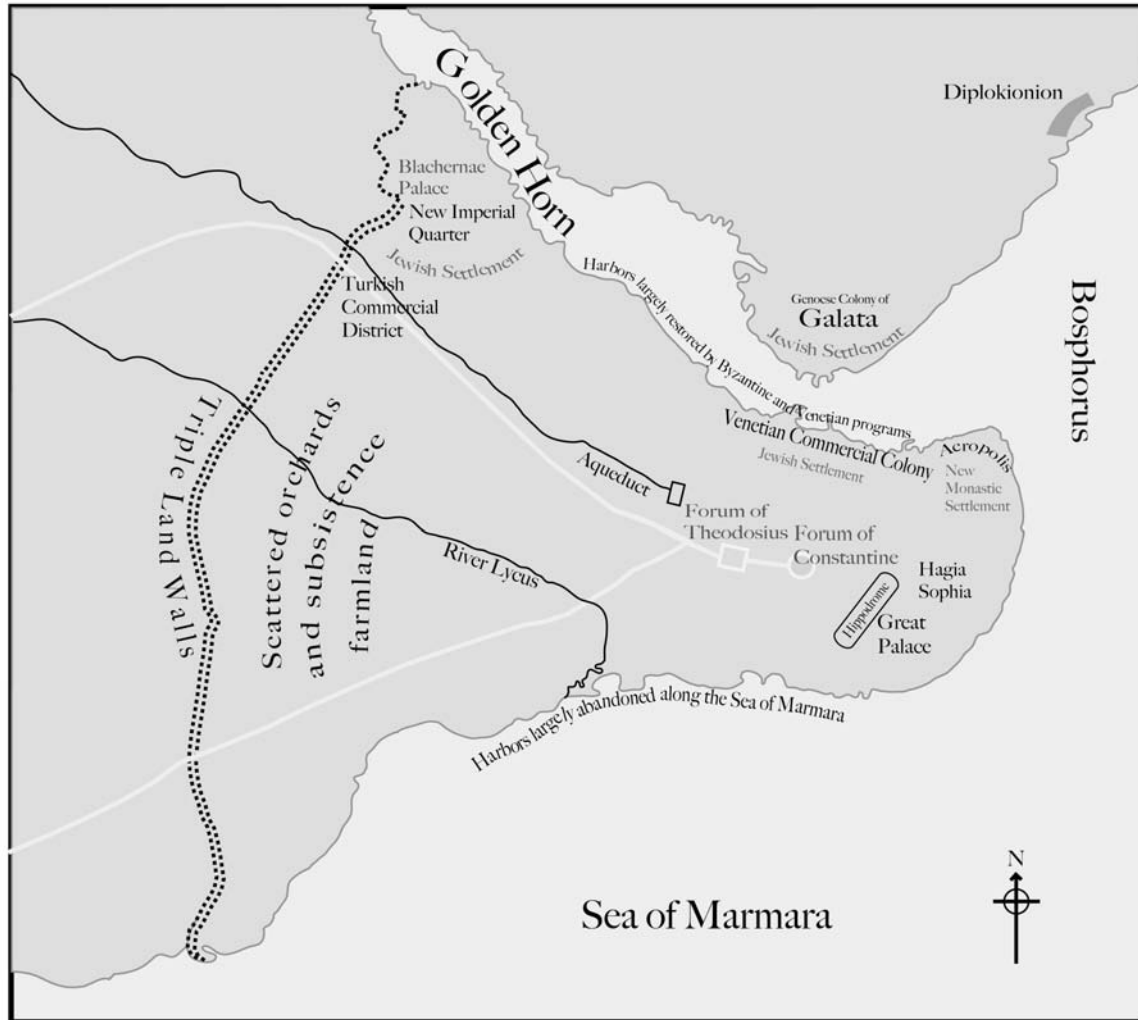


Figure 1: Constantinople during Constantine XI's Reign (1448 – 1453)⁵¹

As a result of the previously mentioned events, the Byzantine Empire had been whittled down to Constantinople, ruled by Constantine XI and the Morea, under his feuding brothers. Therefore, the emperor's diplomatic resources were sorely depleted. This work intends to explore the imperial administration's methods of diplomatic exchange during the Byzantine Empire's final four years of existence. Specifically, it will ascertain how Constantine and his court adapted to these conditions in the face of an

⁵¹ Created by Adam Hellebuyck and Caitlin Kleiboer; Terrain and certain landmarks based upon a map found in David Nicolle. *Constantinople 1453: The End of Byzantium* (New York: Osprey, 1999) 50.

impending Ottoman assault upon Constantinople, and the efficacy of personal diplomacy on Byzantine foreign policy.

Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos' diplomatic relations with other powers depended heavily upon his personal relationships with foreign elites and dignitaries. He developed these throughout his tenure as despot of the Morea and while Roman emperor. He relied upon these relationships, rather than upon bureaucratic channels, because the Byzantine bureaucracy deteriorated along with the state. The emperor also relied heavily upon the personal relationships between members of his court and foreigners within the imperial capital. When Constantine and his court possessed direct, personal relationships with influential foreigners, relations with their home states improved. In addition, the Byzantines created streamlined, coherent foreign policies toward those states. When the emperor or his court did not possess significant personal relationships with foreign elites, relations with those states suffered. Also, Constantine and his advisors could not create coherent foreign policies toward them.

In order to prove the impact that personal diplomacy had over diplomatic exchanges and foreign policy formation during the empire's final years, three distinct cases will be examined. The first, analyzing Constantine's relations with the Ottoman Turks, represents the failure of Byzantine personal diplomacy, and its effect upon the creation of foreign policy. Since the emperor and his court could not establish a close, beneficial relationship with any Turkish elites within Constantinople, they could not improve relations between the two groups. In addition, Byzantine foreign policy toward the Ottomans was haphazardly organized and contradicted itself on several occasions. The second case represents the success of Constantine's personal diplomatic approach,

examining his relations with the Papacy. Since the imperial administration was intimately familiar with several influential members of the Western Church, especially the papal legate sent to supervise the Union of the Churches in Constantinople, the Byzantines retained a direct link to the pope. The emperor also heeded the legate's expertise and implemented certain aspects of church union in order to gain needed military support for the empire's defense. The third case, Byzantine relations with the Venetians, also shows the efficacy of personal diplomacy. However, Constantine was only partially successful in this regard. While he was able to mobilize the considerable Venetian population of Constantinople to his cause with the support of their *baille*, he was unable to secure the Venetian Senate's aid until it was too late for Constantinople. Through each of these examples, the Byzantine administration's use of personal diplomacy will be examined.

CHAPTER TWO

On the Sources

In order to clearly understand Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos' diplomatic actions and foreign policies toward the Ottomans, the Papacy, and the Venetians, the major sources of this period must be examined. Each of these works also falls into one of two categories. Some sources, such as George Sphrantzes, Makarios Melissenos-Melissourgos, Doukas, Nicolò Barbaro, and Leonard of Chios, detail the events surrounding the final destruction of the Byzantine Empire, telling the tale from the Greek or Western Christian viewpoint. The final siege and fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in May 1453 occupies a central place in each of these narratives. Other sources, such as Kritovoulos and Tursun Beg, view the end of Byzantium through their discussion of Ottoman ascendancy. While both of their commentaries discuss Sultan Mehmed II's conquest of the Byzantine capital, this event opens their narratives, which focus upon the Ottoman Empire's expansion and consolidation under his rule. These sources are useful to understand Constantine's diplomatic and foreign policy actions for different reasons. However, each possesses limitations that must be examined.

The most informative source on Constantine XI's diplomatic activities is the *Chronicon Minus* of George Sphrantzes, the emperor's chief ambassador and close friend. Sphrantzes spent a considerable amount of time with Constantine, both during his tenure in the Morea and as emperor. As a result, Sphrantzes was privy to nearly all of his attempts to deter the Ottoman threat to Byzantium, which he details in his chronicle. In addition, Sphrantzes carefully describes each of his missions while acting as Constantine

XI's ambassador to other states. This is particularly valuable to a study of Byzantine foreign policy in the fifteenth century because his chronicle provides an eyewitness account of why certain actions succeeded and others failed during the emperor's quest to save Constantinople. He also includes his personal beliefs and opinions on Byzantine foreign relations, and as a member of the imperial court, describes the opinions of the emperor's other advisors. Since George Sphrantzes was present in Constantinople in the months prior to, as well as during, the city's siege by the Turks, his account of Constantine XI's actions in this period is also invaluable to a study of Byzantine foreign relations, especially toward the Ottoman Empire.

However, there are some problems with George Sphrantzes' *Chronicon Minus*. Sphrantzes often feuded with Constantine's other ministers as a member of his court, and these conflicts show throughout his writings. For example, he portrays Lucas Notaras, another respected and experienced advisor, in a negative way. He discredits his policies throughout the chronicle, and depicts him as selfish and apathetic toward the condition of the empire. This is in direct contrast to other sources, such as Doukas, which portray Notaras in more positive ways. Sphrantzes also shows a mistrust of Italians, especially the Venetians, in the *Chronicon Minus*. As a result, he barely mentions the emperor's considerable efforts to convince them to stay in the city during the Ottoman siege, or their role during the final assault. Despite these problems, George Sphrantzes' work is the most informative source on Byzantine diplomatic activities and foreign policy during the reign of Constantine XI.

Another source useful for understanding foreign policy creation during the last years of the Byzantine Empire is that of the "Pseudo-Sphrantzes," Makarios Melissenos-

Melissourgos. This work, which focuses primarily around the events immediately surrounding the siege of Constantinople, was initially attributed to Sphrantzes. However, scholars later discovered that this work was created by Melissenos, the metropolitan of Monemvasia around the time of the Battle of Lepanto in 1571. There are some obvious problems in using this source, since it details events occurring more than a century prior to its creation. While much of this account is pure fabrication, coming directly from the bishop's imagination, Marios Philippides has explained that certain sections of this work are credible. In specific sections of his siege account, Melissenos draws upon information from both George Sphrantzes' *Chronicon Minus* and Leonard of Chios' letter to Pope Nicholas V when writing his narrative.⁵² As a result, scholars are able to use Melissenos as a source if the information used is also reproduced in either Sphrantzes' or Leonard's work.⁵³ Therefore, this chronicle of the siege is useful as a point of comparison to these other two sources, as it helps to confirm the accuracy of their translations from Greek and Latin into English. Despite its shortcomings, Makarios Melissenos-Melissourgos's account is helpful for understanding Byzantine diplomacy and foreign policy and confirming the accuracy of other sources.

Doukas' history is another useful work for this period of Byzantine history. A resident of Lesbos, Doukas served the Genoese Gattilusio family as an ambassador to the Ottomans in the 1450s, and remained in the vicinity of Constantinople throughout the city's siege. As a result, he had access to firsthand accounts of the events leading to and surrounding Constantinople's fall. He collected testimony from monks and elites captured during the siege, as well as from Turkish soldiers who stormed the city. In

⁵² Marios Philippides. "The Fall of Constantinople: Bishop Leonard and the Greek Accounts." *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* v.22 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1981) 299.

⁵³ Philippides 300.

addition, his work for the Gattilusio family on Lesbos gave him access to further information that he used to write his history.⁵⁴ Therefore, Doukas' work provides a well-rounded, comprehensive perspective of the final years of Byzantium, synthesizing information from Greek, Latin, and Turkish sources. Unlike Sphrantzes' chronicle that focuses primarily upon his own travels without providing a general perspective, Doukas' history gives a clear overview of the events leading to the fall of Constantinople.

However, there are some problems with his work. Doukas is also vehemently anti-Ottoman in his writings and uses every opportunity to vilify the Turks. His hatred forces scholars to carefully consider the historian's portrayal of the Ottomans' actions to ensure that he does not misrepresent any Ottoman interactions with the Greeks. Doukas' accuracy on many of these interactions is confirmed by other contemporary authors, but his anti-Ottoman stance still merits caution when using his work. In addition, while Doukas was in the vicinity of Constantinople during the siege, he did not witness it firsthand, nor was he in the imperial capital at any time during Constantine XI's reign. As a result, his sections regarding the final Byzantine emperor must be compared to the other firsthand accounts, such as those of Sphrantzes, Nicolò Barbaro, or Leonard of Chios. Nonetheless, Doukas remains a generally reliable source on the final decades of Byzantium.

The siege diary of Nicolò Barbaro, a Venetian surgeon and resident of Constantinople, provides an excellent account of Venetian activities both prior to and during the city's siege in 1453. Barbaro's daily account provides a clear chronology of Byzantine actions shortly before and during the Ottoman siege, focusing mainly upon the Venetians in the capital, and Emperor Constantine's relations with them. Barbaro was

⁵⁴ Doukas 28.

present at several meetings held between the imperial administration and the Venetians, and describes their proceedings in his diary. While the diary is an excellent source for Venetian interactions with the emperor and for Venice's efforts during the siege, Barbaro's account also poses a major problem.

Nicolò Barbaro, a patriotic Venetian, holds considerable contempt for many Greeks (aside from the emperor) and the Genoese participating in Constantinople's defense. He constantly downplays the efforts of the Greek soldiers and noblemen during the siege. For example, he chastises the Byzantines for often abandoning their posts in the city during the crisis.⁵⁵ However, Barbaro fails to recognize that these soldiers left their positions to search for food in order to feed their starving families, since most of the Venetians in Constantinople left their families in Italy. Therefore, his lack of perspective leads to a strong anti-Greek sentiment within his diary. Barbaro also shows a typical Venetian hostility toward the Genoese, Venice's Italian rivals. He also minimizes the Genoese involvement in Constantinople's defense, and blames them for the city's eventual fall. Even with these limitations, Nicolò Barbaro provides the most comprehensive account of Venetian interactions with the Byzantines in the 1450s, especially with Emperor Constantine XI.

Leonard of Chios, bishop of Mytilene who accompanied Cardinal Isidore to Constantinople and assisted with the supervision of church union, presents another major source of this period. Present during the siege and capture of Constantinople, Leonard's account is written in a letter to Pope Nicholas V, informing him of the city's fall. This source is most valuable for its information regarding Constantine's actions while implementing union in the capital. Since Leonard was a close associate of Isidore, acting

⁵⁵ Barbaro 60.

as his aide during the mission to Byzantium, his letter also shows the cardinal's advice to the emperor concerning his application of that union. The emperor's selective implementation of union irritates Leonard, and this shows throughout his letter. He also generally disdains the Constantinopolitan citizenry for their opposition to the Roman church, as well as the Venetians in the city because of his Genoese heritage. Therefore, his characterizations of these people must be considered carefully and examined through this bias. However, his account is generally confirmed by other sources and is crucial to understanding the Byzantine implementation of church union during the empire's final years.

While each of the previous sources details Byzantium's fall from the Christian perspective, two major accounts view it from the Turkish one. Kritovoulos, governor of Imbros while the island was under Ottoman occupation in the 1450s and 1460s, describes the events leading to the fall of Constantinople from the viewpoint of Sultan Mehmed II. Kritovoulos' work begins with the ascendancy of Mehmed in 1451, providing a detailed summary of the sultan's relationship with Constantine XI, as well as the effect that the Byzantine emperor's efforts had upon Ottoman policy. His chronicle is also important because it provides a counterbalance to the strongly anti-Ottoman histories written by Greek authors, such as Doukas. Kritovoulos' position also gave him access to information regarding Turkish actions prior to the siege of Constantinople. For example, he provides considerable details of Mehmed II's fortress along the Bosphorus, *Rumeli Hisar*, and the emperor's attempts to dissuade the sultan from constructing it. While useful for this information, Kritovoulos wrote his work in order to gain the direct favor of Mehmed II in Constantinople, as he wanted the sultan to provide him with a pension once

he was removed from his governorship. Therefore, the Ottomans are not portrayed negatively, and the Greeks' efforts to save Constantinople from them are marginalized. In addition, since Kritovoulos was not present at the Ottoman court before the siege, his account relies upon information gathered approximately a decade after the events he describes. However, Kritovoulos' chronicle provides important information regarding the Ottoman perspective of Byzantine diplomatic overtures, as well as Turkish preparations for the assault upon Constantinople.

The history of Tursun Beg, a member of Sultan Mehmed II's court, also details the end of Byzantium from the Ottoman perspective. His proximity to the sultan provides information regarding Mehmed's relationship with his advisors, particularly his Grand Vizier Candarli Halil Pasha, whom the Byzantines tried to court. Tursun Beg's account, like that of Kritovoulos, also explains the effects that Constantine XI's diplomatic actions and foreign policy had upon the Ottoman Empire before Constantinople's fall. However, his explanation is brief. Tursun Beg instead focuses the majority of his work upon Mehmed's consolidation of power following the capture of Constantinople. Despite his brevity, Tursun Beg's history of Mehmed II's reign adds to the understanding of Byzantine diplomacy and foreign policy under Emperor Constantine XI.

While other accounts also show Constantine XI's and his court's reliance upon personal diplomacy to achieve their objectives, these seven sources constitute the main body of information regarding the Byzantine Empire of the fifteenth century. Each provides a unique insight into the events of the period, possessing different strengths and telling integral parts of the story. Even so, these sources must be used carefully. Each work possesses limitations and biases that influence the information that they purport to

present. These issues were dutifully considered before the works were used in this study. Even with their shortcomings, each of these accounts is invaluable to the study of mid-fifteenth century Byzantium.

CHAPTER THREE

Constantine and the Ottomans

Constantine XI Palaiologos' diplomatic actions and foreign policy toward the Ottoman Empire did not succeed because he and his administration did not have access to the expertise of Turkish elites. As a result, Constantine continued the policies of the previous Byzantine emperor, his brother John VIII, bracing the city for an Ottoman assault. In addition, the emperor alternated between confronting and supplicating the Turks, which eventually led to disaster. Constantine and his councilors attempted to court the widow of Sultan Murad II and the Ottoman Grand Vizier Candarli Halil Pasha to their cause, but did not succeed. Instead, Murad's widow remained apathetic toward the Greeks and Halil Pasha assisted Sultan Mehmed II's siege and assault upon Constantinople in the spring of 1453. When Constantine did not gain access to the Ottoman court through these elites, he relied upon his advisors for advice on a proper course of action toward the Turks. However, the emperor's advisors heavily relied upon foreign expertise. Since they did not have access to the Ottoman court, their cohesiveness disintegrated and they presented differing ideas of how to end the Ottoman threat to the imperial capital. Constantine XI vacillated between his advisors' opinions, alternately using strategies of aggression and supplication in order to dissuade a general assault upon Constantinople. These policies were unsuccessful. Without the presence of pro-Greek Ottoman political elites in the Byzantine capital, the emperor and his advisors could not formulate a coherent and effective policy toward the Ottoman Empire.

