

Diplomacy and foreign policy in the personal reign of
Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (945-959)

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Short Abstract

This thesis examines Byzantine diplomacy and foreign policy in the round in the personal reign of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (945-959). This particular period has been singled out for investigation because Constantine had a keen personal interest in foreign affairs and two treatises from his reign, the *De administrando imperio* and the *De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, shed light upon the Byzantine view of the outside world and the workings of imperial bureaux charged with diplomatic affairs and the administration of military campaigns. After introducing the subject and the key sources, the thesis makes a clockwise circuit of all of the theatres in which Byzantine foreign policy was active. The first chapter looks at worldviews as documented in sources from Byzantium, Ottonian Saxony, and the Islamic Near East in order to determine how these key players saw their place in the world and systematised their relationships with each other. The second chapter discusses relations with the Islamic Near East and Transcaucasia and provides a survey of sources, historical reconstruction, and analysis of goals and processes. Chapter three examines relations with the Islamic caliphates of the central and western Mediterranean, and assigns them greater importance than generally acknowledged. Chapter four chronicles the nascent relations with Ottonian Saxony and Byzantium's re-engagement with the Transalpine Franks. Chapter five deals with the peoples of the Eurasian steppe and homes in on Byzantium's attempts to diffuse threats from this volatile world. Chapter six focuses on Italy as the region in which three strands of Byzantine foreign policy met and evaluates the empire's response to wholesale changes in power relations in the peninsula in the early years of Constantine's personal reign. The conclusion to the thesis interrogates whether Constantine's foreign policy kept the empire safe, enhanced its prestige, managed the military elites, and had an enduring legacy.

Long Abstract

The Byzantine 'long' tenth century has been a popular period of investigation. The dynasty established by Basil I in 867 endured until the middle of the eleventh century, with dynastic elements continuing till the death of Empress Theodora in 1056. It was, as is widely recognised, the first period during which significant territorial gains were made by the Byzantine state since the Islamic conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries, though the turnaround perhaps started in the reign of Basil's predecessor Michael III. The reign of Constantine VII can be chronologically divided into three main parts, the regency of his mother Zoe and Patriarch Nikolaos Mystikos (913-919); the de-facto rule of Romanos I Lekapenos, the *droungarios* of the Byzantine fleet who went from usurper to Constantine's father-in-law (919-944); and the period of Constantine's personal reign (945-959). The thesis aims to decouple this last phase of Constantine's reign from the so called 'Age of Constantine Porphyrogenitus', in order to more closely examine one aspect of the Byzantine polity - foreign policy.

Constantine VII's personal reign lends itself to the study of foreign policy for a number of reasons. His diplomatic handbook, commonly known as *De administrando imperio*, is the only work of its kind to survive from the Byzantine Empire and deals, with varying success, with all the regions in which Byzantine foreign policy was active. The treatise known as *De ceremoniis aulae byzantinae* is another work from his reign and touches upon aspects of ceremonial and diplomatic protocol observed in the imperial capital during visits by foreign dignitaries. The tenth-century manuscript of which *De ceremoniis* was a part also contained inventories for military campaigns organised in the reigns of Leo VI, Romanos I, and Constantine VII. The general introduction to the thesis explores the subject matter and methodology used before providing an outline of these two unique texts and their place in the study.

After the general introduction, the first chapter of the thesis deals with the Byzantine worldview at the time of the accession of Constantine VII. It discusses the views of the Byzantine administration towards outsiders, based largely on the evidence in the *De administrando imperio* and the *De ceremoniis*, and with reference to the engagement with external states and groupings in previous significant reigns, namely, those of Romanos I, Leo VI and Basil I. An attempt is made to delineate the geographical extent of Byzantium's diplomatic and military reach, and the state's understanding of the political organisation of the disparate peoples it was forced or chose to deal with and the traditional modalities that governed interaction. The major powers of the Mediterranean, the Near East, and Continental Europe are identified and their views towards the world interrogated. Furthermore, the chapter examines Byzantium's notion of its own position within the network of states. The image projected to its internal population and to clients, real or potential, of a unique, eternal, and Roman state had long been undermined in practice, as can be seen in the careful wording of protocols for addressing powerful Islamic states and in descriptions of Byzantine embassies. Finally, the chapter tries to establish the approximate hierarchy of strategic foreign policy objectives, the distinction between immediate, short term and long term concerns, and the instruments at the disposal of the Byzantine state for achieving these objectives when Constantine VII took the reins of power.

The next chapter in the thesis analyses Byzantium's relations with its traditional and entrenched rivals, the Islamic states on the frontiers of the empire in the Near East and the eastern Mediterranean. Warfare had been a constant feature of this frontier since the beginning of the Islamic Conquests and, since at least 878, the northern Syrian borders had been governed by an autonomous state based in Egypt, at first by the Tūlūnids and then by the Ikhshīdids. Contemporaneously with the accession of Constantine VII, the link with Egypt was severed by the local dynasty of the Hamdānids based around Aleppo. The chapter discusses how, although the Hamdānids led the near-annual raids against Byzantine Asia Minor at this time and chose to

highlight their role in the *jihād* against non-Muslims through commemorative poetry (Mutanabbī and Abū Firās), the raids into Byzantium were a peripheral concern for the dynasty, which faced much more pressing threats to its survival from the Būyids in Baghdad. The chapter demonstrates, through a close reading of the Arabic sources from the period, that the final takeover of Baghdad by the Būyids marked the eastward shift in the centre of power from Iraq to western and central Iran, the real clash of powers being between the Būyids and the Sāmānids, while the Hamdānids and Syria were left to their own devices. For Byzantium, the Hamdānids were a constant irritant, and an active policy of trying to recapture fortified Islamic strongholds was underway through most of Constantine's reign, first under the *domestikos tōn skolōn* Bardas Phokas, followed by his son, Nikephoros Phokas. Constantine's personal project, however, was the capture of Crete from the Arabs who had inhabited it since the 820s and who had continuously menaced the coasts of the Aegean and western Asia Minor. The Cretan expedition of 949 and the planning of the successful expedition of 960/1 is discussed in some detail in this chapter, and is shown to be linked to Byzantium's larger strategy of neutralising threats from the Mediterranean, a leitmotif through Constantine's reign, which is taken up in the chapter that follow.