Constantine's actions were motivated by his court's inability to provide him with decisive advice for countering the Ottoman threat. By the mid-fifteenth century, the imperial court degenerated into an arena for personal vendettas and rivalries between Byzantine notables. While the Byzantine court was always a bastion of intrigue and revolution, from the days of Basil I to John V, the empire's last decade saw these rivalries increase dramatically. The drastic decrease in imperial territorial possessions led to a corresponding decrease in the size of the imperial administration. As a result, the shortage of qualified, capable individuals for imperial positions led emperors, beginning in the fourteenth century, to increasingly entrust sensitive positions and political activities to their own men of confidence.⁵⁶ When each new emperor promoted his own followers into important positions, they collided with the associates of the previous emperor, who were eager to retain their positions of influence within the imperial administration. The administration that Constantine XI inherited upon his accession to the Byzantine throne suffered from these same problems.⁵⁷ Even though the emperor reviewed each situation carefully, he relied upon his own expertise in military affairs, and relied upon his court's greater expertise in matters of diplomacy and foreign policy. The emperor often complained that his ministers were too busy feuding among themselves in order to secure their offices, that they did not concern themselves with the well being of the empire.⁵⁸ In addition, when they did offer advice to the emperor, the other ministers would constantly undermine their suggestions in an attempt to discredit that counselor in his eyes.⁵⁹ Such

⁵⁶ Oikonomides, *Byzantine Diplomacy, A.D. 1204-1453: Means and Ends* 78.

⁵⁷ Nestor-Iskander. *The Tale of Constantinople*. Trans. Walter K. Hanak and Marios Philippides (New Rochelle: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1998) 33.

⁵⁸ Sphrantzes 68.

⁵⁹ Sphrantzes 63.

conditions plagued Emperor Constantine's administration and severely hindered his ability to reach decisions regarding a policy toward the Ottoman Empire.

Each of Constantine XI's advisors held a different position regarding relations with the Ottoman Turks. One of the emperor's most prominent advisors was Lucas Notaras, the *megadux*, or grand admiral of the Byzantine navy. While Byzantium no longer possessed any significant naval forces, this position was expanded into that of an informal prime minister. Notaras gained his position of *megadux* from Emperor John VIII, who considered Notaras a close friend.⁶⁰ However, he did not gain his position solely based upon imperial patronage. Lucas Notaras accompanied John VIII on several diplomatic missions before his promotion and was widely considered throughout the Christian world as a man of great experience.⁶¹ The *megadux* Notaras not only gained the trust of John VIII, but also became close friends with his brother Constantine. Notaras also traveled with Constantine during his campaigns against the Franks as despot of the Morea. In fact, the two became so close that Notaras attended Constantine's first wedding on the island of Lesbos.⁶² Therefore, his views carried a high degree of influence with the emperor during his deliberations over a proper course of action toward the Ottoman Empire.

Notaras believed that any relationship with the Turks had to focus upon dissuading them from attacking the imperial capital. The *megadux* believed that the defense of Constantinople should be the emperor's first priority, and any action that could potentially relieve the Turkish threat to the city should be exploited. However, he believed that the best course of action toward the Ottomans was to stall for time while

⁶⁰ Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 47.

⁶¹ Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 15.

⁶² Sphrantzes 52; Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 18.

Byzantium asked the western Christians for aid. If Constantinople's fortifications could hold out against Ottoman advances for enough time, Notaras believed that the Western Christian powers would eventually come to Byzantium's aid.⁶³ In order to achieve this, the Byzantines needed to exploit instabilities within the Ottoman court, stirring up pretenders to the throne and rival Turkish emirates to distract the sultan from the conquest of Constantinople. In addition, Lucas Notaras believed that any action taken by the Turks against the city would require so much time because of the city's fortifications, that the Latin Christians could intervene on behalf of Byzantium.⁶⁴ Throughout Constantine's reign, the *megadux* stubbornly and vocally maintained this position, often antagonizing the emperor's other close associates, such as George Sphrantzes.⁶⁵ Lucas Notaras' notable reputation amongst Byzantine citizens gained him many allies among the lesser nobles and Greek merchants within Constantinople, further enhancing the power of his ideas. The emperor's close relationship with the *megadux* caused him to seriously consider Notaras' proposals.

Another important advisor of Constantine XI was George Sphrantzes, the emperor's closest friend and associate since his reign as despot, who provided a counterweight to the views of Lucas Notaras. Sphrantzes grew up in the imperial court of Manuel II, eventually entering the service of John VIII upon his accession to the Byzantine throne. Constantine, realizing Sphrantzes' talents, requested and received his services from John VIII.⁶⁶ Until Constantine became emperor in 1448, George

⁶³ Nestor-Iskander 59; Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 60.

⁶⁴ Nestor-Iskander 59. "Lord Lucas... fell silent for a long time... then spoke... 'Begging God's grace, and if it be His will, we can withstand another five-month siege [of Constantinople].'"

⁶⁵ Leonard of Chios in *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts*. Trans. J.R. Melville-Jones (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1972) 29.

⁶⁶ Sphrantzes 30.

Sphrantzes was his personal assistant in the Morea, serving the despot during his numerous military campaigns against the Frankish lords.⁶⁷ During this time, Sphrantzes' relationship to Constantine grew from a professional to a personal one. In fact, the two became so close of friends that Constantine was both best man at his wedding and godfather to both of his children.⁶⁸ As a result, when he became emperor, Constantine brought Sphrantzes to the imperial capital, promoting him to the office of First Lord of the Imperial Wardrobe. In this position, George Sphrantzes possessed more access than any other imperial official to the imperial residence, giving him the ability to greatly influence the emperor's opinion.

George Sphrantzes held a very cautious position toward the Ottoman Turks, especially upon the accession of Mehmed II. Sphrantzes advocated an even more careful position than Lucas Notaras, whom he believed unnecessarily risked antagonizing the new sultan. In addition, Sphrantzes opposed Notaras because he and the *megadux* rarely cooperated with each other.⁶⁹ He believed that Murad II, Mehmed's father, was a threat to Byzantium's survival while he was a young man, but posed little threat to the empire during his later years. Sphrantzes knew that he merely wished to live the remainder of his life in peace.⁷⁰ However, the young Mehmed, only nineteen years old at his father's death in 1449, was entirely different. George Sphrantzes believed that directly antagonizing the new sultan would give him the pretext necessary to begin a war with the Greeks, eventually leading to the fall of Constantinople. During a conversation with the King of Trebizond, Sphrantzes reveals this opinion:

⁶⁷ Sphrantzes 32-40.

⁶⁸ Sphrantzes 52.

⁶⁹ Sphrantzes 68.

⁷⁰ Sphrantzes 59: "The late sultan was an old man, had given up the conquest of our City [Constantinople], and had no desire of attempting anything like it again; he only wished for friendship and peace."

This man, who just became sultan, is young and an enemy of the Christians since childhood; he threatens with proud spirit that he will put in operation certain plans against the Christians... If God should grant that the young sultan be overcome by his youth and evil nature and march against our City, I know not what will happen. Indeed God would have granted a joyous occasion if this man, Murad's son, had died instead.⁷¹

Therefore, George Sphrantzes clearly opposed any hostile policies toward the Ottoman Empire. He did agree with the *megadux* that the Byzantines should seek aid from the west, but wanted to do so in a discrete manner to avoid Ottoman attention. Like Lucas Notaras, the First Lord of the Imperial Wardrobe commanded a vast amount of respect both from the Greek nobility and the Constantinopolitan citizenry. Emperor Constantine XI also seriously considered following Sphrantzes' proposed course of action.

In addition to these two major forces, Constantine entertained the opinions of many other lesser counselors. Andronikos Kantakouzenos, the Grand Domestic, was another of Constantine's ministers advocating aggressive actions toward the Ottomans. As commander-in-chief of the Byzantine army, Kantakouzenos wished to use the military to exploit weaknesses in the Ottoman Empire. Much like the *megadux*, the Grand Domestic wanted to take advantage of the constant rebellions and uprisings they faced in Anatolia from other Turkish groups under Ottoman suzerainty. A zealous Unionist, Kantakouzenos believed that if Western aid promised by the Council of Florence arrived, the combined Christian forces would re-conquer the European and Asiatic provinces for Christianity.⁷² Constantine and the Grand Domestic often quarreled over the imperial positions toward other states, especially Serbia. While Constantine was proud of his mother's Serbian heritage and favored the idea of improving relations between

⁷¹ Sphrantzes 59.

⁷² Donald M. Nicol. *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus) 1100 – 1460* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1968) no. 68 180.

Byzantium and Serbia, Kantakouzenos fundamentally mistrusted the Serbian state, opposing any sort of rapprochement between the two states.⁷³ As a result, the emperor did not fully trust the Grand Domestic's foreign policy advice. The Byzantine army's extreme decline in the fifteenth century also marginalized Andronikos Kantakouzenos in the imperial court, since the small size of the regular forces limited his influence. Therefore, his foreign policy suggestions were less influential than those of Lucas Notaras or George Sphrantzes.

Demetrios Palaiologos Kantakouzenos, a cousin of Emperor Constantine XI, also held a lesser position in the imperial administration as one of the emperor's minor advisors. Demetrios Kantakouzenos served both in the Constantinopolitan administration of John VIII and in the Morea under Despot Constantine.⁷⁴ He was instrumental in convincing John VIII that releasing the Ottoman pretender Mustafa, a political prisoner held hostage in Constantinople in 1422, would greatly benefit the empire.⁷⁵ While this plan ultimately failed, and proved to be a complete disaster for Byzantium, Demetrios did not lose all of his influence in the imperial court. During Constantine's reign, he also advocated similarly aggressive actions against the Ottoman Turks, most notably through the release and exploitation of pretenders to the Ottoman throne, such as Prince Orhan. As a result, Demetrios Palaiologos Kantakouzenos became a lesser ally of Lucas Notaras, although his previous debacle somewhat crippled his prestige amongst the Constantinopolitan elites.

Several other lesser Greek notables vacillated over Emperor Constantine's Ottoman policy during his reign. Another member of the Kantakouzenos family, John,

⁷³ Sphrantzes 63.

⁷⁴ Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 15.

⁷⁵ Nicol, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos* no. 75 192-194.

served as governor of Patras and Corinth in the Morea under Constantine until joining the emperor in Constantinople in 1449. He also believed that aggressive action was necessary for Byzantium's survival, but agreed to abide by whatever course of action the emperor chose to follow.⁷⁶ Other Byzantine advisors, such as Theophilos Palaiologos, carried similar views. Instead of creating innovative ways of countering the Ottoman threat, they merely wished to ingratiate themselves with the new emperor. As a result, these advisors were useless to Constantine during his decision making processes.

While these ministers provided Emperor Constantine with varying degrees of advice on the Ottoman problem, several of his trusted advisors were unable to provide suggested actions because of their deaths prior to his reign. Another Greek notable, the *protostrator* Manuel Kantakouzenos, provided the emperor with sound advice throughout his tenure in the Morea regarding the Franks. Constantine fully trusted his views.⁷⁷ However, Manuel died sometime before 1451, and Constantine could not turn to him for advice on his Ottoman policy during his reign as emperor.⁷⁸ Yet another Greek that influenced Constantine XI, although in an informal way, was his mother Helena. The empress always favored Constantine among her children, even securing the throne for him upon John VIII's death in 1448, amidst claims by one of her other sons, Demetrios. As emperor, Constantine heavily relied upon his mother's advice until her death on March 23, 1450, shortly after his accession. Once she died, the emperor did not know whom to fully rely upon for advice.⁷⁹ As a result of the varying positions regarding the Ottoman Turks among Constantine's closest associates, the indecision of significant

⁷⁶ Nicol, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos* no. 80 197-198.

⁷⁷ Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 47.

⁷⁸ Nicol, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos* no. 63 172-173.

⁷⁹ Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople 1453* 53.

segments of the Byzantine lesser nobility, and the loss of crucial people in his life, the emperor continued to use stalling tactics against the Ottoman Empire rather than adopt a new strategy.

The Byzantine court's reliance upon personal diplomacy during Constantine XI's reign shows through George Sphrantzes' proposed marriage alliance with Mara Branković of Serbia in 1451. Mara had been the wife of Sultan Murad II, and a highly regarded presence in the Ottoman court, especially by her stepson, Mehmed II. In fact, Mehmed respected the Sultana Mara so much that upon his father's death, the new sultan allowed her to return to her father's house in Serbia.⁸⁰ While the sultana was nearing middle age, calling her ability to produce an heir into question, George Sphrantzes believed that a marriage between Mehmed's stepmother and Constantine would greatly benefit Byzantium and forestall any future Turkish assault upon Constantinople.⁸¹ Mara's respect and reputation among the Ottoman court could also potentially guarantee several concessions by the Turks, helping to revitalize the Byzantine state.

Constantine XI wholeheartedly supported George Sphrantzes' proposition upon hearing of it. However, rivalries within the Byzantine court led several ministers to oppose the marriage, casting doubts in the emperor's mind concerning its viability. While Sphrantzes believed in the merits of this marriage alliance, Grand Domestic Andronikos Kantakouzenos and Governor John Kantakouzenos disputed its usefulness because of

⁸⁰ Colin Imber. *The Ottoman Empire 1300 – 1481* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1990) 145. Imber also states that Mehmed also granted his stepmother a fief near Mount Athos in 1457 when she resettled in Ottoman territory. Later, Mehmed granted her monastic lands near Thessalonika.

⁸¹ Sphrantzes 60: George Sphrantzes, in a letter to Constantine XI regarding the proposed marriage, had very few reservations against it. He stated that four possible objections existed: "(1) Her family is inferior to yours; (2) the Church may object on the grounds of close kinship; (3) she has been married already; and (4) she is older and there is the factor that she may be in danger during childbirth, a common risk according to physicians." Sphrantzes believed he could counter these objections during any deliberation of the Byzantine court.

their extreme mistrust of the Serbian state.⁸² As a result, Constantine was paralyzed by the contradictory recommendations of his associates. Sphrantzes details the emperor's frustration with the discord within his court: "On whom could I have relied? On the monks? They are far impractical in such matters. On the nobles? Whom could I have found so impartial to keep it to himself?"⁸³ Constantine's subsequent hesitation in making a decision regarding the marriage alliance without strong support in his court became inconsequential soon after the proposal had circulated among the elites in Constantinople, as Mara had no desire to remarry.⁸⁴

Mara's refusal to remarry signaled the death knell of George Sphrantzes' proposal and also showed the failure of the Byzantines' strategy of personal diplomacy toward the Ottoman Turks. Since the reign of Manuel II, Byzantine emperors attempted to strengthen the bonds between Byzantine and Ottoman elites and rulers. Manuel carefully cultivated a relationship with Sultan Mehmed I, eventually establishing a peaceful exchange between the two states.⁸⁵ George Sphrantzes tried to accomplish this for Constantine and Mehmed II as well. By associating Mehmed's beloved stepmother with the Byzantine emperor, Sphrantzes hoped to create a parental relationship between them. While Mara's refusal to marry ended this particular endeavor, Sphrantzes was discouraged from trying similar tactics again because of the discord and problems this event caused among the imperial court and the emperor himself.

Since the proactive elements of Constantine's court were discouraged from establishing new personal relationships with elites within the Ottoman Empire, the

⁸² Sphrantzes 63.

⁸³ Sphrantzes 63.

⁸⁴ Sphrantzes 62; Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 45: Mara Branković made a vow that if she ever escaped from the Muslim court, she would rededicate her life to God and remain celibate until her death.

⁸⁵ Barker 288.

Byzantines tried to use existing relationships that were cultivated during the reigns of Manuel II and John VIII. The most important relationship for Byzantium was with Candarli Halil Pasha, Grand Vizier to both Murad II and Mehmed II. For decades, Greek nobles sent bribes to the vizier in Adrianople in order to gain his trust and favor.⁸⁶ Such actions were successful, and Halil Pasha became well known for his friendly disposition toward the Byzantine Empire. In fact, even Italians knew of Halil's relationship with the Greeks. The Florentine Tetaldi, who defended Constantinople in 1453, describes Candarli Halil as "the Christians' friend."⁸⁷ The vizier's conciliatory nature was also known among the Turks, who called him *gavur ortagi*.⁸⁸ The Greeks' bribery did succeed to a degree, as Halil Pasha occasionally spoke in favor of Byzantium. For example, Halil was one of the most outspoken opponents of an assault upon Constantinople, since he believed it would unnecessarily antagonize the Italian merchant states and because the city's fortifications were too strong to overcome.⁸⁹

However, the Greeks overestimated their influence over the Ottoman Grand Vizier. While Halil Pasha did speak in favor of Byzantium, he did so because it was in the Ottomans' best interest. While Greek bribes encouraged him to loudly voice his opinions that coincided with Byzantine interests, he was still fundamentally loyal to the Ottoman state. In addition, once Mehmed II rose to the throne in 1451, Halil Pasha lost a considerable amount of influence over the sultan. While Murad II had often looked to him for advice and viewed him as a close friend, Mehmed resented the control that Halil

⁸⁶ Doukas 193: He explains that in addition to being "affable and gentle in manner," Halil "welcomed bribes."

⁸⁷ Tetaldi in *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts*. Trans. J.R. Melville-Jones (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1972) 7.

⁸⁸ Doukas 202: "The companion or helper of the infidels."

⁸⁹ Leonard of Chios 31.

held over him. In 1444, Murad II attempted to retire to a private life of contemplation, leaving the Ottoman government in the hands of Mehmed. However, the Crusade of Varna crossed into Turkish territory shortly thereafter, and the young sultan did not possess the knowledge necessary to defeat them. As a result, Halil Pasha led a group of advisors and army commanders that forced the young sultan to recall his father Murad to the throne.⁹⁰ Mehmed, after being sequestered at Manisa, never forgave Halil for his transgression. Instead, he turned to Halil's archenemy, Zaganos Pasha, for advice. Zaganos had served as Mehmed's tutor during his exile at Manisa, and followed the sultan to Adrianople upon his succession in 1451. Zaganos took advantage of every opportunity to berate and undermine Halil Pasha while at the Ottoman court, and slowly usurped the latter's influence and responsibilities in Mehmed's government.⁹¹ As a result, Candarli Halil Pasha no longer held a significant amount of influence over the sultan's actions, as he had during the reign of Murad II. In fact, he was later executed by the sultan for his misconduct and relations with the Greeks shortly after the fall of Constantinople.⁹²

This misguided reliance upon Halil Pasha led the Byzantine Empire to disaster. Constantine's aggressively anti-Turkish advisors, led by Andronikos and Demetrios Palaiologos Kantakouzenos, convinced the emperor to blatantly provoke the Ottomans because they believed Byzantium had the vizier's unconditional support. They thought that even if their provocation was unsuccessful, Halil Pasha would intervene on the Greeks behalf to prevent disaster. As a result, Constantine sent a mission to Mehmed

⁹⁰ Tursun Beg. *The History of Mehmed the Conqueror*. Trans. Halil Inalcik and Rhoads Murphey (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1978) 32.

⁹¹ Tursun Beg 32-34.

⁹² Kritovoulos. *History of Mehmed the Conqueror*. Trans. Charles T. Riggs (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954) 87-88.

explaining that unless Prince Orhan's annuity was doubled, the Byzantines would release him as a rival claimant to the Ottoman throne.⁹³ Halil Pasha, instead of supporting the emperor's demands, railed against them. He scolded the Byzantine ambassadors, saying:

O stupid and foolish Romans, I know your cunning ways from long ago. Leave well enough alone! The deceased ruler was gentle and to all he was a sincere friend and a man of upright conscience. Our present ruler Mehmed, however, is not of the same disposition as you seem to imagine. If Constantinople succeeds in escaping from his hands – I speak of his insolence, savagery, and violence – then I will know that God still ignores your machinations and perversions... We are not children without sense or strength. If there is something you can do, do it... Be certain, however, that you will not succeed in any of these projects. Instead, that which you think is yours will be taken from you. Nonetheless, I will make your message known to my lord, and let it be as he wishes.⁹⁴

Halil agreed to present the Byzantines' demands to the sultan, but refused to support them. The result was disastrous. Mehmed continued his preparations to take the city.

In addition, when the sultan finally decided to undertake the siege and assault of Constantinople, Halil Pasha provided him with his assistance. When summoned to the sultan's bedchamber and ordered to help plan the conquest of Constantinople, Halil did not attempt to dissuade Mehmed from the endeavor.⁹⁵ On the contrary, the vizier offered his expertise to take the city. Doukas characterizes Halil through his speech to the sultan: "Lord, God who has given you the greater portion of the land of the Romans, will also grant you the City [Constantinople]. I am convinced that she will not slip through your

⁹³ Doukas 192-193. The historian relates the message of the Byzantine embassy: "The Emperor of the Romans does not accept the annual sum of three hundred thousand silver coins. Orhan, who is like your ruler Mehmed, a son of Osman, has reached the age of maturity. Every day many flock to him calling him lord and proclaiming him ruler. He desires to display his munificence by making lavish gifts, but he has nowhere to stretch forth his hands. Demands cannot be made upon the emperor because he is not prosperous enough to comply with the requests. We offer you, therefore, one of two alternatives: either double the annuity or we will release Orhan."

⁹⁴ Doukas 193.

⁹⁵ Kritovoulos 33. "But those [including Candarli Halil] whose ideas were against the step for various reasons and especially because of the misfortunes they had had in the war and the difficulties usually attendant on it, wanted to advise against making war. However, seeing the insistence and zeal of the Sultan, they were afraid, as it seems to me, and unwillingly yielded and were carried along with the majority. So the war was sanctioned."

hands. Together with God and your might, I and all your servants will fight as one, not only with our wealth but also with our flesh and blood. You may be certain of that.”⁹⁶

While Halil answered in this way out of fear for his life, this incident shows that the grand vizier’s ultimate loyalties were not to the Greeks, but to the sultan who held Halil’s very life within his hands. The Byzantines efforts of personal diplomacy had failed.

The Greeks also overestimated the value of their bribery to the Ottoman grand vizier. While Byzantine nobles provided Halil with considerable gifts in the form of art and gold, they could not compete with the gifts and salary provided by the Ottoman sultan himself. Mehmed II, like most Ottomans, knew that the grand vizier accepted bribes in order to voice certain opinions that were favorable to Byzantium. While he could have merely sacked the vizier, the sultan instead used the Greeks’ own tactics against them. The sultan provided all of his advisors with lavish gifts that were far larger than anything Byzantium could afford.⁹⁷ As a result, Mehmed secured Halil’s loyalty, as well as the loyalty of all his close advisors, by preempting any foreign attempts to bribe them.

The Byzantines were also forced to rely upon their relationship with Candarli Halil Pasha because they did not have access to any of Mehmed’s tutors or advisors before he became sultan. The Greeks’ weak relationship with Halil Pasha required years of effort to build, spanning much of Sultan Murad II’s reign. This process was expedited

⁹⁶ Doukas 202.

⁹⁷ Zorzi Dolfin in *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts*. Trans. J.R. Melville-Jones (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1972) 127. Dolfin explains that the sultan rewarded his court well. Mehmed “displayed to them a great quantity of gold, pearls, golden trappings and other treasures. Next, after they had eaten, he told them that he had brought these riches for them to take; he knew that the Christians with their bribes were trying to dissuade them from besieging and capturing Constantinople... he believed that they would show greater honesty by accepting presents from him, rather than from the Christians.” However, this could merely be an example of the sultan providing his advisors with generous salaries in general, not just on this occasion.

because of Halil's location in Adrianople, Murad's capital.⁹⁸ Byzantine and Ottoman merchants participated in a very brisk and profitable trade between Adrianople and Constantinople, and it was therefore possible to reach the Ottoman vizier with messages and gifts.⁹⁹ However, Mehmed and his advisors resided in Manisa, which was less easily accessible to Byzantine travelers. As a result, the imperial administration knew very little about the nature of Mehmed's court and had no opportunities to develop relations with any of its members through bribery or other means.

Since the Byzantines' efforts of personal diplomacy were unsuccessful, the imperial administration resorted to disjointed actions toward the Ottoman Empire. When the gamble over Prince Orhan failed, Constantine XI chose to follow his predecessors' policies of superficial appeasement and supplication of the sultan. The emperor hoped to use this deference to gain time to develop a cohesive plan of action concerning the Ottomans. This was shown during Constantine's confirmation as Emperor of the Romans. Since Byzantium was essentially a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire, the sultan often oversaw changes in leadership. When John VIII died on October 31, 1448 without an heir, his two brothers Constantine and Demetrios contested the Byzantine throne. While Demetrios, a fervent opponent of the west, had the support of the anti-Unionist faction in Constantinople, Constantine was significantly more popular both in the Morea and in Constantinople. In addition, he possessed the support of his mother, Empress Helena, which added overwhelming credibility to Constantine's claim to the empire. However, since the Byzantines were technically vassals of the Ottoman sultan, Constantine agreed to submit the Byzantine succession to Murad II for arbitration. Such

⁹⁸ Tursun Beg 32.

⁹⁹ Klaus-Peter Matschke, "The Late Byzantine Urban Economy, Thirteenth-Fifteenth Centuries" 473.

an act of deference was extremely uncharacteristic of Constantine, especially because of his previous actions toward the Ottomans. On December 6, 1448, George Sphrantzes led an embassy to Murad's court, and Constantine was chosen as the Byzantine emperor.¹⁰⁰ The new emperor hoped that his deference to Ottoman authority would help pacify the sultan while he deliberated on ways to combat the Turks. Once Sphrantzes returned from his embassy, the emperor sent Murad lavish gifts to commemorate a new period of peace between them.¹⁰¹ Through this episode, Constantine showed false obsequiousness toward Murad II in order to mask his true anti-Turkish sentiments. This was shown through his attacks in Greece during and after the Crusade of Varna.

Constantine also used acts of deference toward Murad's son Mehmed in an attempt to stall for more time to create an effective Turkish policy. The historian Doukas intimates that the Greeks were among the first to greet and congratulate the new sultan upon Murad's death.¹⁰² Constantine clearly wanted to placate young Mehmed for the immediate future, while Byzantium committed to a strategy that would undermine Ottoman power around the Aegean. The emperor's embassy succeeded in creating a truce with the sultan, creating another temporary respite from Ottoman hostility. However, such a truce was just as beneficial to Mehmed as it was to Constantine, as the sultan needed time to secure his rule over his empire. Mehmed extended several concessions to the emperor, offering a perpetual peace with Byzantium as well as an annual stipend for the maintenance of Prince Orhan, a rival claimant to the Ottoman throne held as a

¹⁰⁰ Sphrantzes 57: "The empress, the brothers, right of birth, and the love and wisdom of nearly the whole population of the City chose Lord Constantine emperor. The sultan approved the choice and sent me away with honors and gifts."

¹⁰¹ Doukas 186: "Constantine immediately sent ambassadors to Murad to pacify him with gifts and conciliatory messages, thus removing all animosity between them."

¹⁰² Doukas 191: He explains that the Byzantines met with Mehmed before "the inhabitants of Serbia, Bulgaria and the islands, Mitylenaeans, Chians, Rhodians, and the Genoese of Galata."

political prisoner in Constantinople.¹⁰³ Through this superficial act, Constantine received a peace allowing the Byzantines more time to formulate a cohesive and effective Ottoman policy. In addition, this embassy served as a fact-finding mission for the Byzantines, who knew very little about the young new sultan.

Constantine XI based his acts of supplication and deference upon those of his father. Emperor Manuel II often used acts in order to stall Ottoman aggression against the shrinking empire. For example, when Sultan Murad I sought to absorb Constantinople into his realm amidst Byzantine civil strife in 1379, Manuel encouraged his father, John V, to offer himself to the Ottoman ruler as a vassal.¹⁰⁴ This supplication worked, and the Ottomans shifted their attention to more pressing concerns on their borders. Manuel also used this policy of appeasement to his advantage in 1387, after attempting several aggressive actions while despot of Thessalonika. Once his offensives were halted and the Ottomans laid siege to Thessalonika, Manuel turned once again to supplication. He arranged a meeting with Murad I in the Ottoman capital of Brusa, where he acknowledged the sultan's suzerainty over him.¹⁰⁵ As a result, the despot was allowed to continue to rule in Thessalonika. Such actions also allowed the young Manuel time to develop new strategies to combat the Ottomans and save his empire. Emperor Constantine XI used these actions as templates for his own policy toward the Ottoman Empire, since his advisors and counselors could not present him with a decisive strategy.

¹⁰³ Doukas 191: Constantine XI was granted revenue of over 300,000 silver pieces, a considerable sum of money for Orhan's upkeep, from villages along the Strymon River in Mehmed's treaty with Byzantium in 1451.

¹⁰⁴ Barker 34: John V and Manuel II offered to pay the sultan a large annual tribute, provide military forces for service with the Ottoman army, and surrender the last Byzantine possessions in Asia Minor, most notably the city of Philadelphia.

¹⁰⁵ Barker 63: John Barker explains that this supplication was "a bitter pill for Manuel to swallow, to have to bow before the victor."

Even after Mehmed's intentions of military action against Constantine became clear, the emperor tried to stall the sultan with diplomatic overtures, trying in vain to stave off the Ottomans until the Byzantines could develop a counter to the siege of Constantinople. When Mehmed began building the fortress of *Rumeli Hisar*, Constantine realized that his city was in danger of being starved of supplies. Therefore, the emperor sent numerous embassies to the sultan to try to prevent its creation. Constantine's ambassadors stated that when Sultan Mehmed I wished to build a fortress on the Asian side of the Bosphorus, he asked for the permission of Emperor Manuel II "like a son importuning his father."¹⁰⁶ When Mehmed refused to ask for Constantine's permission to build his fortress, the emperor turned to supplication. He offered to pay the Ottomans a large annual indemnity if work on *Rumeli Hisar* would cease, and sent the Ottoman authorities daily gifts to dissuade them from finishing the fortress' construction.¹⁰⁷ However, the Byzantines' attempts to stall Ottoman efforts against Constantinople were unsuccessful.

Emperor Constantine XI's actions toward the Turks while despot of the Morea (from 1443 to 1448) show that he preferred to take decisive, aggressive action against the Ottomans, and that his acts of deference were merely a stalling tactic. The emperor, while ruling southern Greece, was clearly anti-Turkish in his views and policies. Constantine's earliest actions against the Ottomans coincided with the Crusade of Varna, launched from Hungary in 1444. The Byzantines learned of the crusade in 1443, when John VIII went on a hunting expedition with the Italian traveler Cyriacus of Ancona.¹⁰⁸ The Greeks

¹⁰⁶ Doukas 195.

¹⁰⁷ Doukas 197.

¹⁰⁸ Oskar Halecki. *The Crusade of Varna: A Discussion of Controversial Problems* (New York: Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, 1943) 25-26.

thought of the crusade in two ways. First, they believed that if the Hungarians could fight their way to Constantinople, the city's immediate encirclement would be relieved. They could then concentrate on re-conquering Thrace from the weakened Turks. Second, the Greeks of the Morea, Constantine included, counted upon the crusade to provide a necessary distraction so that they could reoccupy portions of central Greece.¹⁰⁹

The despot used the distraction that the Western crusaders provided to conquer several cities and towns from the Turks in Attica and Thessaly. The chronicler Doukas explains that Constantine “foresaw the total destruction of the Turks” during his campaign throughout late 1444 and 1445.¹¹⁰ While the despot made considerable gains early in the campaign, once the crusaders were defeated at Varna, the sultan could focus his attention upon the Greeks.¹¹¹ Despite overwhelming numbers of Turkish troops, Constantine refused to return control of the conquered territories to Sultan Murad II. Instead, he prepared for battle at the newly refortified *Hexamilion* wall across the Isthmus of Corinth.¹¹² The Byzantines of the Morea also placed more emphasis upon exploiting human weaknesses in siege warfare than upon technological advantage, since they did not possess the financial resources necessary to outpace the Ottomans in military

¹⁰⁹ Halecki 30.

¹¹⁰ Doukas 185.

¹¹¹ For more information on Despot Constantine's campaigns against the Turks and Franks in central Greece, see George Ostrogorsky. *History of the Byzantine State*, Trans. Joan Hussey (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1969.) Constantine's Moreote campaigns are detailed on pages 566 and 567.

¹¹² Doukas 185. Constantine had refortified the isthmian wall in 1443, shortly after he became despot of the Morea. He firmly believed it could withstand any assault by the Turks, as it possessed a series of advanced forts and towers, and was sufficiently manned by Moreote, Frankish, and Albanian troops. The despot was also heartened by a series of prophecies concerning the inviolability of the isthmian fortifications. One of which stated: “When dust holds pine and pine receives gore, then will the Isthmus' enclosure grow strong; and justice will come to the race of Hellenes from heaven, along with good fortune, and she will subject to the yoke their former shameless destroyers. Most blessed is he who for the fourth time will fortify the Isthmus, the land of the earth-shaker.” Since Constantine was in fact the fourth ruler to fortify the isthmus, he firmly believed he would succeed. For more information regarding isthmian prophecy in the mid fifteenth century, see Edward W. Bodnar, “The Isthmian Fortifications in Oracular Prophecy” *American Journal of Archaeology* 64.2 (April 1960): 165-171.

technology.¹¹³ Therefore, the isthmian walls were built in a medieval fashion, and did not possess any defensive artillery to discourage an Ottoman assault. Constantine misjudged the quality of his fortifications, as Murad, using gunpowder artillery, smashed through them and routed the defenders.¹¹⁴ The Turks took over 60,000 prisoners, and Constantine barely escaped with his life.¹¹⁵ This episode shows Constantine's tendency toward rash, aggressive actions against the Ottoman Turks even before his accession to the Byzantine throne.

However, the emperor's actions did have a historical premise. Constantine based these tactics on previous actions of Manuel II, during his tenure as despot of Thessalonika. Manuel, in defiance of his father John V's instructions, began military operations against the Turks surrounding Thessalonika in the late fourteenth century.¹¹⁶ Manuel attempted to use upheavals within the Ottoman Empire to weaken the Turkish position in Macedonia, using these distractions to reoccupy several towns and villages in the area around Thessalonika. However, the Ottomans restored order and the sultan easily crushed Manuel, as he did to Constantine less than fifty years later. In fact, Manuel's actions directly caused the loss of Thessalonika to the Turks in the first years of the fifteenth century. Since Constantine believed that circumstances, not Manuel's actions, caused his plans to fail, the despot believed that the plans would succeed because of the massive distraction caused by the Hungarian crusaders. While Constantine's plan also failed, this episode shows his offensive tendencies toward the Ottoman Turks.

¹¹³ Eric McGeer. "Byzantine Siege Warfare in Theory and Practice." *The Medieval City under Siege*. Eds. Ivy A. Corfis and Michael Wolfe (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1995) 129.

¹¹⁴ Sphrantzes 56.

¹¹⁵ Doukas 185-186.

¹¹⁶ Barker 46.

The only concrete policy that Emperor Constantine XI insisted upon regarding the Ottoman Empire was the refortification of Constantinople. The Byzantine emperor was a soldier above all else, and fundamentally believed that diplomacy would eventually give way to military action and a siege by the Ottomans.¹¹⁷ Shortly after Constantine's accession in 1448, he ordered Constantinopolitan citizens to requisition large amounts of grain and other supplies to help the city withstand a siege by the Ottoman Turks.¹¹⁸ In addition, the emperor began transferring the population of Constantinople's hinterland into the confines of the city. Constantine feared for their safety in the event of war, and wanted to forestall any Turkish actions against them.¹¹⁹ Emperor Constantine's belief that diplomatic overtures toward the Ottomans would fail led to these safeguards for Byzantine citizens.

This belief is also a cause of Constantine's monumental efforts to repair Constantinople's triple land walls. Upon his accession to the throne, he immediately assigned his kinsman Manuel Palaeologus Iagrus the task of restoring the land walls damaged during Murad II's abortive siege of the city in 1422. Despite the city's lack of financial resources, the work was dutifully completed by the end of 1452.¹²⁰ After their restoration, the land walls facing the Lycus Valley were extremely formidable.¹²¹ The inner wall, the largest of the three, was over 25 feet high and over eight feet thick, with

¹¹⁷ Barbaro 23. "When the emperor reflected that whatever happened the Turks would come to attack the wretched city of Constantinople, and since all the city walls were very strong and thick, from ten to twelve feet or more, except that those of the palace were very weak and without barbicans or ditches, he therefore began to make arrangements to provide the palace also with fortifications, so that if the Turks came, they should not be able to do any damage."

¹¹⁸ Doukas 197.

¹¹⁹ Doukas 199. "Foreseeing the future, the emperor diligently prepared the City's fortifications and moved inside those villagers living nearby. The harvested wheat and winnowing fans were also brought inside"

¹²⁰ Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople 1453* 92.

¹²¹ Konstantin Mihailović. *Memoirs of a Janissary*. Trans. Benjamin Stolz (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1975) 93. The Constantinopolitan defenses are characterized by "fine strong, and high walls and thick towers."

the outer wall standing at 15 feet with a thickness of nearly six feet. In addition, the outer moat was cleared of debris and refilled, providing the city with even more protection.¹²²

While Iagrus possessed sufficient resources, as well as the city's skilled masons, to restore the walls to a prime medieval condition, he did not have enough money to modernize the fortifications to support and defend against gunpowder artillery. In fact, most medieval cities did not possess the resources necessary to modernize their defenses, since the new building materials of choice, such as granite, were extremely expensive.¹²³ In addition, Ottoman artillery easily demolished large sections of the walls during the siege because they retained the medieval style.

While the emperor was committed to repairing Constantinople's fortifications upon his accession to the Byzantine throne, Sultan Mehmed II's decision to build a fortress on the European side of the Bosphorus, *Rumeli Hisar*, deepened his commitment to the project. In the spring of 1452, Mehmed decided that he needed a way to control the shipping traveling through the Bosphorus.¹²⁴ He therefore endeavored to build a modern fortress, which he named *Rumeli Hisar*.¹²⁵ The historian Kritovoulos details Mehmed's preparations, as well as the specifications of the fortress. While the refortification of Constantinople took nearly five years because of the city's financial troubles, Mehmed

¹²² Tetaldi 4. "Constantinople is very strong, of a triangular form. The land walls are six thousand paces in length, the walls facing the sea five, and those facing the harbour and the Bosphorus six again. The land walls are very thick and high, with barbicans and battlements above them, and false walls and ditches running along outside them. The principal walls are twenty to twenty-two *brasses* in height, three and in some places six *brasses* thick and in a few places eight. The false walls outside are built up to a height of twenty to twenty-two *brasses*, and are three *brasses* thick. The ditches are thirty-five *brasses* wide and fifteen *brasses* deep. The *brasse* contains at the most about three and a half palms by the Avignon standard."