Continuing with the theme of securing Byzantine coastlines and the Mediterranean for Byzantine maritime interests, the next chapter looks at emerging Islamic states in southern Spain and North Africa in the centre and western extremity of the sea. In the case of the emerging Umayyad dynasty of Andalusia, Constantine was the first Byzantine emperor to establish friendly and mutually beneficial relations. The end of the alliance with Hugh of Provence in Italy, with the latter's withdrawal from the peninsula in 945, opened up an opportunity that Constantine was keen to grasp, that of forming a profitable alliance against the Fātimids of North Africa, who also controlled Sicily. In the case of the Umayyads, the very recent assumption of the Caliphal title and their keenness to emulate the grand architectural and intellectual attributes of the

Umayyad Caliphate in Syria (seventh and eighth centuries) provided an opportunity for Byzantium to step in as a link to the past. We know that Constantine VII provided pillars for the new city of Madīnat az-Zahrā as well as medical and historical manuscripts. The latter is of particular interest as, the translation and dissemination of Greek knowledge had become one of the hallmarks of Abb'āsīd sophistication in Baghdad, and, in a sense, Constantine was educating the Umayyads in the contemporary attributes of caliphs. The military dimension of this relationship was not insignificant as the Fātimids were a threat to Umayyad influence in the western Maghrib and to access to commodities from sub-Saharan Africa, especially the gold that was minted for the new coinage of Abd ar-Rahmān III an-Nāsīr. The Byzantine reaction to the renewed strength of Sicily under the new regime of al-Hasan ibn 'Alī al-Kalbī was initially to sue for peace, but the alliance with the Umayyads, and the Fātimids' primary objectives of keeping the Umayyads at bay while planning the conquest of Egypt, emboldened Byzantium enough to launch two offensive campaigns against Sicily. Arab sources certainly viewed the first campaign of 951/2 as a planned invasion. Byzantium was ultimately unable to muster the manpower and resources required to make any inroads into Sicily, but established secure diplomatic channels of communication with the Fātimids, for whom this association with the traditional enemy of the caliphs could only enhance their own claim to being the true, divinely revealed caliphs and was written up as such by the historians of the regime.

At this point, the thesis shifts focus from the Islamic world to the new emerging powerhouse in Western Europe, Ottonian Saxony. Due to extremely limited notices on interaction between the Byzantine Empire and the Ottonian Saxons prior to the coronation of Otto I as Holy Roman Emperor in 962, most academic investigation of Byzantine relations with the Ottonians concentrates on the period after 962, and hence, after the lifetime of Constantine VII. However, this chapter looks beyond the short notices of Greek embassies in ecclesiastical annals and tries to prove that Constantinople was well aware of Otto's rising power, that it understood full well

the implications of Otto's rise for the position of Byzantium in Italy and on its claim to represent the Roman Empire in the Christian world. The worlds of Byzantium and Ottonian Saxony overlapped in at least four different spheres of influence; they had diametrically opposite relations with the Umayyads in Spain, they both coveted supremacy in Italy, both states vied for increased influence among the Kievan Rus and, most importantly, they followed an entirely divergent policy towards the Magyars. This rivalry, which has been remarked upon in the context of the subsequent Byzantine reigns, can be traced back to the time of Constantine VII. All these four arenas find a prominent place in Liudprand of Cremona's *Antapodosis*, the text of which recalls the enormous energy expended in making and maintaining complex clientages and mutually beneficial alliances, both by the Byzantines and the Ottonians. The chapter asserts that Constantine's alliances with the Umayyads and with the Magyars had a further purpose directed towards the curtailment of Otto I's progress into Italy and hence, into direct conflict with Byzantine interests.

Having begun the discussion about the Magyars and the Rus in the previous chapter, the next chapter of the thesis examines Byzantine relations with these and the other peoples of the Transcaucasian and Black Sea regions. The Magyars, the Rus and the Pechenegs feature prominently in the *De administrando imperio* as pre-existing and potential allies who must be, in turn, placated and pitted against each other. By the time of Constantine's personal reign, the Bulgarian threat had been eliminated and the Khazars had ceased to be an active menace to the Empire's possessions in the Crimea. The Pechenegs were treated by the Byzantine Empire as potential allies against the Hungarians and the Rus, but their lack of maritime power meant that they were not in a position to attack Byzantium itself. Under Constantine, the policy towards the Magyars was one of accommodation, which protected the imperial domains in Italy and Thrace (for the most part) from the repeated depredations of the Magyar raiding parties. This chapter demonstrates that, under Constantine, Byzantium responded quickly to the potential to menace

represented by the Magyars by including them amongst their clients and trying to learn about their kinship and political structures while, at the same time, offering them baptism and entry into the Orthodox fold. Baptism and imperial titles were also offered to the leaders of Kievan Rus and cavalry troops were recruited from both groups to be enlisted in the empire's campaigns in the East. The chapter asserts that the foreign policy initiatives with the Magyars in the Carpathian Basin and the Rus in the Eurasian Steppe are reminiscent of the proselytizing missions among the Slavs of the ninth century, only this time the emphasis was on creating a pro-Byzantine elite among the nomadic powers, who, if left unaddressed, had the potential to harm the empire.