¹²³ Kelly DeVries. "The Impact of Gunpowder Weaponry on Siege Warfare in the Hundred Years' War." *The Medieval City under Siege*. Eds. Ivy A. Corfis and Michael Wolfe (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1995) 237: Granite walls better withstood the effects of early cannon traditional stone masonry.

¹²⁴ Kritovoulos 17. Mehmed claimed that the new fortress would protect all local merchant shipping from Catalan pirates. The Byzantines did not believe such reasons. See also Mihailović 89.

¹²⁵ Doukas 197-200. *Rumeli Hisar* was also called *bogas kasen*, "cutter of the straits" or "cutter of the throat." The latter was very applicable for Byzantium.

constructed *Rumeli Hisar* within six months.¹²⁶ The walls of the fortress, over twenty-five feet high and nearly ten feet thick, were reinforced with iron and lead joints and designed to withstand attacks by ship-mounted cannon.¹²⁷ In addition, the fortress' massive towers were designed to support huge cannons that were capable of sinking any vessel illegally traveling through the Bosphorus.¹²⁸ This modern fortress' impregnability influenced Constantine's decision to repair Constantinople's defenses. The emperor ordered that cannons be mounted upon the walls in order to emulate *Rumeli Hisar*, as well as western cities that tried to counter the impact of cannons by mounting their own cannons atop city walls.¹²⁹ However, these alterations proved ineffective for the medieval walls of Constantinople. Kritovoulos explains that during Mehmed's siege in 1453 the Byzantines were unable to fire their own artillery from vantage points on top of the land walls, because the recoil from the cannons shook the walls and caused pieces of them to fall. Since the Greeks did not want to weaken the integrity of their walls in the face of heavy Ottoman bombardment, defensive armament upon Constantinople's walls was limited to handheld ranged weapons during the siege.

However, the emperor could still place faith in the city's fortifications even in the face of Turkish cannons. In the fifteenth century, assaulting walled cities was still an extremely difficult process. Even if city walls crumbled against cannons, soldiers still had to make their way through the rubble of those walls and into the city, while at the same time being fired upon by the defenders. These conditions would exist well into the late

¹²⁶ Barbaro 9.

¹²⁷ Kritovoulos 19.

¹²⁸ Doukas 200-201. A Venetian ship commanded by Antonio Rizzo refused to stop at the fortress to pay the Ottoman toll required for travel through the Bosphorus. As a result, *Rumeli Hisar* fired one massive stone at the vessel, shattering it. The surviving sailors were murdered, and Captain Rizzo was impaled as a warning to future ships.

¹²⁹ DeVries 233.

fifteenth century. For example, the Italian city of Volterra withstood an attack by the Florentine army in 1472, even after its walls had been destroyed by cannons. The city only surrendered because of internal dissent among the population and the efforts of Florentine sympathizers.¹³⁰ As a result of these factors, the sultan's new fortress *Rumeli Hisar*, as well as the fortifications of western cities, heavily influenced Constantine's defensive policies aimed against the Ottoman Turks.

When the Byzantine attempt to gain the support of first Mara Branković, widow of Murad II, and then Grand Vizier Candarli Halil Pasha failed, Constantine XI and his administration resorted to a series of disjointed, ineffective policies toward the Ottoman Empire. The Greeks alternated between antagonism and supplication. They antagonized the Turks through their attempt to extort financial resources from Mehmed during the Prince Orhan incident. The Greeks then turned to supplication once this effort failed. However, the Ottomans no longer wanted to tolerate the existence of an independent Constantinople within their territory, capable of causing problems for them in the future, which the Orhan incident proved. Therefore, the Ottomans continued their preparations, eventually assaulting Constantinople on May 29, 1453. As a result, the failure of personal diplomacy led to a series of poor diplomatic and foreign policy actions, and contributed to the city's fall during Constantine XI's reign.

¹³⁰ Michael Mallett. "Siegecraft in Late Fifteenth Century Italy." *The Medieval City under Siege*. Eds. Ivy A. Corfis and Michael Wolfe (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1995) 248-249.

CHAPTER FOUR

Constantine and the Papacy

The relationship between the Papacy and Constantine XI Palaiologos' administration represents a success in Byzantine personal diplomacy. Even though the Papacy sent little aid to Constantinople during its time of crisis, the emperor carefully managed relations between the Latins and Greeks amidst the controversial actions of the Council of Florence. The emperor accomplished this because he and his court possessed the expertise of Cardinal Isidore, the papal legate sent to Constantinople to supervise church union. With his advisors giving him almost unanimous consent, Constantine XI implemented the union of the churches in Constantinople. In addition, despite the unpopular Greek submission to the Papacy at Florence, Constantine and his advisors carefully maintained an uneasy peace in the capital between unionist and anti-unionist forces.¹³¹ Furthermore, the emperor appeased the Papacy through a number of overt and covert gestures. By foregoing an imperial coronation ceremony in the capital, leaving the patriarchate vacant following Gregory III Mammes' departure to Rome, and only publicly proclaiming the union in December 1452, Constantine gained tacit support from both sides. As a result of this compromise, the emperor succeeded and gained papal support against the Ottomans. Unfortunately for Byzantium, papal reinforcements were not enough to save Constantinople. Constantine XI's efforts, despite the minimal Latin response, should be regarded as successful during the Byzantine Empire's final crisis and conflict with the Ottoman Turks.

¹³¹ Leonard of Chios 12.

The most significant influence over Byzantine-Papal relations during Constantine XI's reign was established nearly a decade before he took the throne. The Council of Florence in the 1430s heavily shaped Greek foreign relations with the Latin Church. Just as Michael VIII Palaiologos traveled to the west and offered to reunite the schismatic Christian churches to gain military support against an invader, eventually forming a short-lived alliance through the Council of Lyons, John VIII hoped to gain western military support against the Ottomans. Therefore, the emperor traveled to Italy in 1437 with a small retinue of churchmen, philosophers, and imperial administrators.¹³² The council was initially held in the scenic, fortified city of Ferrara near Venice, the Byzantine delegation's port of arrival. However, the delegates quickly traveled to Florence after a virulent outbreak of the plague ravaged Ferrara shortly after the initial convocation.¹³³

John's father, Manuel II, tried to convince his son that church union would antagonize the Turks, and western promises of military aid would only be illusory. In the funeral oration of his brother Theodore, written in 1407, Manuel II describes the possible results of any reunion with the Papacy. He explains that while the promise of Latin military aid against the Turks had the potential to save Byzantium, the bitter divide that church union would cause between the Greeks could lead to conflict or even civil war.¹³⁴ Manuel II was not the only opponent of union with Rome, as a significant portion of the

¹³² Doukas 179.

¹³³ Joseph Gill. *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959) 93.

¹³⁴ Manuel II Palaeologos. *Funeral Oration on his Brother Theodore*. Trans. J. Chrysostomides (Thessalonike: Association for Byzantine Research, 1985) 244: "O life no longer bearable were it not for our religious faith, since living is no longer desirable particularly to me, as also to all those who knew precisely how outstanding your [Theodore Palaiologos Porphyrogenitos] character was, o friend of God. This then was the meaning of those signs from afar when they declared a change of fortune for the worse. We however saw this and leapt for joy, thinking that the evil would befall our foes, as some had predicted. Now that the evil turned out to be against us, clearly affecting us all, so vast, so bitter, so irreparable that nothing remains but to live in despondency, weeping and mourning for the rest of time."

common Constantinopolitan citizenry fervently defended Orthodoxy against the Latin Church. Nonetheless, despite sweltering heat, insufficient supplies and monetary resources, the prospect of spending years away from family and loved ones, and little domestic support, the Greek delegation began a two year debate regarding union with the Papacy.

The Council of Florence debated several discrepancies between the Latin and Greek Christian practices. The most significant dispute, according to Emperor John VIII, concerned the procession of the Holy Spirit.¹³⁵ While the Greeks followed the literal text of Christian Scripture, stating that the Holy Spirit only proceeds from the Father, the Latins believed in an implied interpretation of Scripture, explaining that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son.¹³⁶ The addition of *filioque* to the Nicene Creed was another point of dispute among the delegates.¹³⁷ The Greeks argued that any addition to the Creed after the seven Ecumenical Councils was forbidden.¹³⁸ However, the Latins argued that additions to the Creed are prohibited only when they create a different faith, not merely when they clarify the traditional one.¹³⁹ Purgatory's existence was also disputed, as the Greeks fervently denied its validity.¹⁴⁰ The Greeks also opposed the use of unleavened bread in the Eucharist, but they eventually relented and viewed it as a minor difference of ritual.¹⁴¹ The Council of Florence also discussed papal primacy among the Christian patriarchates. After several months of debate, the Greeks accepted

¹³⁵ Gill 172.

¹³⁶ Gill 194.

¹³⁷ Donald M. Nicol. *The Last Centuries of Byzantium 1261 – 1453* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 77: *Filioque* is the Latin term literally meaning “and the Son,” inserted into the Creed by Latin priests beginning in fifth century Spain.

¹³⁸ Gill 148.

¹³⁹ Gill 156.

¹⁴⁰ Gill 123: Mark of Ephesus was the most passionate Greek opponent of Purgatory's existence at the Council of Florence.

¹⁴¹ Gill 275.

the Roman see's primacy, although its actual text in the proclamation was deliberately vague.¹⁴² While each topic was debated and discussed equally between the Greek and Latin delegates, the Council of Florence's results did not reflect that equality.

The Latin delegates and Pope Eugenius IV were not interested in compromise with the Greeks. They understood that the Byzantine temporal position was tenuous at best, and without church union there would be no military aid to Constantinople. In each of their responses to the Greek theological positions, the Latin delegates reminded the Byzantines that they were in no position to make demands.¹⁴³ The Greek delegates quickly understood that the western Church required their signatures affirming the Byzantine submission to Rome, not their philosophical and theological positions at the council. Sylvester Syropoulos, grand *ecclesiarch* of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, explains the Greeks' frustration at the lack of genuine debate at Florence:

Another day we met again according to custom at the patriarch's lodgings. We debated there the question of union, and the supporters of 'Latinism' contented themselves with praising the harmony and the 'peace.' The bishop of Heraclea observed: 'It would be good if you would furnish us with the declaration which you have sent to the Latins. We have heard it only once, though we should have seen and examined it several times.' At once the bishop of Nicaea [Bessarion] replied: 'It would be shameful for you to say you have forgotten it after having heard it once. You should not have forgotten what was said and heard here.' Thus he replied to and avoided the request of the bishop of Heraclea. These are the kinds of examination and studies that [the Greek] bishops thought they should devote to this declaration and agreement concerning the faith.¹⁴⁴

The Council of Florence's results were predetermined well before John VIII and his retinue even arrived in Italy. The Latins prevailed in all theological matters, especially

¹⁴² Ostrogorsky 563.

¹⁴³ Gill 146: "Did Mark [of Ephesus] forget that the Roman pontiffs had come to the aid of the Eastern Church on so many occasions, being present in person or by proxy at councils to still the storms of heresy?"

¹⁴⁴ Sylvester Syropoulos. "A Greek Prelate Describes Greek Disputes over Union." *Byzantium: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes*. Trans. Deno John Geanakoplos (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 223-224.

regarding papal supremacy, subtly rewording translated texts to mislead the Greek delegates. They granted the Greeks only a small consolation, allowing them to keep their traditional church ritual.¹⁴⁵ In their despair and desire to return to their homes after two years of discussion, the Greek delegates all signed the decree of union except for Mark of Ephesus, who would take no part in such a one-sided affair.¹⁴⁶ The emperor and his legates then returned to Byzantium, where the union was openly reviled by the general clergy and citizenry of Constantinople. Constantine XI Palaiologos inherited these implications from the Council of Florence nearly a decade later, and his acknowledged obligation to implement them greatly influenced his foreign relations with the Papacy.

The Byzantine submission to Rome at the Council of Florence, and Emperor Constantine XI's efforts to execute it within Constantinople during his reign, came solely as a result of Ottoman pressure toward the empire. The Orthodox Church, which carried a large amount of power and prestige in the east even as the Byzantine state declined, had little interest in surrender to Roman supremacy and doctrine.¹⁴⁷ Therefore, the Byzantines pursued union solely because of the emperor's and his court's wishes. Without the Turkish threat to Constantinople, the Council of Florence would not have occurred. The Papacy, as a result of previous antagonisms between the groups since the Council of Lyons in 1274, realized that John VIII's overtures came because of Byzantium's crisis. However, the pope used this to gain religious concessions from the Greeks.

Just as the Council of Florence influenced the emperor's policy toward the Roman pontiff, the status of the Papacy throughout the fifteenth century also played an important role in Papal-Byzantine relations. However, Constantine XI faced a Papacy that had lost a

¹⁴⁵ Ostrogorsky 563.

¹⁴⁶ Gill 356.

¹⁴⁷ Ostrogorsky 563-564.

significant amount of the prestige it gained during the High Middle Ages. During the fourteenth century, nepotism, as well as the Papacy's tenure at Avignon, drained the papal treasury of funds and lowered its stature among Christian leaders.¹⁴⁸ In addition, the election of several rival popes in Rome, Pisa, and Avignon split the western Christians into rival factions. The papal Curia made several efforts to repair the Papacy's reputation which culminated in the Council of Constance, opened in November 1414. After three years of debate and negotiation, twenty three cardinals and thirty other electors deposed the three competing popes and elected Martin V.¹⁴⁹ However, the city of Rome required the bulk of Martin's attentions, as it had descended into lawlessness and ruin during the years of the rival popes in Avignon and Pisa.¹⁵⁰ Even after he had restored order to Rome, Martin was concerned with several major conflicts throughout Western Europe. The Hundred Years' War between France and England, the Spanish *reconquista* from the Moors, and the German civil wars occupied the pope for the rest of his life.¹⁵¹ In addition, Italy was in a constant state of upheaval due to virulent outbreaks of the plague and political intrigues among the quarrelling princes.¹⁵² Even though Martin V recognized that the eastern Christians suffered numerous defeats at the hands of the Ottomans, the conflicts throughout Italy and Western Europe drained his resources.¹⁵³ Therefore, he was unable to provide significant assistance for Byzantium during his tenure as pope.

¹⁴⁸ Walter Ullman. *A Short History of the Papacy in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen & Co, 1972) 286; William J. La Due. *The Chair of Saint Peter: A History of the Papacy* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999) 146.

¹⁴⁹ La Due 164: The three popes were John XXIII of the Pisan line, Gregory XII in Rome, and Benedict XIII of the Avignon line.

¹⁵⁰ Kenneth M. Setton. *The Papacy and the Levant (1204 – 1571)* II (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1978) 40.

¹⁵¹ Setton 39-40.

¹⁵² Gill 16.

¹⁵³ Setton 42-44.

After the accession of Pope Eugenius IV in 1431, the Papacy faced a new crisis that distracted it from helping the Greeks. The Conciliar movement, the belief that the ultimate church authority rested in the decisions of church councils rather than the pope himself, challenged papal supremacy.¹⁵⁴ Supported by French and German clergy and elites, the Conciliar movement undermined support for papal directives throughout Western Europe.¹⁵⁵ While Eugenius IV tried to focus the western princes' attention on the eastern crisis through the Council of Florence, his decreasing influence garnered support primarily from the Italian clergy. After the Latins' success at the council, Eugenius' prestige temporarily increased and helped him to convince the Hungarians and Venetians to assist the Greeks. However, when the crusade failed and the Turks destroyed the crusaders at Varna in 1444, the pope's prestige once again decreased.¹⁵⁶ His successor, Nicholas V, faced similar temporal problems upon his accession in March 1447.¹⁵⁷ The Romans opposed his municipal administration, and Italian princes constantly challenged his temporal authority. While he zealously presided over the Conciliar movement's defeat at Basel and Lausanne, his enthusiasm did not extend toward assisting the eastern Christians.¹⁵⁸ Nicholas V did not believe that the Ottoman Turks possessed the strength necessary to destroy the Byzantine Empire, and continually disregarded information relating Greek defeats in the east.¹⁵⁹ As a result, Constantine XI faced a Papacy that possessed a decreased amount of influence among the western princes, as well as a pope who did not fully understand the extent of the Ottoman threat to Byzantium.

¹⁵⁴ Setton 47.

¹⁵⁵ Setton 59.

¹⁵⁶ Setton 84-85.

¹⁵⁷ Setton 98.

¹⁵⁸ Setton 99.

¹⁵⁹ La Due 174.

Constantine XI Palaiologos' actions toward the Papacy were heavily influenced by his courtiers' opinions. His advisors, in contrast to their positions toward the Ottoman Turks, generally agreed on a Byzantine policy toward the Papacy. Each of the councilors' positions revolved around the Council of Florence and its execution in Constantinople. The *megadux* Lucas Notaras held a pragmatic position, particularly concerning the implementation of church union. George Sphrantzes explains that his desire to save the city from the Ottomans at all costs clearly motivated his position toward the Roman see.¹⁶⁰ He understood that the empire's military salvation could only come from the Latin Christians, and that the Papacy was the only force that could mobilize them.¹⁶¹ Therefore, he advised the emperor to take the necessary steps in Constantinople to implement the union of the churches proclaimed at Florence. Notaras also used his position and influence to advertise these benefits of church union to many courtiers and prominent Constantinopolitan citizens, especially after papal legate Cardinal Isidore arrived in the city in 1452.¹⁶² While the chronicler Doukas quotes the *megadux* saying that "it would be better to see the turban of the Turks reigning in the center of the City than the Latin miter," subsequent authors have often taken this statement out of context and portray him as an opponent of church union.¹⁶³ Notaras most likely made such a comment as a frustrated response to the intransigence of some Italians residing in Constantinople, rather than as a mark of his anti-unionist sentiments.¹⁶⁴ In fact, Lucas Notaras was an extremely passionate and vocal supporter of church union in Emperor Constantine XI's circle of advisors.

¹⁶⁰ Sphrantzes 63.

¹⁶¹ Nestor-Iskander 59.

¹⁶² Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 58.

¹⁶³ Doukas 210.

¹⁶⁴ Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 60.