The final chapter of the thesis turns to Italy and the Dalmatian coast. It outlines Byzantium's relationship with all the different powers in Italy – the Frankish Kingdom of the north, the Papal State, the Lombard principalities and the maritime city states – and examines the role the state had in mind for its territories in Apulia and Calabria. The chapter views Italy as Byzantium's western frontier, which brought the empire face to face with the Fātimids in the south and the Franks in the north, and also informed the empire's policy towards the Magyars. It puts forward the hypothesis that Byzantine Italy served as Byzantium's forward base in the Mediterranean, which, due to its vulnerability to attack from Lombards and Fātimids alike, was protected primarily by the naval *themata* stationed on the Dalmatian Coast (which in turn protected access to the Aegean and the Empire's heartland). Under Constantine VII, Byzantium continued to maintain its traditional ties with the maritime city states of Gaeta, Amalfi, Naples and Venice and denied the Lombard states a port of their own. The chapter tries not only to disentangle the complex relations of trade and client management in Italy but also demonstrate that, as with Crete, Byzantium under Constantine began to develop a more aggressive naval policy in southern Italy, backed by the increased contacts with the entire range of Mediterranean states.

The thesis concludes by putting Byzantine foreign policy under Constantine VII to a series of tests to determine its effectiveness, responsiveness, and innovativeness. It evaluates how the personal reign of Constantine VII differed from those preceding it, and the implications on the study of Byzantine diplomacy and foreign policy.

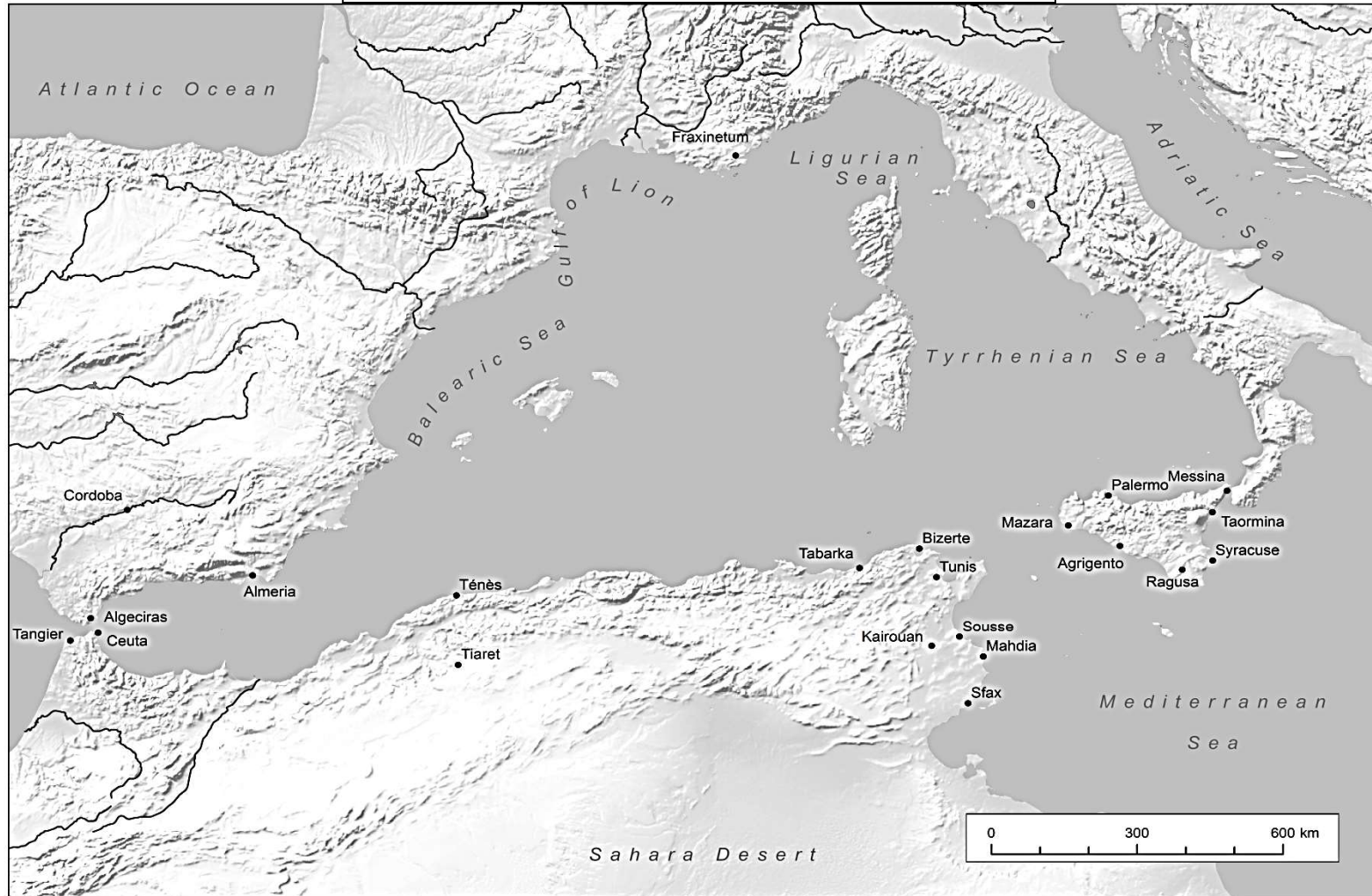
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The Near East



The Central and Western Mediterranean



The North



Italy



Introduction

The life of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos was unconventional for that of an early medieval ruler.¹ Born to an emperor, Leo VI (r.886-912), and his uncanonical fourth wife in 907, he would have to wait nearly thirty-eight years (945) before taking the reins of state, due to an unstable regency and a military coup, which shut him out of power and kept him from exercising his birthright. When he came to power as the result of a palace revolt against the Lekapenoi, he seemed to possess few of the more obvious attributes of a successful early medieval Byzantine emperor. He had never been in charge of an imperial bureau or a field army and had no experience of having directing Byzantium's approaches to the world beyond its borders. As commander in chief, what Constantine VII brought to his post was a personal enthusiasm for foreign affairs, sometimes ill-informed, which he inherited from his father's own research into the politics, history, and social organisation of the peoples who surrounded the empire.² Such an interest, however, had not prevented Leo VI from committing a series of fairly serious errors in his own foreign policy, trapping Byzantium in costly and dangerous conflicts, but, despite his inexperience, Constantine VII's government was able to navigate through a rapidly-changing world to bring the empire to the threshold of the apogee of its international reputation after the coming of Islam.³

The subject

The foreign policy of Byzantium in any period of its existence is a worthwhile subject of enquiry, as the geographical location and long history of the empire made regular communications with the world not only unavoidable, but a central feature of any ruling regime's government agenda.

¹ *ODB*, 'Constantine VII'.

² *Taktika* of Leo VI, ed. Dennis (2012); Howard-Johnston (2000).

³ cf. Karling-Hayter (1967). This apogee is generally thought to be the second half of the tenth-century and the first quarter of the eleventh. Holmes (2005), p. 2-3.

This thesis examines diplomacy and foreign policy at a key phase in the empire's history, the personal reign of Constantine VII (945-59), through the lens of a unique range of source materials that are not found for any other period.⁴ The late-ninth and early tenth centuries were periods of great transition and opportunity in the history of the Near East, eastern and central Europe, and the Mediterranean littoral. Regimes changed and borders moved with such frequency, that, for the relatively stable Byzantium, simply keeping up with the changes beyond the frontiers posed a major challenge, let alone the fostering and calibration of relations.⁵ At the time of Constantine VII's accession to sole rule in 945, Byzantium was in the advantageous position of not being engaged in any large-scale military conflicts that could subsume all other foreign policy priorities. This had been the case for over a decade, since the end of the war with Bulgaria in 927 and the easing of land and sea raids from Syria and the Jazīra in the early 930s. However, the regime that Constantine supplanted, that of Romanos I (919-944), had been essentially reactive on all fronts apart from the east, choosing to use the breathing space to devoting the empire's resources to pursuing traditional goals in the Near East. This was to change dramatically in the fifteen years of Constantine's personal rule, which saw Byzantium's role as no longer limited to being a regional power in the Near East, but as an imperialist power with the means and motivation to wield influence on a much broader scale.

Methodology

The thesis approaches diplomacy and foreign policy in the personal reign of Constantine VII by looking at it in the round in all the sectors in which Byzantium played a part. It analyses the full range of sources for Byzantium, both internal and external, and does the same for the whole

⁴ See below, pp. 11-20.

⁵ A prime example of this changeability are the negotiations for the prisoner exchange on the river Lamos in 946, which were started with the Ikhshīdids, but were concluded with the Hamdānids, all within the course of a single summer, pp 82-9.

range of peoples targeted by the empire.⁶ It avoids looking at these relations in a purely bilateral way, and attempts to bring to the surface the overlapping interests and objectives which drove encounters on Byzantium's part and that of the target peoples. Conclusions are drawn not only from sources which comment upon foreign relations directly, but also from those that contribute to an understanding of the institutional, commercial, and ideological structures which underpinned them. The primary aim is to reconstruct the contacts within the period under examination in their chronological context and to evaluate them against the backdrop of the recent and not so recent past.

This study begins with an analysis of the ways in which Byzantium and the preeminent powers in the west and east, the Ottonians and the world of Islam centred on Iraq, thought about and categorised the peoples of the world, and what they determined to be their positions and functions in the different neighbourhoods inhabited by them. It then moves to Byzantium's traditional adversaries, allies, and clients in the Near East. This chapter looks at relations with the Islamic world of the *thughūr* and the Armenian and Iberian Christians of Transcaucasia. The third chapter deals with Byzantium's contacts with another Islamic sphere, that of the Umayyad and Fātimid caliphates in the central and western Mediterranean, both rising powers active in the vicinity of Byzantine Italy. In chapter four, we move north into continental Europe, to the emerging empire of the Ottonians, and chart how its first forays into Italian politics were received by Byzantium, how well Byzantium comprehended Ottonian ambitions in the region, and the nature of its response. Chapter five will turn to the most poorly documented peoples of the time, the Turkic, Scandinavian, and Slavic formations which inhabited the Eurasian steppe around the Black Sea, the Carpathian Basin, and Bulgaria. The near complete lack of primary source

⁶ Greek, Latin, and Arabic primary sources have been examined in the original language, but I have had to rely on translated texts for Armenian and Russian sources.

information originating in this sector is matched only by Constantine VII and his government's fear of it, as reflected in his writings.⁷ This was also the sector where relations were most fluid, allowing for a range of diplomatic experiments undertaken in treating with its settled and nomadic peoples. The final chapter homes in on the region where politics in all spheres apart from the Near East converge. This is Italy, where Byzantium had its own territories and maintained historic clientages and communications with the Franks of the Kingdom of Italy, the papacy, the Lombards, and the city-states of Venice, Amalfi, Naples, and Gaeta. Furthermore, Italy was central to Byzantium's western policy as a whole and also had a role to play in dealings with the Hungarians. The thesis ends with a general conclusion based on individual conclusions outlined at the ends of the chapters.