Constantine's close friend and councilor George Sphrantzes was equally as pragmatic concerning relations with the pope and church union. The First Lord of the Imperial Wardrobe was not concerned with religious dogmas, but merely gaining papal military assistance for Constantinople. In his chronicle of events surrounding the fall of Constantinople, Sphrantzes relates a parable describing his beliefs:

Allow me to make use of a parable. For many years I and some others have been accustomed to meet in the Church of Saint Sophia by our Middle Way, the broad spacious street of our City. Some time later other people discovered another road that leads to the same church, as they say, and urged me: 'Come also by this road which we discovered; we know that your way is old and fine and known to us from the beginning with you, but the one we have just found is a good road also.' So I hear certain individuals assert that the new road is the correct way, while others maintain the opposite. Why can I not say: 'Go in peace and love to Saint Sophia by whatever road you please; but I will use the road I have taken with you for a long time, a good road traveled and witnessed by you and my ancestors.'¹⁶⁵

He also realized that there were grave risks inherent in any church union. He believed that the Turks feared any rapprochement between the Christians and the subsequent military alliance that would result. Until the Council of Florence, with the exception of the failed Crusade of Nicopolis in 1396, the Turks seized territory from Byzantium without fear of reprisal, since the Greek military was extremely weak and the stronger Latin Christians were unlikely to aid schismatics.

After church union, the Ottomans needed to exercise more caution. The mere proclamation of union in Rome led to the Crusade of Varna in 1444, and a Greek proclamation of union in Constantinople could have led to another. However, Sphrantzes regarded the union's proposed military benefits as worth the risk.¹⁶⁶ If carried out carefully and discretely, he believed it would succeed. He explains: "I wish that the union of the churches had come about properly, even if it had cost me one of my eyes. But I

¹⁶⁵ Sphrantzes 49-50.

¹⁶⁶ Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 17.

said it because the synod was the single most important cause for the attack that the impious [Ottomans] launched against our City, which resulted in the siege, our enslavement, and our great misfortunes.”¹⁶⁷ George Sphrantzes was so fervent of an advocate for church union that he recommended the papal legate Cardinal Isidore for the recently vacant patriarchate in Constantinople, after Patriarch Gregory III fled to Rome, but the emperor dismissed his recommendation.¹⁶⁸ Through these actions, George Sphrantzes advised the emperor to celebrate the union of the churches to improve relations between Byzantium and Rome.

Unlike Lucas Notaras and George Sphrantzes, Constantine’s close friend John Kantakouzenos and Grand Domestic Andronikos Kantakouzenos advocated Byzantine submission to the Papacy on religious grounds. While they also believed that the military union would significantly decrease the Ottomans’ pressure upon Constantinople, the two advisors viewed this as a consequence of adopting the Roman faith.¹⁶⁹ Andronikos was so fervent in his beliefs that in 1437, John VIII sent him as an emissary to the Serbians asking them to send a delegation to the Council of Florence.¹⁷⁰ When they refused the offer, both he and John Kantakouzenos became fervent opponents of the Serbians, labeling them as heretics.¹⁷¹ Following Constantine’s accession the throne, the two advisors consistently explained to the emperor that commitment to church union was

¹⁶⁷ Sphrantzes 50.

¹⁶⁸ Sphrantzes 72: “The cardinal of Russia [Isidore] happened to be in the City and I argued, as his intermediary to my late lord [Constantine], the emperor, that he should be appointed patriarch in the hope that various advantages would come from him and the then pope... After many consultations and deliberations, my late master and emperor decided to abandon the... alternative.”

¹⁶⁹ Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 46-47.

¹⁷⁰ Nicol, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos* no. 68 180.

¹⁷¹ Sphrantzes 63: “My grand domestic is an enemy of Serbia and made an agreement with John Kantakouzenos.”

spiritually correct, and would bring temporal rewards for the empire as well.¹⁷² Both Andronikos and John joined their voices to those of Notaras and Sphrantzes in supporting union with the Papacy.

Two influential churchmen also made their way into Constantine XI's retinue in order to advise him on the proper course regarding union with the Papacy, joining the ranks of his other unionist councilors. Bessarion, Bishop of Nicaea, was one of these clerics. The bishop was, according to the historian Doukas, "the most erudite of the hierarchs" who attended the Council of Florence.¹⁷³ His eloquence, learned status, and persuasiveness at the council convinced Pope Eugenius IV that he should be made a cardinal.¹⁷⁴ In fact, his subsequent theological contributions to Latin Christendom so impressed the other cardinals that he was nearly elected to the papal throne in 1455.¹⁷⁵ As a result, his stature in the west added significant credibility to his messages to Constantine XI supporting Byzantine assent to the union of the churches. Bessarion spent little time in the beleaguered capital after 1439, but he communicated with the emperor and the elites in the city frequently.¹⁷⁶ Therefore, despite his distance from Constantinople, Cardinal Bessarion significantly influenced Constantine XI's decisions regarding the Papacy and implementing the Council of Florence's decisions.

¹⁷² Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople 1453* 53.

¹⁷³ Doukas 180.

¹⁷⁴ Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 21.

¹⁷⁵ Pius II. *Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope: The Commentaries of Pius II*. Trans. Florence A. Gragg (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959) 69.

¹⁷⁶ Sphrantzes 93: The author intimates that the cardinal spent nearly all of his time between 1439 and his death in 1472 in Italy. Bessarion spent most of that time in Rome near the pontiff, gaining even more popularity from western churchmen. George Sphrantzes explains: "Cardinal Bessarion... passed away on November 15 [1472]. His body was returned to Rome with all honors and was buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles, which had been his last residence. He had arranged in advance his own tomb, which was placed next to the holy martyr, Saint Eugenia."

The other churchman who advised the emperor on the proper course of action toward the Papacy exercised his influence while in Constantinople itself. He was also the integral figure in Constantine XI's strategy of personal diplomacy. Isidore, Cardinal of All Russia, arrived in the imperial capital in November 1452, with a company of 200 Neapolitan archers, as the papal legate to Byzantium.¹⁷⁷ Like Bessarion, Isidore was an intelligent and eloquent man, first elevated from monastic life to become bishop of Kiev before attending the Council of Florence in John VIII's delegation.¹⁷⁸ Pope Eugenius IV was also impressed with Isidore, elevating him to the cardinalship following the council. When the Kievans rioted against Isidore and the union upon his return, Pope Nicholas V designated him the papal legate to Constantinople.¹⁷⁹ The cardinal was an equally shrewd politician as he was a talented theologian and orator. He understood that Constantine faced open rebellion in the capital if the union's implementation did not proceed carefully. However, Isidore continually pressured the emperor to undertake small steps toward this goal as the weeks of his visit progressed.¹⁸⁰ The cardinal had learned from his experience in Kiev, and was confident that union could succeed in Constantinople. He assured the emperor that once church union had occurred, the military aid he requested would arrive. Instead of returning to the Curia when the Ottoman pressure on Constantinople increased shortly after his arrival, the cardinal remained in the city and used his military knowledge to assist with the defense.¹⁸¹ Cardinal Isidore remained in close contact with Pope Nicholas V during his time in the capital, constantly reporting on

¹⁷⁷ Doukas 203.

¹⁷⁸ Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 15.

¹⁷⁹ Doukas 203: "The pope sent Isidore, cardinal of Poland and former archbishop of Russia, a sagacious and prudent man, learned in Orthodox doctrine, a Roman by descent, a venerable father, and one of those present at the Council."

¹⁸⁰ Leonard of Chios 20.

¹⁸¹ Melissenos 111.

the emperor's progress toward completing the union of the churches.¹⁸² Since Constantine realized that further western military aid hinged upon his reports to the pope, Isidore's recommendations held a significant amount of influence over the emperor's decisions regarding Rome.

Demetrios Palaiologos Kantakouzenos, Constantine's cousin and *mesazon* through his and John VIII's reigns, remained aloof from the debate within the Byzantine court over union.¹⁸³ The *mesazon*'s delicate nature necessitated his passivity during court debate and discussion during Constantine's reign. He intimately understood that the general population of Constantinople virulently opposed the submission to the Papacy, but remained loyal to his former master John VIII's faith in the union's ability to save Byzantium.¹⁸⁴ He did explain to Constantine the extent to which the Constantinopolitans opposed church union, but did not elaborate upon any plans to implement it in the city. Therefore, Kantakouzenos remained virtually silent on the subject in the emperor's presence and avoided any contradictions arising from his delicate position within the imperial administration.

One of the few elites in Constantine's inner circle to oppose rapprochement with the Papacy was the emperor's younger brother, Demetrios Palaiologos Porphyrogenitos. The prince, who became a co-despot of the Morea following Constantine's accession to the imperial throne, adopted this position after attending the Council of Florence with his elder brother John VIII in 1437 and 1438.¹⁸⁵ Demetrios Palaiologos did not oppose

¹⁸² Leonard of Chios 12.

¹⁸³ Nicol, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos* 264: In the later Byzantine administration, the *mesazon* acted as the liaison between the emperor and the population of Constantinople.

¹⁸⁴ Nicol, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos* no. 75 192-194.

¹⁸⁵ Sphrantzes 49: "On November 27 of the same year [1437], our emperor Lord John, accompanied by the patriarch, Lord Demetrios the despot, numerous senators, clerics, and almost all the metropolitans and bishops, departed for the scheduled synod."

church union on spiritual grounds. Instead, he recognized that most of the Constantinopolitan citizenry would oppose any attack upon their faith, leaving them searching for a leader that would exemplify their beliefs. His opportunism manifested itself soon after the Council of Florence's conclusion. Proclaiming himself the defender of Orthodoxy and the leader of the anti-unionists, Demetrios laid siege to Constantinople with a company of Turkish mercenaries in April 1442.¹⁸⁶ While he did not possess a sufficient number of troops to force the city, Demetrios hoped that the anti-unionists in the city would depose John VIII and offer him the throne. This rebellious act relegated Demetrios to insignificance within the imperial administration until September 1, 1449, when he became co-despot of the Morea with his brother Thomas. Before he could rally the anti-unionists to any seditious acts against Constantine, the latter sent him to Mistra in the Morea.¹⁸⁷ This act effectively ended Demetrios' influence over Constantine's court and advisors, as well as any control he held over the emperor's policy toward the Papacy. Therefore, Despot Demetrios' anti-unionist opinions held little authority over Emperor Constantine XI's actions.

Since most of his advisors wanted to implement union with the Papacy, the emperor undertook several significant actions designed to please Rome and upset the Constantinopolitan population as little as possible. Constantine knew that he had little time to waste. Nearly a decade had passed between the Council of Florence and Constantine's accession to the throne, and the Greeks still had not publicly proclaimed the union. With each passing month, the Papacy grew more impatient, expecting results

¹⁸⁶ Sphrantzes 53: "On April 23 of the same year [1442], Lord Demetrios the despot, supported by Turkish troops, ravaged and blockaded the suburbs of Constantinople."

¹⁸⁷ Sphrantzes 53.

from Byzantium. In a letter to the emperor dated September 27, 1451, Pope Nicholas V expresses his irritation:

The Greeks cannot really assume that the Roman pontiff and the whole Western Church... are so bereft of intelligence as not to realize why in this delay the excuses keep coming – they understand, but they bear with it... But if, however, you refuse to maintain this decree among your people, you will compel us to make provisions which look both to your salvation and to our honor.¹⁸⁸

Constantine and his government realized that they needed to take action in order to secure papal support, but they faced another crucial problem. Most of the lesser elites and nobles outside Constantine's inner circle fervently opposed church union. The emperor already had difficulties controlling and subordinating the Constantinopolitan elites, as they often refused to give up their wealth to the city's defense. Leonard of Chios explains: "Again, what traitors were among the Greeks, what greedy betrayers of their country! Their needy Emperor begged them again and again to lend him money to pay his soldiers, but they swore that they had none, because the poverty of the times had exhausted their resources. Yet their enemies [the Turks] later found wealth enough among them."¹⁸⁹ The Venetian physician Nicolò Barbaro confirms the bishop's account, and even explains that these Greek elites stubbornly refused any imperial initiatives regarding their wealth and privileges: "The Emperor was very poor, and asked his barons to lend him money, but they excused themselves because they had none; the Turks, however, found a great deal of money – in fact, thirty thousand ducats were found in the possession of one of these gentlemen. The Emperor was [also] advised not to raise taxes at such a time of

¹⁸⁸ P. Lampros "Letter from Pope Nicholas V to Constantine XI, September 27, 1451" *Palaiológeia kai Peloponnesiaká* (Athens, 1930) as cited in Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204 – 1571)* II, 106.

¹⁸⁹ Leonard of Chios 26.

trouble.”¹⁹⁰ The Byzantine nobility did not challenge Constantine’s right to the throne, but they fervently defended their wealth and privilege.

While Constantine could have devoted his attention to the insubordinate elites in Constantinople, he instead refused to divert his focus from the Ottomans’ external threat. Leonard of Chios explains: “The Emperor lacked firmness, and those who neglected to obey his orders were neither chastised nor put to death. So each one followed his own inclinations, and they soothed the Emperor’s anger with flatteries in their usual way. That good man, so wickedly mocked by his own subjects, preferred to pretend that he did not see the wrongs that were being done.”¹⁹¹ As a result, the tensions between Constantine and the city’s elites made the emperor’s efforts in proclaiming church union extremely difficult.

In order to personally distance himself from the union before slowly implementing it, Constantine XI refused to partake in an official religious coronation ceremony. Traditionally, a new emperor would be crowned by the patriarch of Constantinople in Hagia Sophia shortly after his arrival in the city. However, Patriarch Gregory III Mammes was a committed unionist and Constantine did not want to be overtly perceived as supporting the unionists’ position. In addition, he did not possess the financial resources necessary to prepare a lavish and traditional ceremony in Hagia Sophia.¹⁹² He satisfied himself with the private and civil coronation ceremony performed at Mistra on January 6, 1449.¹⁹³ Two emissaries from Constantinople traveled to the Morea, informed Constantine of his brother’s death, and crowned him emperor on the

¹⁹⁰ Barbaro 77.

¹⁹¹ Leonard of Chios 29.

¹⁹² Leonard of Chios 26 and Barbaro 77.

¹⁹³ Sphrantzes 57.

Constantinopolitan people's behalf in the palace of the despots.¹⁹⁴ However, the lack of a proper coronation ceremony did cast some doubt over Constantine's imperial legitimacy. The historian Doukas explains in his chronicle that John VIII was the last true Roman emperor because Constantine did not participate in a religious coronation.¹⁹⁵ However, only a minor segment of the citizenry disputed the emperor's legitimacy in Constantinople. George Sphrantzes explains that with or without a proper coronation, the Constantinopolitans acclaimed Constantine emperor.¹⁹⁶ While the Papacy gently urged Constantine to undergo the coronation, the emperor continually delayed claiming that the Ottoman threat required his immediate attention.¹⁹⁷ Patriarch Gregory III Mammes' departure to Rome in August 1451 simplified the emperor's problem. Gregory chafed at the lack of commitment shown to the agreements made at Florence and retired to private life.¹⁹⁸ With the patriarchate vacant, Constantine indefinitely postponed his coronation until the immediacy of the Ottoman threat consumed the Papacy's attention. Therefore, he placated the anti-unionists within Constantinople without offending or antagonizing the Papacy.¹⁹⁹ This was one of Constantine's first actions designed to maintain peace in Constantinople and gain military support from the pope.

¹⁹⁴ Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 37.

¹⁹⁵ Doukas 186: "John who had suffered from gout for many years, a condition that was aggravated by the deep distress and grief he experienced after his return from Italy, partly because of the agitation resulting from the Union of the Churches, and partly because of the empress' death, fell gravely ill and within a few days died, the last to reign as emperor of the Romans. The officials summoned Constantine to Constantinople."

¹⁹⁶ Sphrantzes 57: "On December 6, I set out with an embassy to inform the sultan that the empress, the brothers, right of birth, and the love and wisdom of nearly the whole population of the City [Constantinople] chose Lord Constantine emperor. The sultan approved the choice and sent me away with honor and gifts."

¹⁹⁷ Leonard of Chios 29.

¹⁹⁸ Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 49.

¹⁹⁹ Michael Cordoses. "The Question of Constantine Palaiologos' Coronation." *The Making of Byzantine History*. Eds. Roderick Beaton and Charlotte Roueché (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1993) 139-141.

Another tactic Constantine XI attempted in his quest for military aid from Rome involved his father's tactic of personal diplomacy. Manuel II traveled to England and France in the beginning of the fifteenth century, and was in constant contact with the Papacy, attempting to gain military assistance.²⁰⁰ However, without church union, Manuel II believed that his efforts would not succeed. He received many promises, as he explains in a letter to the priest Euthymius in the summer of 1401:

Now, as long as our negotiations were stalled at the stage of favorable promises, and these from men who make them most readily, the awareness that your salvation depended upon deeds, not words, made me completely numb, hand, tongue, and mind, although I wanted to intone the hymn of victory. Above all I had been afraid that, quite unawares, I might be overcome by grief if I should try to sing a happier song to you.²⁰¹

Manuel II echoes these beliefs in a letter to Demetrios Chrysoloras, one of his advisors in Constantinople, later in the year. Even though the Papacy made promises to assist the Greeks, they had no incentive to fulfill them as long as the schism remained.²⁰² After the Council of Florence, the emperor believed that another journey to the west would elicit the promised aid. He was still admired throughout Christian Europe for his daring attacks against the Ottomans while despot of the Morea.²⁰³ Therefore, he believed that a personal appeal would succeed with the western rulers. However, Constantine was foremost a soldier. He refused to leave Constantinople while rumors of an impending Ottoman attack abounded in the city.²⁰⁴ Instead of traveling to the pope himself, Constantine asked his brother Thomas, co-despot of the Morea with his brother Demetrios, to travel to Italy

²⁰⁰ Barker 174.

²⁰¹ George T. Dennis. *The Letters of Manuel II Palaeologus: Text, Translation, and Notes* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1977) 104.

²⁰² Dennis 108: "I am aware that your salvation requires deeds, not promises. Now, I have received the most wonderful promises, but I was very dubious about their fulfillment, since this requires time in which many things could happen, and so I was informing you of conditions here in another hand."

²⁰³ Setton 96.

²⁰⁴ Constantine refused to leave the city several times during his reign, most notably before the final Ottoman assault on May 29, 1453. For more information, see Nestor-Iskander 59 and Doukas 220.

in his place.²⁰⁵ Since Thomas was a member of the imperial family, held the prestigious rank of despot, and came at his brother's request, Constantine believed he would be a suitable replacement. However, he politely refused, fearing his brother Demetrios would strike against his lands when he left. Instead, the emperor sent Andronikos Bryennios Leontaris to the Papacy in April 1451, where he would remain as a spokesman for the Greek cause, and report relevant information back to Constantine.²⁰⁶ Even though Andronikos could not rouse the Papacy to aid Constantinople on his own, he did provide the Byzantines with crucial information regarding the Roman see under Pope Nicholas V.