Survey of scholarship

The empire's foreign relations have intrigued scholars of Byzantium and the wider medieval world for a century and a half. Therefore, this survey concentrates on the most important milestones, while acknowledging the author's debt to the many scholars whose works have informed this thesis. A comprehensive analysis of Constantine VII's complete reign (913-959), including his diplomacy and foreign policy, was first attempted in 1870 by Alfred Rambaud.⁸ This was a masterful work for its time but now seems dated in both content and approach. Another attempt was made a century later by Arnold Toynbee, though this was a meandering work, derailed in the main by the author's break from chronology and its unwieldy scope.⁹ The reign has received excellent coverage in more general histories of Byzantium, but it was beyond their remit to flesh out all the emergent themes.¹⁰ Albeit not brought together in a single work, the

⁷ See below, pp. 12-3.

⁸ Rambaud (1870).

⁹ Toynbee (1973).

¹⁰ The most influential recent studies are Whittow (1996), various authors in Shepard ed. (2009), and Cheynet (2006).

oeuvre of Jonathan Shepard has made a significant contribution to every aspect of Constantine VII's foreign relations.¹¹

The main advances in scholarship have taken place in studies on relations in individual sectors, none more so than relations between the Byzantines and the Islamic Near East. The study of the period was transformed through the efforts of Alexander Alexandrovich Vasiliev, who published a history of Byzantine-Arab relations from the reign of Basil I (r. 867-986) to that of Romanos II (r. 959-963).¹² His work reached a wider audience once it was translated in French by Marius Canard, who had previously edited and augmented extracts from Arabic sources, many of which remain unedited to this day, prepared by Vasiliev.¹³ This latter remains the first port of call for any scholar of Byzantium wishing to examine sources in Arabic and will be cited for minor chronicles and poetry in this thesis. Canard's further works on the Hamdānids and the sources for the reign of Sayf al-Dawla are still unsurpassed in scope and scholarship.¹⁴ A more recent scholar of the Islamic world who has enhanced our understanding of Byzantium's relations with the wider Near East is Hugh Kennedy.¹⁵ Scholars of Byzantine studies have made their greatest contribution to our knowledge of developments in this region through studies on warfare, the military, and frontier organisation.¹⁶ A mention must also be made of two works on Transcaucasian history and relations, which are indispensable for understanding relations with the east in the middle Byzantine period.¹⁷

¹¹ See Bibliography, pp. 37-8.

¹² Vasiliev (1900).

¹³ Vasiliev (1968); Vasiliev and Canard (1950).

¹⁴ Canard (1953); Canard (1934).

¹⁵ Haldon and Kennedy (1980); Kennedy (1986).

¹⁶ Oikonomides (1976); Dagron and Mihaescu (1986); Dennis (1985, 2010); McGeer (1995); Haldon (1999, 2000, 2014); Sullivan (2000, 2005).

¹⁷ Ter-Ghewondyan (1976); Martin-Hisard (2000).

The depth and breadth of research on the Near East is unmatched in any other area apart from relations with northern peoples. For the Fātimids and Umayyads, we have next to no secondary source material dealing with relations with Byzantium in our period.¹⁸ Among scholars of the Frankish world, Karl Leyser was the only historian of the west to examine relations with Byzantium in our period in a sustained way.¹⁹ This brings us to the north, where relations with Byzantium in our period have been studied intensively by a number of scholars, owing in part to the unique information on the northern world found in the *De administrando imperio*. There are far too many works to enumerate here, but mention must be made of the only major study to look at relations between all the northern peoples and Byzantium from sixth century to 1453, *The Byzantine Commonwealth* by Dmitri Obolensky.²⁰ Byzantium's Italian policy, which is well-studied and understood from the eleventh century onwards, is poorly served by scholarship for our period. Vera von Falkenhausen's study on the documentary evidence for the Byzantine presence in Italy from the ninth to tenth centuries, and her subsequent historical analysis, is invaluable in this regard.²¹ Further insights are available from archaeological studies of Byzantine Apulia and Calabria by Jean-Marie Martin, Ghislaine Noyé, and Annick Peters-Custot.²²

Apart from studies by individual scholars, there are also useful assemblages of material on various subjects with a bearing on the current study. The historical geography of Byzantium's Anatolian frontier was first addressed by Ernst Hönigmann in 1935, and then advanced by Friedrich Hild and Marcell Restle.²³ The chronology and evidence of Byzantine relations with the world is the subject of works by Franz Dölger and Peter Wirth.²⁴ Important collections of articles on subjects

¹⁸ Stern (1950); Halm (1991/1996).

¹⁹ See Bibliography, p. 27.

²⁰ Obolensky (1971).

²¹ Falkenhausen (1967/1978).

²² Martin (1993, 2000); Noyé (1988); Peters-Custot (2009).

²³ Hönigmann (1935); Hild and Restle (1981).

²⁴ Dölger (1924-65); Dölger and Wirth (1977-).

addressed by this thesis include *Travaux et mémoires* (13) and the proceedings of two Spring Symposia of Byzantine Studies.²⁵ Ultimately, the most useful advances have been made in the modern editions of Byzantine primary sources, refining readings of texts left unedited since the nineteenth century.²⁶ The next section of the introduction examines a selection of these in greater detail.

The Sources

Fundamental to any history is a proper understanding of sources. This section will provide an overview of the sources for this period, while sources for individual arenas will be dealt with in greater details in the relevant chapters. The primary sources for the study of diplomacy and foreign policy in the personal reign of Constantine VII are more plentiful and varied than for any reign since Late Antiquity. In Byzantium, history writing, or at least compiling, was an activity that was undertaken with gusto by the emperor and his literary atelier of state officials. There are a number of named individuals, who held imperial posts and titles, who appear as authors of books, orations, or diplomatic letters.²⁷ Constantine's historical projects focused on both the middle and the long distance, and it is unsurprising that they did not come up to his day.

Histories commissioned by emperors themselves rarely do, as the closer the writers or redactors got to the life of the ruling emperor, the greater was the risk of reporting events in a way that the patron thought was not suitably flattering. In the case of the particularly controversial reigns of his forbears, like those of the usurper and parvenu Basil I and of the hopelessly unsuccessful and morally castigated Leo VI, Constantine must have been aware of the damning histories and

²⁵ Dagron ed. (2000); Franklin and Shepard eds (1998); Eastmond ed. (2001).

²⁶ Modern editions include the the letters of Nicholas Mystikos, the *Logothete's Chronicle*, the *Vita Basilii*, the *DAI*, the *Synopsis Historion* of John Skylitzes, , and almost all known tenth-century military treatises. See Bibliography, pp. 3-5.

²⁷ Treadgold (2013), pp. 165-96,

rumours which later found their way into the *Logothete's Chronicle* and the history of John Skylitzes, and which must have proliferated in the reign of Romanos I.²⁸

The purposes of Constantine's commissions in the field of history were two-fold. The first was to create a monumental anthology of historical excerpts, under fifty-three headings, the surviving parts of which comprise selections from twenty-five Greek authors from Antiquity to Late Antiquity (the only later author included was George the Monk).²⁹ The second set of commissions was for a continuation of the history of Theophanes the Confessor from 813 to 867, to be followed by an encomiastic life of the founder of the dynasty, Basil I. Two versions of the first part exist, the better of which was included in *Vat.gr. 167* and comprises Books I-IV of what we know as *Theophanes Continuatus*. The second part was included in *Vat.gr. 167* and is what we now know as Book V of *Theophanes Continuatus*.³⁰

This background to history writing in the reign of Constantine VII is important because what we know of his reign follows directly from his own efforts. Constantine's own reign and that of his son Romanos II were dealt with in a favourable light, possibly by his eulogist Symeon, from which we find a portrait of the emperor as he would have wanted to be remembered. It shines a light on his particular interest in corresponding with foreign rulers, on relations with the Fātimids, and Italian concerns, all of which will be addressed in the relevant chapters. This favourable portrait, which was no doubt written by someone who knew the emperor personally, was incorporated into *Vat.gr. 167* by a third redactor around the year 1000. This third redactor used the very anti-Macedonian chronicle known as the *Logothete's Chronicle*, which ends in Romanos I's death in 948, for the reigns of Leo VI and Romanos I, creating a very curious pro-

²⁸ See Treadgold (2013), pp.146-52, 203-224 on Symeon the Logothete, Pseudo-Symeon, and Niketas the Paphlagonian.

²⁹ *ODB*, 'Excerpta'; Lemerle (1986), pp.323-32.

³⁰ Hereafter, *Theo. Cont. cont.*, *VB*.

and anti-Macedonian amalgam. *Theophanes Continuatus*, was used, along with a now-lost updated anti-Macedonian history (i.e. including the personal reigns of Constantine VII and Romanos II) by John Skylitzes, writing in the reign of Alexios Komnenos after the Macedonian dynasty had fallen. This provides us the second viewpoint on Constantine VII's reign in Byzantine historiography, and also some unique information on foreign relations in the reign.³¹ All of these works were essentially Constantinopolitan in focus, written by members of the state bureaucracy, and are far more interested in domestic intrigues and action at the centre. Despite the fact that the different versions of the *Logothete's Chronicle* were compiled at the behest of, or at least by partisans of, great Anatolian magnate families, they are not imbued with any of the flavour of life on the frontier.

The literary engagement with the past under Constantine VII was not restricted to histories alone, and the historical/ archival record provided the content of two treatises for which the reign stands out. Due to the complex way in which they inform our understanding of diplomacy and foreign policy in the reign of Constantine VII, the *De administrando imperio* and the *De ceremoniis* will be examined in greater detail below. A later treatise, the *De Velitatione*, commissioned by Nikephoros I Phokas, must also be included in the list of historical sources for our period as, despite being stripped of almost all particulars of actual campaigns, it reflects the military organisation and methods of engagement on the eastern frontier.

Having looked at the Byzantine historical tradition addressing Constantine's personal reign, we must now look at the external traditions that discuss the encounters between Byzantium and the wider world. The most plentiful and varied material comes from the corpus of writers in Arabic who chronicled the engagement of the Islamic world with the 'Rūm' in historical and

³¹ Hereafter, Skylitzes.

geographical works and in poetry.³² The most complete of these, looking at both the Near East and the Central Mediterranean is the thirteenth-century *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārikh*, a continuation of the history of al-Tabarī, by Ibn al-Athīr, whose writings are now the sole memorial to his genius after the destruction of his mausoleum in Mosul in June, 2014.³³ The geographical spread of relevant works in Arabic is unrivalled, as the sources which inform the current study emanated from the pens of authors across the Near East and as far away as Umayyad Spain, where excerpters of Ibn Hayyān provide us with a detailed narrative concerning the arrival of Byzantine emissaries.³⁴ Historical works in Arabic offer a view of action on the frontier, replete with details about military movements and toponyms, which is almost absent from the Byzantine sources. This is an interesting fact as the authors all came from a courtly or bureaucratic milieu, not unlike that of the Byzantine authors.

While the east and the Islamic states of the Mediterranean are well served by sources in Arabic, for Italy and the Frankish West, we must rely almost exclusively on sources in Latin originating from Lombard and Frankish Italy and Saxony.³⁵ These come down to us in two interlinked strains and one free-standing history-cum-memoir. The interlinked strains represent two levels of historical record-keeping. The more basic of the two are the monastic annals from West Frankia and Lombard Italy, which record the significant occurrences (battles, political and ecclesiastical appointments, marriages, deaths, etc.) in every year. Also from a monastic or ecclesiastical milieu, are the histories of Widukind of Corvey and Thietmar of Merseberg, which deliver fleshed-out narratives that are inherently inward looking and uninterested in foreign peoples or diplomacy.³⁶ The stand-alone work is the *Antapodosis* of Liudprand of Cremona, which is part memoir and part

³² See Chapter 2, pp. 74-9.