Constantine XI Palaiologos' major action to gain favor with the Papacy involved proclaiming the union of the churches in Hagia Sophia. The emperor seriously debated this act before relenting to Cardinal Isidore's request. He felt no spiritual need to proclaim the church union in the great church, and he feared a backlash from the anti-unionists within Constantinople.²⁰⁷ However, the emperor knew that finally proclaiming union publicly in the capital would greatly improve his standing with the Papacy and finally bring Byzantium aid and he thus gave his consent.²⁰⁸ The Italian and Greek clergy celebrated church union on December 12, 1452, commemorating the names of Pope Nicholas V and the departed Patriarch Gregory III Mammes in the liturgy.²⁰⁹ Before the service, Constantine and his advisors took several precautionary measures to prevent any riots or other violent acts by the anti-unionist party. According to Sphrantzes, Constantine

²⁰⁵ Sphrantzes 64: "The emperor decided to send an envoy to the Morea to escort one of his brothers to the City [Constantinople], if he accepted and remained faithful to the terms of the agreement, so that if the need arose to review their policy toward the [Ottoman] sultan, one of the two might travel to the rulers of the West."

²⁰⁶ Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 49.

²⁰⁷ Doukas 204: "Even the emperor only pretended to [support union]."

²⁰⁸ Sphrantzes 72: "The emperor consented to have the pope's name commemorated in our services, by necessity, as we hoped to receive some aid."

²⁰⁹ Doukas 205: "After both Pope Nicholas and the exiled Patriarch Gregory were commemorated in the diptychs, the Divine Liturgy was concluded on the twelfth day of December in the year [1452]."

did not force the population to attend. In fact, “whoever was willing would pronounce the commemoration in Saint Sophia; the rest would incur no blame and remain peaceful.”²¹⁰ Constantine also assured the citizenry that complete submission to the Papacy would be only temporary. Doukas explains that the people “agreed to the Article of Union with the understanding that, once the Turkish threat had passed and peace was restored, a number of scholars would gather to study the articles and correct whatever was not in complete accordance with the true faith.”²¹¹ Fortunately for the emperor, these measures succeeded.

The proclamation of union caused great lamentation in the city, but no violence.²¹² Instead, the anti-unionists merely avoided Hagia Sophia, which Cardinal Isidore had transformed into a Latin cathedral. Doukas writes: “From that day on which the Union had supposedly taken place in the Great Church [Hagia Sophia], the Constantinopolitans shunned it as though it were a synagogue of Jews, and neither oblation nor burnt offering nor censuring took place inside.”²¹³ Nonetheless, the proclamation liturgy satisfied Cardinal Isidore, who wrote to Pope Nicholas V shortly after the ceremony explaining merely that the Greeks had finally proclaimed union with Rome. Isidore, sympathetic to the Greeks plight, did not inform the pope of the dissention within Constantinople or the emperor’s theological apathy.²¹⁴ As a result, Constantine

²¹⁰ Sphrantzes 72.

²¹¹ Doukas 205.

²¹² Barbaro 12: “On the thirteenth of December the Union took place in the church of Saint Sophia with great solemnity on the part of the clerics, and there was there also the Reverend Cardinal of Russia [Isidore], who was sent by the Pope, and also there was the Most Serene Emperor with all his nobles, and all the people of Constantinople, and that day there were great lamentations in the city. This Union was with the intention that they should be united as we Franks are, and not have any more schism in the Church, and we should say Mass in their churches, and the Greeks say Mass in our Latin churches.”

²¹³ Doukas 210.

²¹⁴ Doukas 205: “Every heart and every intent of the Greeks was examined, and their trickeries and deceptions did not escape the cardinal’s [Isidore’s] detection. Since he belonged to the same nation, he

succeeded in convincing the Papacy that the Greeks were serious about church union, without overwhelmingly alienating his citizenry.

Emperor Constantine XI also delicately managed the problem concerning the vacant patriarchate following Gregory III Mammes' departure in April 1451. He believed that appointing a new patriarch risked shattering the tenuous peace he created in Constantinople and was unnecessary until someone defeated the Ottoman threat to the city. While the proclamation of union in Hagia Sophia in December 1452 implied that Gregory III could return to the patriarchal throne, he declined and remained sequestered in Italy.²¹⁵ Even when his close friend George Sphrantzes recommended Cardinal Isidore for the patriarchal throne as a way to gain the Roman see's assistance, Constantine refused to act. The Constantinopolitan citizenry had not yet rioted against church union, but any provocation could break the emperor's fragile peace.²¹⁶ The proclamation of church union had come close to inciting riots, but its implementation was absolutely necessary for papal military support. Filling the vacant patriarchate was not as necessary. Instead, Constantine again explained that he could not focus upon such matters while the Ottomans stood at the city gates.²¹⁷ Once the impending crisis ended, he would decide upon a new patriarch. The Papacy relented and allowed the emperor to wait. Again, Constantine XI successfully avoided conflict with his own people while bolstering his position with Rome.

needed little prompting to offer the City his help. He was content, therefore, to report to the pope only what had taken place."

²¹⁵ Doukas 203: "The emperor earlier had sent word to Rome that in return for aid... Patriarch Gregory would return to his throne."

²¹⁶ Sphrantzes 72: "After many consultations and deliberations, my late master and emperor decided to abandon the first alternative altogether, since the appointed patriarch requires the obedience of all; otherwise riots and war ensue between him and those who are opposed to his appointment; especially at this time, when we were facing extreme war, what a misfortune to have a war inside the City as well!"

²¹⁷ Leonard of Chios 29.

Constantine and his advisors also relied upon leniency to maintain peace within the city while implementing the union of the churches. The emperor lowered the tensions within Constantinople by allowing the citizenry to voice their dissent freely. Constantine and his inner circle refused to take harsh actions against those residents that did not believe in union. Bishop Leonard of Chios, an assistant to Cardinal Isidore, explains that the emperor would not punish vocal monks for their beliefs: “Indeed, if he had only shaken off his timidity, he would have punished their [the monks] deceitful pretense of faith; for he who spurns God and seeks to please man will surely be confounded. If only they had been repressed, as they should have been, they would not have spread this pestilential infection.”²¹⁸ Doukas agrees with the bishop, describing the emperor’s actions toward anti-unionist nuns: “Those nuns, who considered themselves to be pure and dedicated to God in Orthodoxy, with common resolve and in accord with their teacher Gennadios [a prominent anti-unionist], and with the abbots and the confessors and the remaining priests and laymen, cried aloud the anathema.”²¹⁹ Even though the dissidents opposed church union, many were grateful to the emperor for his leniency, understood his position, and pledged their loyalty to the emperor and Constantinople. Doukas details this in his chronicle: “The Constantinopolitans, in their despair, had been saying, ‘Would that the City were delivered into the hands of the Latins, who call upon Christ and the Theotokos [Mother of God], and not thrown into the clutches of the infidel.’”²²⁰ As a result, Constantine provided means for dissidents to voice their opinions while retaining their loyalty to the empire. The papal legate Isidore, along with his assistant Leonard of Chios, expressed their concern over the emperor’s leniency, but understood that he

²¹⁸ Leonard of Chios 20.

²¹⁹ Doukas 204.

²²⁰ Doukas 210.

needed to diffuse the tensions over church union.²²¹ Through his flexibility, Emperor Constantine further maintained the peace between the unionists and anti-unionists during his quest for papal aid.

Constantine's and his administration's efforts to secure papal assistance for Constantinople during its time of crisis were a partial success. While the Papacy faced several challenges in Western Europe that occupied many of its resources, Pope Nicholas V aided Byzantium in a variety of ways. First, Constantine's implementation of church union led the Papacy to recommend another crusade to save the Greeks. Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, later Pope Pius II, explains in his autobiography that the Curia wanted to rouse the western princes to defend Constantinople.²²² While matters in the west prevented Nicholas from organizing a general crusade, he did exhort all Christians to individually travel to Constantinople to take part in its defense against impending assault. One of these enterprising westerners was Giovanni Giustiniani Longo. Giustiniani was a Genoese adventurer experienced in siege warfare.²²³ Doukas describes his entry into Constantinople: "From Genoa there also arrived Giovanni Longo Giustiniani in two huge ships which were carrying a large supply of excellent military equipment and well-armed youthful Genoese soldiers full of martial passion. This Giovanni was a very adept tactician in the deployment of allied military forces. The emperor welcomed him warmly

²²¹ Leonard of Chios 20.

²²² Pius II 63: "Aeneas in his [the pope's] name read two speeches in public audience: one thanking the Pope and the cardinals for the distinguished favors they had bestowed on the [German] Emperor; the other begging that a crusade against the enemies of Christianity should be proclaimed and equipped and imploring the Pope to put a stop to the harrying of Christians in Greece and the Orient."

²²³ Melissenos 103: "There was a Genoese nobleman named Giovanni Giustiniani in the City, a skillful, brave, sensible, and experienced individual in command of the ships."

and honored him with the rank of Protostrator.”²²⁴ Giustiniani was one of several private Italian and German soldiers that traveled to Constantinople’s defense.

While not enough to save the city, Pope Nicholas V also provided military forces and supplies for Constantinople. Troop enrollment and resource procurement in Italy were long and arduous tasks, as recruiting, training, equipping, and shipping military units and supplies took a significant amount of time. The first troops arrived in October 1451, in the company of Cardinal Isidore. On his way from Rome, Isidore recruited with papal funds more than 200 crossbowmen and gunners skilled with gunpowder weaponry from Naples. The cardinal knew that his gesture would be appreciated by the beleaguered emperor, as “his military escort, small though it was, was a token that the pope would send practical assistance to a people that recognized his authority.”²²⁵ Once the Ottoman encirclement of Constantinople began in earnest (in late 1452), the Papacy shifted its focus from sending troops to sending supplies for the citizenry. Using its limited resources, the Papacy outfitted several transports of grain to feed Constantinople. The most notable of these convoys traveled to Constantinople in April 1453. The pope filled one of Constantine’s imperial galleys with grain in Sicily at his own expense, and hired three Genoese vessels to carry other assorted provisions to the city.²²⁶ Despite dozens of Ottoman vessels surrounding them in the Bosphorus, the four ships fought their way into Constantinople’s protected harbor, supplying the city with foodstuffs and ammunition. Even though the Papacy’s troops and supplies did not prevent Constantinople’s capture

²²⁴ Doukas 211.

²²⁵ Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople 1453* 69.

²²⁶ Melissenos 106: “Three Genoese ships finished loading at Chios, waited for favorable winds, and set sail for our City. On their way they were joined by an imperial vessel transporting grain from Sicily.”

by Mehmed II's superior army, the shipments that the Papacy provided were a direct result of Constantine XI's competence.

Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos successfully maintained cordial relations with the Papacy throughout his reign by skillfully implementing the union of the churches. The emperor gained confidence from his advisors' solidarity regarding the union's usefulness, which came from the expert advice provided by Cardinal Isidore. These also emboldened his subsequent actions in Constantinople. By implementing portions of the union when convenient, Constantine pleased Pope Nicholas V and his legate in Constantinople, Isidore. In addition, the emperor's delicate implementation of union forestalled any rioting by the large anti-unionist faction in the city. While papal aid to Constantinople did not prevent the city's capture by the Ottomans, the emperor was still successful in his relations with the Roman see.

CHAPTER FIVE

Constantine and the Venetians

Constantine XI's relationship with Venetian interests in Constantinople before the siege also represents a partial success in Byzantine diplomacy. While the Venetian government sent only a token amount of aid to the emperor, Constantine and his court successfully mobilized the Venetian population within Constantinople to support Byzantium against the Ottoman Turks during the crisis. Constantine realized that the Venetian Senate would send him little aid. The city was involved in its own conflicts over Italian hegemony. He had antagonized Venetian interests during his tenure as despot of the Morea, the Venetian doge mistrusted Greeks in general, and his advisors, on the whole, mistrusted the Venetian government. As a result, Constantine focused his pleas for help upon the merchants, ship captains, and other Venetian residents and travelers in the Byzantine capital. Instead of fleeing before the Turkish siege, a significant portion of Constantinople's Venetian population remained in the city, risking death, to aid in its defense because Emperor Constantine convinced them to do so. As a result of this local support, despite the Venetian government's refusal to provide significant assistance to Constantinople, Constantine XI Palaiologos' diplomacy toward the Venetians was successful.

Before discussing the Byzantine's relations with Venice, it is important to place the Italian republic into its historical context in the fifteenth century. While crisis loomed in the east between Byzantium and the Ottomans, the Venetians prepared for a confrontation with their neighbors over hegemony in northern Italy. As a primarily

maritime republic, Venice wanted to secure food supplies for its citizens and lumber for its shipwrights.²²⁷ However, the Venetian subjugation of towns within its hinterland irritated and antagonized the other major powers in northern Italy: Lombardy and Florence. While the Italians avoided open war in the early fifteenth century, the accession of Francesco Foscari to the Venetian dogeship fundamentally altered the tenuous truce in northern Italy. Foscari, a prominent member of the hawkish faction eager to exert its dominance over the Milanese and Florentines, plunged Venice into war with Milan by 1423.²²⁸ This disastrous conflict extended throughout the next thirty years, drawing vital Venetian military assets into the Po River valley region and away from the Levant and Constantinople.

The Venetians did answer the pope's call for a crusade against the Ottomans in 1443, allying and cooperating with the Hungarians. However, the crusade's catastrophic failure at Varna in late 1444 soured the Venetian crusading spirit. In fact, the Venetians concluded peace and a new trade agreement with the Ottomans shortly after the crusade's dissolution. While the Venetians took Ottoman military strength very seriously after Varna, their main concern in concluding a new treaty with Sultan Murad involved gaining an advantage over the other Italian trading republics in their territories.²²⁹ After concluding this new trade agreement, the Venetian government viewed any negative actions toward the Turks with skepticism. They were not eager to endanger their new agreement or antagonize their new trading partners, especially with other Italian city-states eager to take their place trading in the Ottoman realms. As a result of these issues,

²²⁷ Frederic C. Lane. *Venice: A Maritime Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) 225.

²²⁸ Lane 229.

²²⁹ Lane 235.

Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos faced a highly distracted and disinterested Venetian government in the fifteenth century during his time of crisis.

During his reign, Constantine relied heavily upon his court's advice when negotiating and communicating with the Venetians, both in Venice and in Constantinople. However, only a few members of the emperor's court possessed any experience with Venetian interests or opinions on any proper actions toward them. Among the experienced advisors, the distant Venetian government elicited feelings of hostility and disdain from many of his councilors. However, these councilors frequently developed close, friendly relationships with the Venetian merchants, sea captains, and other artisans and traders traveling and living within the Byzantine capital.

Megadux Lucas Notaras developed the strongest relationships with both the Venetian government and Venetian travelers and citizens in Constantinople. He built close ties with the government in Italy by depositing much of his considerable fortune in Venetian banks, and even settled his three daughters in the city.²³⁰ In addition, Notaras eventually gained Venetian citizenship, proving his connections to influential leaders and businessmen within the republic.²³¹ The *megadux* also cultivated close ties with the Venetian merchants and trader captains that frequented Constantinople. In order to gain their favor, Notaras frequently devoted Byzantine resources to developing infrastructure and effecting repairs in the city's Venetian quarter along the Golden Horn. For example, Lucas Notaras supervised and financed the repair and expansion of harbors in the Golden Horn to accommodate larger Venetian galleys and merchantmen in 1446.²³² The Venetians in Constantinople also favored him because of his antagonism toward one of

²³⁰ Donald M. Nicol. *Byzantium and Venice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 415.

²³¹ Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 47.

²³² Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice* 387.

the Venetians' main Italian rivals: the Genoese. Before the crisis, Notaras clearly favored Venetian interests over those of the Genoese in nearby Galata, but his bias clearly showed during the Ottoman crisis and siege of Constantinople. For example, the Genoese soldier of fortune and the commander of the Christian forces at the walls, Giovanni Giustiniani and Lucas Notaras entered into heated debates over the correct placement of military units and defensive artillery against the Turks. The *megadux* attempted to frustrate Giustiniani's plans at every step, though.²³³ As a result of these actions, Lucas Notaras possessed a significant amount of respect from Venetians, both in Italy and in Constantinople. He worked feverishly to convince them to cooperate with Constantine XI's plans and advised the emperor of their desires and capabilities to defend the city.

While Lucas Notaras possessed a friendly rapport with the Venetian government and citizens within Constantinople, First Lord of the Imperial Wardrobe George Sphrantzes was skeptical and mistrusted Venetians. Sphrantzes particularly scorned the hawkish Venetian doge, Francesco Foscari, characterizing him as vengeful, deceitful, and thoroughly anti-Greek in his sentiments. In his *Chronicon Minus*, George Sphrantzes describes a supposed marital arrangement between the doge's daughter and Constantine, during his tenure as despot of the Morea.²³⁴ Foscari wished to unite Venetian possessions in the Morea, mainly Modon and Coron, with Constantine's realm in the peninsula's northwest. In addition, he promised the poverty-stricken despot with "a handsome dowry," which Constantine could not deny in his struggle against the Turks and the Achaean lords adjacent to his realm.²³⁵ However, Sphrantzes claims that upon gaining the

²³³ Leonard of Chios 29: "He asked the *Megadux* Lucas Notaras for the cannon which belonged to the city, so that he could use them against the enemy. In reply he received a haughty refusal."

²³⁴ Sphrantzes 71.

²³⁵ Sphrantzes 71.

throne, Constantine rightfully cancelled the agreement with Foscari on the grounds that imperial dignity could not permit a lowly Venetian to become Roman empress at Constantinople.²³⁶ After Constantine cancelled the agreement, Sphrantzes claims that Foscari became a bitter enemy of Byzantium, doing nothing to save it from the Ottomans. Since George Sphrantzes believed that ending such a marriage agreement was proper and justified, he vilified the doge for his supposed bitterness and extended his disdain toward most Venetians. While Donald Nicol refutes the legitimacy of this proposed marriage, Sphrantzes' inclusion of it within his narrative is significant.²³⁷ This example shows his hostility toward the Venetians and his desire to legitimize that hostility through this story. In addition, George Sphrantzes' diplomatic missions around the Aegean and Black Seas limited his exposure to Venetians living within Constantinople. Therefore, he could not provide Emperor Constantine with detailed advice on a proper course of action toward them.

The Grand Domestic Andronikos Palaiologos Kantakouzenos, much like Lucas Notaras, possessed considerable knowledge of Venice and Venetian negotiating tactics. Kantakouzenos represented the empire in several treaty negotiations with Venice. His most notable Venetian diplomatic achievement was the commercial treaty in 1448, where

²³⁶ Sphrantzes 71-72: "Once Constantine had become emperor and come to the City, this marriage was out of the question. What nobleman or noblewoman would ever receive the daughter of a Venetian – even though he might be the glorious doge – as queen and lady for more than a short time? Who would accept his other sons-in-law as the emperor's fellow sons-in-law, and his sons as the brothers-in-law of the emperor?"