³³ Hereafter, Ibn al-Athīr.

³⁴ See Chapter 3, pp. 142-5.

³⁵ See Chapter 4, pp.162-72.

³⁶ See Chapter 4, pp. 167-72.

history, and recounts information he collected on the recent history of the Byzantine Empire from his journey to Constantinople in 949 as an ambassador from Berengar II, King of Italy. If Liudprand had continued this work beyond 949, we would have certainly gained a far deeper understanding of Ottonian communication and rivalry with the Byzantine world in the personal reign of Constantine VII.³⁷

One stream of historical information, which is abundant for the preceding centuries, runs completely dry in the mid tenth century. We would have expected to find Armenian histories for our period of enquiry, but there are no surviving histories after those of Tovma Artsruni and Hovhannes Draskhanakerttsi, which stop in the 920s.³⁸ Stepanos Taronetsi, writing in the eleventh century, does not seem to have had access to any histories that covered this period, and does little to fill in the gap as far as Armenian relations with Byzantium are concerned. This is a huge lacuna in the historiographical record which is only partially and unevenly addressed by the Transcaucasian chapters in the *De administrando imperio*.³⁹ A gap in the historiographical tradition is perhaps less explicable than the fact that several of those who had relations with Byzantium were still to develop their own historical writing. This is mainly true for the Rus and the Slavic and Turkic peoples around the Black Sea. If there had been Bulgarian or Khazar historical sources from the tenth-century, they seem to have been destroyed by the Rus incursions in the 960s. What we are left with is stray material in the form of Bulgarian epigraphy, fragments from the Cairo Genizah, and later histories like the *Povest' Vremyan'nykh Let'* or Russian Primary Chronicle and Simon of Kéza's *Gesta Hunnorum et Hungarorum*, which relied on Greek and Latin sources for a reconstruction of their ancestral past.⁴⁰

³⁷ Hereafter, *Antapodosis*.

³⁸ Hovhannes Draskhanakerttsi, *History of Armenia*, tr. Maksoudian (New York, 1987).

³⁹ Hereafter, *DAI*.

⁴⁰ See Chapter 5, p. 207.

De administrando imperio

The *DAI* is a treatise on ethnographic and diplomatic matters, written by Constantine VII for the education of his son Romanos II, possibly intended for presentation to the latter on his entry into adulthood at the age of fourteen.⁴¹ The traditional dating of the text is based on the date provided in chapter 45, the tenth indiction (September 951 – August 952), which would correspond to Romanos's fourteenth year.⁴² Further proof can be found in the fact that there is no mention of the visit of Olga of the Rus in 957 in the text, which bases a whole chapter on information gathered at the time of the visit of Hungarian leaders in c. 948.⁴³ Bury attempted a dating of individual chapters in the text, which indicate that the process of compilation took between place over three to four years, and was started after the death of Romanos I in 948. The earliest surviving manuscript of the whole text was produced for Caesar John Doukas who, as the power behind the throne in the reign of Michael VII Doukas (r.1071 -1078) and as the one of Alexios Komnenos's closest advisors (between 1081 and John's death in 1088), would have had access to what must have been a document that was confined to the palace due to the sensitive nature of its contents.⁴⁴ That the *DAI* was read in the intervening time is evidenced by one stray reference to the theme of Tziliapert, which has never been attested as a tenth-century theme in any extant documents and therefore must reflect an eleventh-century interpolation, which was copied into the Doukas manuscript.⁴⁵

While dating the text has proved to be fairly uncontroversial, the authorship of the text is a more complex problem. Overall credit for the text must be given to Constantine himself as it is executed too ineptly to have been prepared by the bureaucrats who functioned in his literary

⁴¹ Jenkins (196), p. 11.

⁴² *DAI*, 45, p. 206.

⁴³ The reasons for placing Olga's visit in the year 957 will be discussed in Chapter 6, pp. 230-2. *DAI*, 40, pp. 174-179.

⁴⁴ *Par.gr.2009*

⁴⁵ *DAI* 53, pp. 286-7.

atelier.⁴⁶ However, it is clearly a compilation of a variety of pre-existing texts alongside new material and a proem written specifically for the whole work. Its fifty-three chapters are of varying lengths and styles, from the shortest, chapter three, comprising only four lines in the critical edition, to the longest, chapter fifty-three, running to a total of five hundred and thirty-five lines, albeit including at least one later interpolation. The first six chapters are exceedingly brief and consist of information about relations between the Pechenegs and their northern neighbours, and thoughts on how they might be mobilised to defend the empire from attacks. This is followed by two short, but detailed, chapters about how contacts between imperial agents and the Pechenegs were orchestrated through Cherson. Chapter nine is a free-standing text on the route taken by the Rus when they travelled down the Dnieper, with no evidence of any editorial intervention by Constantine, which must have been provided by the office of the *logothetēs tou dromou*. After this there are three brief chapters on the Uzes and the Alans, before chapter thirteen, written by the emperor, plunges into what must have been one of Constantine's most pressing concerns. In an era where the empire's policy for the containment of hostile peoples in the north involved intense diplomacy and client management through inducements, Constantine was at pains to instruct his son to ensure that investiture with imperial robes and diadems, marriage into the imperial family, and the secret of Greek fire were completely out of bounds and were not to be a part of any package of enticements to northern nomads.⁴⁷

This first section of thirteen chapters was Constantine's main personal contribution to the treatise, barring the later chapters on the genealogy of Hugh of Provence and on relations with the Iberians and Armenians in the reign of Romanos I.⁴⁸ The rest of the text is made up of earlier material, in some cases glossed by Constantine to bring it up to the present day, and in others left

⁴⁶ Sevckenko (1992), pp. 167-95. Howard-Johnston (2000), pp. 308-314.