²³⁷ Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 32: According to Nicol, no contemporary Venetian sources make any mention of a marriage alliance or proposal between Doge Francesco Foscari and Despot Constantine. In addition, Constantine's rejection of such a marriage would be completely uncharacteristic of the emperor, as he desperately sought to connect his realms to those in the West to secure protection from the Ottomans. For further information on Constantine's marriage goals, see: Steven Runciman. "The Marriages of the Sons of the Emperor Manuel II." *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Slavi: Miscellanea Agostino Pertusi*. Tomo I (Bologna: Pàtron Editore, 1980) 273-282.

he personally represented Emperor John VIII.²³⁸ While possessing more knowledge of the Venetians than George Sphrantzes, he shared the ambassador's opinions of Venice. Kantakouzenos recognized that the Venetian doge would act in the republic's best interest, whether that meant cooperating with Byzantium or with the Ottomans to gain economic and political advantages over his rivals. In addition, the memories of the Venetians' role in the Fourth Crusade of 1204 were foremost in Greek minds, especially that of Andronikos. This traumatic event, ingrained in the Byzantine collective memory, fundamentally characterized Greek relations with Venice. After Venetian ships and soldiers assaulted and captured Constantinople, and subsequently stripped the city of its wealth, the Greeks were extremely wary of trusting them ever again.²³⁹ Kantakouzenos understood that Byzantium needed allies if it was to survive a Turkish attack.²⁴⁰ However, he did not believe that the Venetian government would be the ally that the Greeks required. While the Venetian residents of Constantinople might act to defend the city against an Ottoman assault, he believed that the republic itself would not actively support Byzantium during its time of extreme crisis.

While Notaras, Andronikos Kantakouzenos, and Sphrantzes were among Constantine's most trusted advisors, his most knowledgeable and useful associate when interacting with the Venetians was their *baille* in 1452 and 1453, Girolamo Minotto.²⁴¹ He was also the successful target of Constantine XI's personal diplomacy. While the previous *baille* acted mainly as a communications medium between the Venetian

²³⁸ Nicol, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos* no. 68 180.

²³⁹ Laonikos Chalkokondyles. *Demonstrations of Histories: Books I – III*. Trans. Nicolaos Nicoloudis (Athens: St. D. Basilopoulos, 1996) 93.

²⁴⁰ Cristoforo Riccherio in *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts*. Trans. J.R. Melville-Jones (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1972) 118.

²⁴¹ A Venetian *baille* supervised and administered the Venetian populations in cities outside of the republic, in most cases independently of local rulers. The *baille* of Constantinople oversaw one of the most considerable Venetian populations outside of Venice in the fifteenth century.

government in Italy and the emperor, Minotto took an active role in Constantine's inner circle.²⁴² Initially interested in balancing Venetian relations between Constantinople and the Ottoman sultanate, the destruction of a Venetian merchant galley by the fortress *Rumeli Hisar* completely altered his orientation.²⁴³ The *baille* realized what this action implied for Venetian trading throughout the Aegean, and he wanted to do anything he could to keep its control independent of the Ottomans. Such an act placed the Ottomans in a state of war with Venice, but the republic wanted to pursue a diplomatic solution to the situation.²⁴⁴ However, Minotto realized the futility of negotiation with the Turks. Their recent peace and trade agreement had not prevented the Venetian galley's destruction in the Bosphorus, and the *baille* had little reason to expect any new agreements to fair any better than the current arrangement. Therefore, with few prospects of assistance from the Venetian government, Minotto helped the emperor mobilize the local Venetian population in Constantinople for his war efforts. He convinced a number of merchant galleys and transports to remain in the city pending a siege, and acted as the emperor's liaison in defense matters.²⁴⁵ Girolamo Minotto became so important to and trusted by Constantine XI that he was given command of the Greek and Italian troops defending the Blachernae Palace, the emperor's imperial residence near the walls along

²⁴² Barbaro 21: Girolamo Minotto frequently held councils with Emperor Constantine, especially as the Ottoman threat to the city intensified.

²⁴³ Doukas 200-201: Rumeli Hisar, Mehmed II's new European fortress, destroyed Venetian captain Antonio Rizzo's galley for refusing to submit to Ottoman inspection. Minotto's frustration at the vessel's destruction was compounded by the Turks' treatment of its survivors. Doukas explains: "The fortress' garrison discharged an enormous stone which shattered the ship. As the vessel began to sink, the captain and thirty survivors boarded a boat and made it ashore. The Turks seized them, bound their hands and necks in chains, and, placing them in single file, brought them before Mehmed who was then sojourning in Didymoteichos. He gave orders to behead them all except the captain whose life was taken by a stake through the anus. Moreover, they were to be left uninterred."

²⁴⁴ Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice* 395-398.

²⁴⁵ Barbaro 14-16.

the Golden Horn.²⁴⁶ As a result of his close relationship with Emperor Constantine and his animosity toward the Ottoman Turks, the Venetian *baille* Girolamo Minotto was one of Byzantium's foremost advisors on diplomacy toward Venice and her citizens.

However, Emperor Constantine's diplomatic relations with Venice were complicated by his aggressive actions toward the republic while despot of the Morea. Specifically, Constantine's capture of Patras, a port city in the Moreote northwest, irritated Venice and characterized the future emperor as a maverick. In the fifteenth century, the city of Patras was administered by its Latin archbishop, Pandolfo Malatesta, under the suzerainty of the Papacy.²⁴⁷ The Venetians briefly held possession of the city between 1408 and 1419, but sold the city to the Latin ruler of Epiros, Carlo II Tocco, who later placed the city under Rome's protection. However, the Venetians still coveted Patras as a commercial center and conducted a brisk trade within the city. They also still viewed the city as a target for Venetian territorial expansion in the Morea, as Patras was located across the Corinthian Gulf from their base of Naupaktos. However, after John VIII established his brother Constantine in the northwest Morea as despot, the port city was a prime target for him as well. The despot did not waste time attacking the city. Constantine moved against Patras in 1428, shortly after his arrival in the Morea. However, even with the aid of his brothers John and Thomas, the despot could not capture the city. He accepted instead an annual tribute of 500 gold coins from the city's defenders.²⁴⁸ While the Venetians in Naupaktos were not pleased with this arrangement

²⁴⁶ Melissenos 109.

²⁴⁷ Sphrantzes 43; Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 9.

²⁴⁸ Sphrantzes 33: "As nothing useful could be accomplished against Patras, with the exception of the capture of three young defenders, a peace treaty was struck with those in the castle; it specified that Patras would pay an annual tribute of 500 gold coins to Lord Constantine."

between Patras and Despot Constantine, it still allowed them to maintain their commercial ties to the city as before.

Constantine's subsequent actions surprised Venetian observers. Almost immediately, he laid siege to the city once again, this time with a larger, more committed army. The despot actively engaged the defenders, barely escaping death during a skirmish when archers killed his horse from under him.²⁴⁹ After a brief but intense struggle, the defenders and the despot reached an agreement, since the bishop was traveling through Italy during Constantine's sieges of Patras. If he did not return after a month, the defenders would surrender to Constantine and proclaim him their overlord.²⁵⁰ When the metropolitan did not return in the allotted time, Patras surrendered to Despot Constantine, although the city's citadel, defended by men loyal to the bishop (including some Venetians), did not surrender for another twelve months.²⁵¹ Constantine's occupation of Patras annoyed the Venetians and frustrated their plans for domination over the city.²⁵² In addition, the Byzantine capture of Patras threatened the status of Venetian mercantile interests in the city, as the despot could force new taxes to finance his further Moreote campaigns.²⁵³ Despot Constantine's actions against Patras would become important after his accession to the throne in 1449, as the military campaign established him as a maverick in Venetian eyes. Even twenty years later, the Republic of Venice viewed Constantine as a threat to their possessions in Greece and throughout the Levant, and was reluctant to provide him with aid.

²⁴⁹ Sphrantzes 36.

²⁵⁰ Sphrantzes 40: "If their lord and metropolitan returned during the month of May, he would act as he saw fit. If he failed to arrive, however, they would surrender the castle."

²⁵¹ Sphrantzes 45.

²⁵² Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor* 11.

²⁵³ Peter Lock. *The Franks in the Aegean 1204 – 1500* (New York: Longman, 1995) 108.

The Venetian government also hesitated to support Constantine XI in Constantinople because Byzantium possessed a sizeable debt to Venice. In 1449, shortly after Constantine's accession, this debt amounted to 17,163 *hyperpera*, a staggering amount to the impoverished empire.²⁵⁴ Constantine himself accrued little of this debt. Much of it resulted from a loan taken by Anna of Savoy, mother of Emperor John V, during her civil wars with John VI Kantakouzenos in the late fourteenth century. Anna received 30,000 Venetian gold ducats for her campaigns, and offered the Byzantine crown jewels as collateral for future payment.²⁵⁵ Each successive emperor, including Constantine, felt indignation and embarrassment because the Byzantine crown jewels no longer resided in Constantinople. However, the emperors had more pressing concerns and uses for their monetary resources than recovering the crown jewels. Compounding this debt, in 1390 John VII agreed to pay a considerable amount of gold for damages to Venetian property in Constantinople during anti-Latin riots and collateral damages from the earlier civil wars.²⁵⁶ Constantine's debt was further increased because of his elder brother Theodore's actions. In 1424, while acting as despot of the Morea, Theodore attacked the Venetian ports of Modon and Coron, wreaking havoc with their possessions in the hinterland of those cities.²⁵⁷ Shortly thereafter, in the face of Venetian pressure, John VIII agreed to compensate Venice for their losses in the region. As a result of these actions throughout the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Constantine XI and his court faced a staggering debt that the Venetians wanted to collect.

²⁵⁴ Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice* 391.

²⁵⁵ Barker 443; for more information concerning the Byzantine crown jewels in Venetian hands, see John W. Barker, *Manuel II Palaeologus (1391-1425): A Study in Late Byzantine Statesmanship* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1969) Appendix I: The Pawning of the Byzantine Crown Jewels to Venice, 443 – 445.

²⁵⁶ Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice* 398.

²⁵⁷ Setton 16.

One of Constantine's first acts as emperor was to stabilize his economic situation. With increased resources, he could continue to rebuild and repair the city walls, improve the city's infrastructure, and begin to slowly pay Byzantium's debts to the Venetians in order to gain their favor and assistance. Emperor Constantine's administration did begin minting new *hyperpera* for such purposes, but the empire possessed a very limited amount of specie.²⁵⁸ In order to gain new sources of specie for his coinage, Constantine levied a new tax upon the foreign merchant interests in the city, extracting customs duties from their ships as they sailed to and from Constantinople in 1450.²⁵⁹ Almost immediately, the Venetians in the city railed against these new duties, claiming that they violated the Byzantine-Venetian treaty of 1448 signed by John VIII's administration. This treaty guaranteed Venetian mercantile independence around the city.²⁶⁰ Constantine also received envoys from the Venetian government in Italy, complaining about the inconveniences suffered by Venice as a result of his sweeping tax measures.²⁶¹ While the emperor desperately needed the revenues from these customs duties to finance Constantinople's defense against the Ottoman Empire, he carefully considered the merchants' opinions within the city. If Venice itself would not send support to Byzantium, the goodwill of Venetian merchants and captains residing in Constantinople would be crucial to its defense. Therefore, while he never withdrew the customs edict, its enforcement dropped significantly, especially as Turkish pressure on the city increased in

²⁵⁸ Philip Grierson. *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection. Volume Five: Michael VIII to Constantine XI 1258 – 1453. Part Two: Catalogue, Concordances, and Indexes*. Eds. Alfred R. Bellinger and Philip Grierson (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1999) 529-531; S. Bendall and P.J. Donald. *The Later Palaeologan Coinage 1282 – 1453* (Bristol: A.H. Baldwin & Sons, 1979) 176-7: Archaeological evidence has discovered various denominations of *hyperpera* carrying Constantine XI's name and image, proving that he did mint coinage during his brief reign.

²⁵⁹ Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice* 391.

²⁶⁰ Leonard of Chios 26-27.

²⁶¹ Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice* 391.

1452. As a result, Constantine could claim to the Venetian government that he was attempting to raise the monetary resources necessary to pay Byzantium's considerable debt to the city, without alienating the sizeable Venetian population within Constantinople.



*Figure 2: A Silver Quarter-Hyperperon Minted by Constantine XI*²⁶²

In order to counter such negative perceptions, Constantine sought to ingratiate himself to Venetian interests by relying almost exclusively upon Venetian transportation throughout the Aegean. His decision to use Venetian shipping was not unique. Emperors throughout the fifteenth century relied upon Venice when traveling both around the Aegean and the Mediterranean. In 1400, Manuel II used their galleys during his grand visit to the rulers of Western Europe.²⁶³ Constantine's brother John VIII also used Venetian transportation when traveling between Constantinople and Italy for the Council of Florence.²⁶⁴ This was partly a practical decision, since Venice held a powerful naval position in the region, with several strategic bases scattered on islands around the Mediterranean. The Venetians were also the only power that consistently defeated the Ottomans at sea. For example, a Venetian squadron smashed the Ottoman fleet off of Gallipoli in May 1416, causing significant damage to Turkish sailors' morale.²⁶⁵ In fact,

²⁶² Bendall and Donald 177.

²⁶³ Doukas 87: "The Venetians extended him their hospitality, as was meet, and after giving him many gifts, he returned to Methone on their triremes."

²⁶⁴ Doukas 179, 181; Chalkokondyles 147.

²⁶⁵ Doukas 119: "When the Venetians saw the Turkish triremes moving out like the links of a chain strung out, they bore down upon them, and sounding the attack, joined battle. Ramming first the trireme of

these sailors became convinced of Venetian invulnerability at sea and were extremely wary of attacking them in the region. However, the Venetians were not the only group capable of transporting the Byzantines around the region. After 1261, the sea routes around Constantinople were essential to Genoese, Catalan, and other European trade interests centering on the port of Caffa on the Black Sea coast.²⁶⁶ Each of these powers maintained considerable trading fleets in the region, capable of shuttling the Greeks on their diplomatic and administrative missions. However, the Byzantine rulers tried to win the favor of local Venetian captains, giving them the nearly exclusive honor of transporting them on important missions of state. They also tried to impress the Venetian government by rarely traveling with their economic or political competitors such as the Genoese or other Italians.

Constantine XI continued the traditions of his father and brother in this regard. During his tenure as despot, he often traveled between Constantinople and the Morea to receive instructions and guidance from his brother John VIII. In almost every documented case, Constantine traveled by way of Venetian galleys plying the trade routes between Crete, another Venetian possession, and ports along the Black Sea.²⁶⁷ He also used their ships to travel around the Morea, even negotiating with representatives of Patras aboard a Venetian merchant vessel in 1437.²⁶⁸ Upon his accession, Constantine's

Admiral Čali Beg, they hacked him to pieces and slaughtered mercilessly everyone on board. Then they boarded one trireme after the other, overpowering all the ships."

²⁶⁶ Anna Avramea. "Land and Sea Communications, Fourth-Fifteenth Centuries." *The Economic History of Byzantium*. Ed. Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002) 87.

²⁶⁷ George Sphrantzes documents several instances when Despot Constantine relied upon Venetian shipping. For example, Sphrantzes 47: (In 1435) "While my lord the despot was at Stylaria, expecting the official Venetian vessels for his passage to the City, I arrived, without accomplishing anything. So I took the boat with him."

²⁶⁸ Sphrantzes 49: "My master and I went from Patras to Euripos by a land route. At Karystos, a castle in Euripos, we took a Venetian ship and met on board Markos, the canon of Patras, who had been there when we attacked it."

court almost exclusively used Venetian shipping while on missions of state. George Sphrantzes, the most prolific traveler in Constantine's court, traveled on their ships during missions to the Morea, the Ottomans and to Trebizond.²⁶⁹ As a result of this exclusive usage, the Byzantine imperial family and court became familiar with several Venetian merchants and ships' captains in the region. Many of these merchants and captains were among those that remained in Constantinople to help defend the city against the Ottoman Turks, showing that Constantine's policy regarding Venetian transportation did succeed in drawing help for the empire.

By maintaining friendly relationships with several of the Venetian captains who sailed around the Aegean and Black Seas, Emperor Constantine gained valuable intelligence concerning Ottoman military movements around Constantinople. The emperor regularly met with these friendly captains and received information about the Turks that the merchants would hear throughout their travels. For example, Venetian shipping alerted the emperor of Mehmed's plans to build the fortress of *Rumeli Hisar* six miles away from the capital city. The captains also provided Constantine with detailed information concerning the armament and fortifications that the new castle possessed.²⁷⁰ The emperor also wanted these captains to relay the information they gained through their travels to the Venetian government in order to convince it that the Byzantine capital was in extreme danger. Constantine XI Palaiologos rightly believed that the government

²⁶⁹ Sphrantzes 55: On the mission to the Morea: "At the end of December 1445, I sailed to the Morea with the Venetian boats which had brought the embassy to the City." Sphrantzes 54: On the mission to the Ottomans in Thebes: "I boarded the vessel of Antonios Hyalinas from Crete and landed at Karystos of Euripos." Sphrantzes 62: On the mission to Trebizond in 1451: "I arrived safely in the City on board the ship of Antonio Rizzo, the good man who later suffered martyrdom for his faith in Christ."

²⁷⁰ Barbaro 9: "In March, 1452, Mehmed Bey the Turk set about building a fine castle six miles from Constantinople towards the mouth of the Black Sea. It had fourteen towers, of which the five principal ones were covered with lead and very strongly built."

in Italy would believe its own sailors and captains concerning the Turkish threat, rather than any Greek envoy that the emperor might send to ask the Venetians for assistance.

Since Emperor Constantine could not convince the Venetian government that their interests in Constantinople were threatened by an Ottoman invasion and that he was not a danger to their interests, Venice sent only a token amount of aid to Byzantium during the crisis. While the emperor's plan to use Venetian merchant captains to convince the government of Constantinople's precarious position did work, the main fleet intended to save the city did not arrive in time. The emperor himself could not sufficiently convince the Venetians that the city was really in any danger. The city's fortifications had held off numerous Turkish assaults in the recent past, most notably in 1422, and the Venetian Senate believed that an attack by the young Mehmed II would also fail at the triple walls. Venetian naval victories against the Ottomans, most recently in 1416, also convinced Francesco Foscari and the senate that any Turkish navy posed little threat to Christians in the East.²⁷¹ The Venetian government did answer a request by the emperor and the *baille* for provisions of body armor and gunpowder, which was sent ostensibly to defend Venetian interests in Constantinople from Turkish raids before the main siege began. However, this was the only aid the government sent to the ailing city before its fall.²⁷²

The Venetian government did belatedly take some action to aid Byzantium. In late 1452, after impassioned pleas by Admiral Alvise Loredan, leader of the naval action off Gallipoli in 1416, and another merchant galley captain, Antonio Diedo, did the

²⁷¹ Barbaro 78: "Our Senators would not believe that the Turks could bring a fleet against Constantinople."

²⁷² Sphrantzes 71: George Sphrantzes laments the lack of Italian help throughout this section of the *Chronicon Minus*.

Venetian Senate act to save Constantinople.²⁷³ The Venetian Senate begrudgingly voted to send an armada to the Aegean Sea to reinforce Constantinople when they heard news of Sultan Mehmed II's preparations.²⁷⁴ However, this fleet was equipped so slowly that the Byzantines almost surely knew it would never come in time. Constantine continued to watch for any signs of a relieving Venetian fleet in the Aegean Sea throughout the siege, but it never arrived.²⁷⁵ As a result of the Venetian government's lack of support for Constantinople, the emperor focused his attention upon the city's Venetian residents as sources of support against the Ottoman invasion.

While Constantine was only partially successful at convincing the Venetian government to aid Constantinople, he was very successful with the *baille*, Girolamo Minotto, and the rest of the Venetian residents of the city through his strategy of personal diplomacy. Since the government gave Minotto the power to act as he saw fit to protect the republic's interests in Constantinople, whether by assisting the emperor or offering his friendship to the sultan, he wholeheartedly threw his support behind Constantine. Even though the emperor tried to impose new taxes upon the Venetian merchants, he eventually relented and had otherwise shown his friendship to them. In addition, many members of his court patronized Venetian interests and catered to their various needs in the city. Minotto knew that Constantine needed the Venetians and other Italian republics to carry out his trade and other mercantile affairs, and would therefore be amenable to their interests. On the other hand, Sultan Mehmed II did not need them. While contacts to lucrative trade markets in Italy did excite Turkish merchants, they were not crucial to the

²⁷³ Sphrantzes 72.

²⁷⁴ Barbaro 78: "They decided, however, to arm fifteen galleys and two ships of eight hundred *botte* each on the nineteenth of February, 1452, but did not begin to send them until they knew that the Turks had begun the siege."

²⁷⁵ Barbaro 23-27.

Ottoman Empire's survival.²⁷⁶ As a result, the *baille* took several measures to ensure the Venetian residents of Constantinople's support against the Turks.

Baille Girolamo Minotto, in cooperation with Emperor Constantine XI, prevented all Venetian ships from leaving Constantinople during the crisis. Since the city was an important waystation for ships traveling from Caffa and Trebizond, where they could rest and re-supply their vessels before sailing into the Aegean Sea, several merchant ships arrived throughout late 1452 and early 1453. These vessels were subsequently detained by the *baille* for military service.²⁷⁷ While such acts might have angered these merchants, who were now trapped in Constantinople as the city awaited Mehmed's siege, there are no accounts of any such feelings in the Greek or Italian sources on the crisis. This can be attributed to both the *baille*'s and the emperor's personal charisma, as they were able to inspire the city's wary defenders on numerous occasions. However, the emperor still feared that the Venetians might abandon the city to its fate. The ships' captains, as well as several other merchants who were defending the city, requested that their cargoes remain stored aboard Venetian vessels, instead of being stored in the city's warehouses. This would significantly hasten any plan to abandon the emperor and Constantinople, since the Venetians would not have to waste time loading their ships before fleeing.²⁷⁸ However, in order to reassure the emperor, the *baille* forced each captain to swear an oath to

²⁷⁶ Klaus-Peter Matschke. "The Late Byzantine Urban Economy, Thirteenth – Fifteenth Centuries." *The Economic History of Byzantium*. Ed. Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002) 481.

²⁷⁷ Doukas 211: "When the Venetian merchant triremes sailed from the Sea of Azov and the Don river and from Trebizond, on their way back to Venice, the emperor and the Venetians who were residing in the City would not allow them to continue on their way. They stayed ostensibly to help defend the City."

²⁷⁸ Barbaro 21: "When the Emperor had understood the words of the captains and of the *Baille*, that at all costs they wanted to have the merchandise on board the galleys, then he and all his barons gathered in a group and took counsel together, and when they had spoken much with each other, the Emperor, with an air of great sorrow, replied courteously to the *Baille* and to the two captains, "Indeed I understand quite well, honorable *Baille*, and you, honorable Captains, that as soon as you have the merchandise on the galleys, you will sail as soon as it is dark, and go with God, and leave me alone against the army of Mehmed Bey the Turk, my treacherous enemy, which we await every day, since intends to attack my empire by land and by sea with all the force available to him."

Constantine that he would not leave until the siege had ended.²⁷⁹ Nearly all of the Venetian captains honored their agreement with Minotto and Constantine XI, further showing the *baille*'s and the emperor's skills of persuasion and inspiration. In all, at least nine Venetian vessels, with their crews, participated in the defense of Constantinople.²⁸⁰

Aside from the ships' crews, the other Venetian residents of Constantinople also actively defended the city for Emperor Constantine. Since they could no longer leave the city, as the *baille* had cancelled all departures from Constantinople, they also vigorously participated in the defense. The emperor made constant visits to the Venetian quarter of Constantinople, encouraging the residents and offering his thanks, making it known that their support was crucial for the city. Men from all professions joined work parties repairing the city's fortifications, constructed shields and weapons in the Venetian quarter's workshops, and took watches upon the city walls with the Greeks. For example, the surgeon Nicolò Barbaro details in his diary of the siege that the Venetian residents wholeheartedly supported the city's defense, as he himself worked diligently to restore and augment the city's fortifications.²⁸¹ In fact, the Venetian residents of Constantinople were so proud of their involvement that when Constantine asked several contingents to parade along the city walls in their full regalia and armor, they gladly agreed.²⁸² While the Venetian government sent only a small amount of aid to Constantinople during the

²⁷⁹ Barbaro 21-22.

²⁸⁰ Melissenos 102: "Our naval forces consisted of three ships from Genoa, one from Spanish Castille, one owned by a Frenchman from Provence, and three from Crete (one from Khandax and two from Kydonia); they were all well equipped for battle. Three Venetian merchantmen with their escorts, certain fast triremes, were also in the harbor and assisted in its defense." Since Crete was a Venetian possession during this period, their ships are counted among the Venetian total. In addition, each merchantman was assumed to have one escorting vessel, reaching the total of at least nine Venetian ships in Constantinople during the siege.

²⁸¹ Barbaro 23.

²⁸² Barbaro 29.

crisis and siege, the emperor successfully mobilized the local Venetian population to assist with the city's defense.

However, once the number of Venetians in the city swelled because several galleys and merchantmen remained for its defense, Constantine XI faced the potential problem of Italian rivalries erupting into violence. More specifically, the emperor needed to ease tensions between the Venetians and the population of Galata, the Genoese colony across the Golden Horn from Constantinople. The Genoese also participated in the defense of Constantinople. However, their contributions had to remain a secret in order to maintain the peace between the Ottomans and the Genoese government in Italy, and to safeguard their colony at Galata.²⁸³ Nonetheless, many Genoese crossed the Golden Horn to assist the emperor with the defense, sharing feelings of Christian camaraderie with the Greeks that superseded any treaty obligations. While initially the Venetians and Genoese maintained an uneasy peace in Constantinople, the arrival of Giovanni Giustiniani with seven hundred Genoese volunteers and mercenaries increased tensions between the two groups considerably. The emperor handled the situation very carefully. He recognized that Giustiniani, with his considerable experiences in siege warfare around Italy, would be the best commander for Constantinople's triple walls.²⁸⁴ However, Constantine placed several Venetian contingents at key defense points along the walls to avoid showing favoritism toward the Genoese.²⁸⁵ By equally dividing the Venetians' and Genoese's

²⁸³ Angelo Giovanni Lomellino in *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts*. Trans. J.R. Melville-Jones (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1972) 133: Lomellino was the *podestà* (governor) of Galata during the Ottoman siege of Constantinople.

²⁸⁴ Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople 1453* 84; Doukas 211.

²⁸⁵ See above; Girolamo Minotto and a Venetian formation were given command of the Blachernae Palace, Constantine's residence in Constantinople.

responsibilities during the Ottoman attack, Constantine avoided alienating either group in such a way that could compromise the city's defense.

The emperor's efforts in maintaining the peace between the two Italian factions were often tested once the Ottoman siege began in earnest in April 1453. There were several instances of the Venetians quarrelling with the Genoese over defense strategies, and these disputes often escalated into violence.²⁸⁶ One major incident occurred after the Christian forces attempted to destroy the Turkish vessels that had been dragged overland into the Golden Horn, behind the Greek and Italian defensive lines. After a short battle, the Ottomans completely defeated the Christian attack on their position, and sunk a Venetian war vessel, killing its crew. Following this failure, open fighting broke out between the Venetians and Genoese. The Venetians claimed that a Genoese spy informed the sultan and led to the loss of their vessel and crew.²⁸⁷ Once again, only the emperor's personal charisma and leadership ability ended the violence, as he reminded the Italians that they could never survive if they remained divided.²⁸⁸ Constantine further tried to treat both sides equally to avoid resentment from either the Genoese or the Venetians and to forestall any further conflicts between them. For example, the emperor praises both sides equally in his final address to the troops on the eve of the fall.²⁸⁹ By continually communicating with both the Venetian and Genoese forces in Constantinople, reminding

²⁸⁶ Leonard of Chios 23.

²⁸⁷ Melissenos 112: "When our vessels came close to the triremes, God put a stop to our plans, as a punishment for our sins; it is also possible that through carelessness, one of those young men had revealed the secret operation to the enemy."

²⁸⁸ Melissenos 113: "When the emperor realized what was happening, he hastened to the rioters and in grief, addressed both the Venetians and the Genoese: 'I beg you, my brothers, keep the peace among you; we have enough fighting originating from the outside. Do not quarrel with each other, for the mercy of God.' He spoke at length and restored peace between them."

²⁸⁹ Melissenos 123: "Next he turned and addressed the Venetians, who were standing at his right side: 'Noble Venetians, my dearest brothers in Christ, courageous men, experienced and seasoned fighters!' ... Turning to his left, he addressed the Genoese: 'Most honored brothers from Genoa, courageous and illustrious warriors! You are aware and know that this City was not only mine but yours too for many reasons.'"

them of their commitments to fight the Ottomans and quickly solving conflicts between them, Constantine successfully avoided alienating the Italians during the siege. The emperor effectively mobilized the Venetian residents in Constantinople for the Ottoman attack, retaining their services and loyalties while still making the most of the other Italian communities. The most notable of them were the Genoese who arrived in the capital to offer their services to the empire.

Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos' efforts to court the Venetians in Constantinople paid off as they fought the Ottomans with distinction, especially during the final assault on May 29, 1453. The Venetian citizen-soldiers fought in nearly every skirmish and major engagement during the month long siege of the city.²⁹⁰ Some Venetians, like the *baille*, Girolamo Minotto, fought until they were surrounded and captured by the Ottomans once they stormed the walls. Nearly all of the captured Venetians were executed by Sultan Mehmed II shortly after the city's capture.²⁹¹ Others, like Nicolò Barbaro, barely made it to the Christian vessels fleeing the Golden Horn once the battle had clearly been lost. It is a testament to Constantine's diplomatic skills, as well as the personal relationships he and his court established among the Venetian community in Constantinople, that the Venetian residents fought as long and as hard as they did, instead of saving their own lives. While they did not possess the numbers to successfully defend Constantinople from the Ottomans, their devotion to the city was commendable.

Constantine XI's diplomatic relations with the Venetians were a complete success on one level, but failed in other aspects. The emperor and his court cultivated a close

²⁹⁰ Doukas 217: "From the Imperial Gate to Kynegon, the Venetians fought with the Romans against the Turks."

²⁹¹ Barbaro 64-67; Melissenos 133: "The executions of many eminent noblemen followed, including the Venetian *baille* and his son."

relationship with local Venetian interests, especially with the merchants and ship captains that traveled around the Aegean and Black Seas. In addition, Constantine developed a friendly rapport with the Venetian *baille* of Constantinople, Girolamo Minotto. As a result, the local Venetian population was ready to assist the emperor with the city's defense against the Ottomans, and many of them gave their lives in the struggle. This was a major diplomatic success for the emperor. Instead of packing their belongings and leaving the city for safer Venetian bases in the Aegean, the residents of Constantinople chose to remain and fight. On the other hand, Constantine XI Palaiologos' diplomatic overtures to the Venetian government in Italy were largely unsuccessful. Since his administration did not trust the Venetian doge, they did not believe it was useful to aggressively court the republic because it would almost surely refuse to aid Byzantium. Therefore, the emperor did little to counter the Venetian Senate's opinion that he was a maverick and as much a danger to Venetian possessions in the Levant as the Ottoman Turks. Eventually Venetians familiar with the emperor pleaded with the senate on Byzantium's behalf, but a relief force was not equipped in time to save the Byzantine capital. As a result, Constantine XI's relations with Venice and the Venetian population of Constantinople show that his diplomatic strategies focused primarily upon courting individuals, such as Girolamo Minotto and several ships captains in the Levant, in order to gain support from larger groups of people during his quest for aid to defend his empire.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Each of these previous examples shows the importance of Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos' personal relationships in both Byzantine diplomatic relations and foreign policy creation during the empire's final years. Instead of relying upon an extensive bureaucracy, as Byzantine emperors of previous centuries had, Constantine relied upon his charisma and commanding presence. He tried to create personal connections with influential foreigners, mainly Italians, to accomplish his diplomatic goals and create foreign policy. He was not always successful, as his relations with the Ottomans portray. He could not prevent the fall of Constantinople to the Turks on May 29, 1453, since Sultan Mehmed II was determined to take the city soon after his accession. The emperor's diplomatic efforts and foreign policy toward the Ottomans were largely ineffective, because Constantine did not develop close relations with any Ottoman elites during his life. However, the emperor secured resources from Rome and the Venetians that considerably delayed the city's capitulation because of his relations with Italian elites, carefully cultivated throughout Constantine's travels around the Aegean.

Constantine XI and his court could not gain reliable diplomatic information regarding the Ottoman Turks, nor create a consistent foreign policy toward the empire because they did not develop a deep relationship with any members of the Ottoman elite, particularly Grand Vizier Candarli Halil Pasha. While the Greeks aggressively attempted to court him to their cause, especially to exert his influence over Ottoman policies toward Byzantium, Halil Pasha remained loyal to the sultan, following his wishes and assisting

in the conquest of Constantinople. As a result, the Byzantine administration could not formulate an effective foreign policy toward the Ottoman Empire. Instead, the Greeks alternated between acts of hostility and supplication to the Turks. In fact, the only consistent Byzantine action against the Ottoman threat during Constantine XI's reign was the refortification of Constantinople. These inconsistencies antagonized the Turks and exacerbated the tensions between the two groups, and did not alter Sultan Mehmed II's ultimate plan to conquer the Byzantine capital. The Ottoman case portrays the shortcomings of Constantine XI's and his court's use of personal diplomacy to save the empire during its final years.

The Byzantine use of this tactic for diplomatic overtures and foreign policy creation did succeed with other powers. Constantine XI Palaiologos' relations with Rome improved considerably through his relationship with the papal legate to Constantinople, Cardinal Isidore. The emperor and his councilors possessed the political skill necessary to realize that celebrating an imperial coronation in the capital upon his accession, with unionist clergy, would exacerbate the religious tensions within the city. However, Constantine and his advisors needed the expertise of someone familiar with papal expectations of the Greeks in the implementation of church union, in order to gain military aid for Constantinople. Since the Greek cardinals, especially Isidore, understood the difficulties facing the imperial administration in the city, particularly the rising anti-unionist sentiments, they advised the emperor on the best way to implement union, and gain the Papacy's military support, while avoiding conflict within Constantinople. Even though the pope did not send enough soldiers to prevent the city's fall, the resources his ships provided prevented its early capitulation to the Turks. As a result, Emperor

Constantine XI used personal diplomacy, shown through his relationship with Cardinal Isidore, to secure crucial support for the empire during its final crisis.

The Venetian case also highlights the success of personal diplomacy for the Byzantines. However, Constantine's diplomatic overtures and foreign policy were received differently by two distinct groups of Venetians. The Venetian citizens of Constantinople responded favorably to Byzantine diplomatic efforts designed to gain their support for the city's defense, because their *baille*, Girolamo Minotto, advised Constantine of how to properly approach them while at the imperial court. For example, many of the major construction projects in Constantinople during Constantine XI's reign, besides the continual restoration of the defenses, catered to Venetian interests in the city. However, the Venetian government in Italy responded to these overtures less enthusiastically, because they were specifically designed to court the Venetians in Constantinople. Even so, Constantine's relations with Venetian merchants and ship captains aided his requests for aid from the republic. They were instrumental in finally convincing the senate that defending the Byzantine Empire was in their best interest, and at least partially mobilizing the republic's resources to assist the Greeks. Venice sent the Byzantines provisions to Constantinople, and began outfitting a fleet to come to its defense shortly before the city fell to the Turks. As a result of the imperial administration's efforts, the Venetian citizens in Constantinople, as well as several Venetian merchant vessels, actively participated in its defense instead of fleeing to safer locations. The Byzantines' use of personal diplomacy toward the Venetians can also be viewed as a success despite the fall of Constantinople because the administration created coherent, effective policies that encouraged them to provide aid for the city.

Even though the Byzantine Empire did not possess its former prestige or power during the fifteenth century, Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos effectively used the resources available to him in his attempt to save Constantinople. Personal diplomacy was ineffective against the Ottomans, since the Turkish elites did not reside in the imperial capital and Turkish residents were mainly transients. As a result, the imperial administration could not present an effective foreign policy toward them, and they continued their plans for the conquest of Constantinople. While he was ultimately unsuccessful in his task of dissuading the Ottomans from attacking, the number of Italians present during the siege is a testament to the emperor's efforts in the face of such hardships. The death of many of these same Italians, during and following the final battle, also shows his impact upon them, as he inspired them by example. He refused to flee Constantinople for the relative safety of the Byzantine Morea, engaging the Turks in hand-to-hand fighting until he was killed. Even during the darkest period of Byzantine diplomacy, when the empire faced its final challenge, Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos used his particular talents to gain western aid.

Even though the Byzantine Empire fell in the morning hours of Tuesday, May 29, 1453 and the emperor was killed, Constantine XI's diplomatic and foreign relations are important for study. First, these processes are useful for comparative reasons. While the diplomatic endeavors during the height of Byzantine power have been thoroughly studied, those of the empire's final years have not received such attention. With a detailed study of foreign policy creation under Constantine XI, changes over time can be examined. In addition, a discussion of Byzantine relations toward other powers during the empire's last years proves that the Greeks did not merely react to the actions of those

around them, particularly the Ottomans. Previous works detailing the end of Byzantium portray the Greeks as powerless to influence the events unfolding around them. This is not the case. Despite their relative weakness, the Byzantines creatively used the resources at their disposal, particularly through personal diplomacy, to actively seek salvation for the empire. For these reasons, the study of Constantine XI's diplomatic and foreign relations is important for Byzantine historical scholarship.

It is also necessary to recognize Emperor Constantine XI's personal growth and fortitude during this dire period. While a competent administrator and capable warrior since he was a young man, Constantine gained a deeper understanding of the threat that the Ottomans posed to the empire's survival throughout his life. As the years passed and his experience grew, he clearly recognized and appreciated that Byzantium was facing its greatest crisis. Salvation appeared to be out of the empire's grasp. However, this did not deter the emperor from actively seeking aid, which he eventually received from several sources. Lesser Byzantine emperors fled from their problems. Constantine faced his until the bitter end: Surrounded by Turks while fighting at the ruined city walls, he died defending his empire. While his victories were few, Constantine XI Palaiologos' efforts continued the fine tradition of Byzantine diplomacy and foreign relations despite considerable hardships. His resolve and skill in the face of such adversity make him, and his administration, some of the most outstanding figures in Byzantine history.

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