⁴⁷ *DAI*, 13, pp. 66-77.

⁴⁸ The Transcaucasian Chapters were also based on earlier work, from the beginning of the tenth century, but display much greater editorial input at the time of the *DAI*'s compilation.

largely inedited, or even duplicated. Chapters fourteen to twenty-two comprise a history of Islam in the Near East, followed by two extracts from Stephen of Byzantium and one from Theophanes the Confessor, which exclusively provide ancient and late antique information, apart from a longish gloss by Constantine at the end of chapter twenty-five, which tries to set out his own understanding of the divisions in the Islamic world at the time of writing.⁴⁹ The reason for including these three chapters was to cover, albeit entirely superficially, Spain and North Africa in the treatise, as the central and western Mediterranean were assuming greater prominence in Byzantium's foreign policy under Constantine VII.

The next part of the *DAI* is what has very usefully been termed the 'Historico-Diplomatic Core' of the entire treatise, with in-depth material on four key areas: Italy (Venice, Lombardy, and Byzantine Southern Italy), the Balkans, the North (Pechenegs and Magyars), and Transcaucasia (Iberia, Taron, and Qaysite emirates around Lake Van).⁵⁰ This is where the most detailed material in the *DAI* can be found, though none of the historical coverage in any but the Transcaucasian chapters goes beyond 926 at the very latest, and is mainly carried up to the second half of the ninth century. It seems almost certain that Constantine had come upon, or had been provided with, a dossier of information on foreign powers, compiled during the reign of his father, Leo VI.⁵¹ This dossier most certainly provided him with the kernel around which the entire treatise was constructed, with our author attempting to update it, but with very uneven results. Bringing the dossier completely up to date would have involved the work of Constantine's literary atelier of imperial officials, working in the archives of the bureau of foreign affairs to create joint-up narratives from reports, correspondence, and stray records. The *DAI* seems to have been a more personal project, and with the atelier hard at work on the emperor's other commissions,

⁴⁹ *DAI*, 25, pp. 106-9.

⁵⁰ Howard-Johnston (2000), pp. 314-32.

⁵¹ Howard-Johnston (2000), pp. 321-32.

Constantine seems to have updated the work from memory and from easily accessible reports without conducting a systematic information-gathering exercise. Where he seems to have had access to official reports on recent events and documents pertaining to actual contacts, the *DAI* becomes far more precise and coherent. In the historico-diplomatic core, this is evident from the chapters on client management in Transcaucasia, the account of Bulgarian designs on Serbia and the Byzantine intervention to deny them, and on the account of the social organisation of the Magyars.⁵² In the early chapters, the sections on the despatch of imperial agents and the itinerary of the Rus *monoxyla* on their way to Constantinople seem to have been derived from such sources.⁵³

The final chapters, forty-seven to fifty-three, are discrete write-ups on a variety of subjects, which do not seem to have been integrated into the text at all, but were nevertheless a part of the treatise as it stood at end of compilation, as the proem vaguely refers to them as chapters on ‘the things that were introduced’ in the state in times past.⁵⁴ They are mainly concerned with the military organisation of the state, with a special focus on the imperial fleet and on the organisation of the frontier.

This survey of the *DAI* has attempted to examine the coverage of the treatise, but something must be said about those that it did not include for greater analysis. These peoples include the Arabs, the Eastern Franks, the Bulgars, the Rus, and the Khazars, who are absent for the most part from the core analytical chapters, apart from in their role as aggressors. One view is that they were left out because they were out and out competitors and adversaries, and could not be counted upon to ally with Byzantium.⁵⁵ The real reasons for their absence seem to be the fact that

⁵² *DAI*, 32, pp. 152-61; 38-40, pp. 170-179; 43-46, pp. 188-223.

⁵³ *DAI*, 1, pp. 48-9; 4, pp. 50-3; 7-8, pp. 54-7; 9, pp. 57-63.

⁵⁴ Jenkins translates the phrase as ‘the reforms which were introduced’ in *DAI*, Proem, pp. 46-7.

⁵⁵ Howard-Johnston (2000), pp. 330-6.

the *DAI* is so strongly driven by its source material, which, if it existed for these people, would have been woefully out of date by Constantine's time. The outright collapse of 'Abbāsid state machinery in Syria and the Jazīra brought a reorganisation of the frontier which did not bear much resemblance to what had existed before 912. In the west, the Saxons had still to emerge as the dominant Frankish clan, which changed the political landscape in the regions with which Byzantium had traditional contacts – Bohemia, Bavaria, and the Kingdom of Italy. Bulgaria had perhaps not been included in the ethno-geographical reports in Leo VI's dossier in the first place, as the Byzantines were at outright war with them. Even if there had been material on the Bulgars, a wary peace had been established since the death of Symeon, and the diplomatic and strategic approach to Bulgaria after the death of Symeon and the marriage of Peter with Maria Lekapena was at complete odds with what would have been the case in the reign of Leo VI. The emergence of Kiev and the attack on Constantinople in 941 had brought the Rus to the very top of Byzantium's external affairs' agenda. Chapter nine, on the arrival of the monoxyla might have been Constantine's attempt to provide the Rus the treatment that the Pechenegs and Magyars receive in the core chapters – he simply did not have to hand the information on their origins and social organisation. As seafarers who could attack the environs of Constantinople, the Rus were certainly the most concerning of all the northern powers, especially as they have acted in concert with the Khazars in 941, but this did not preclude attempts at forging closer ties, as is evidenced by the baptism of Olga in 957.⁵⁶ The omissions in the *DAI* were therefore dictated by the sources, and are not due to a simple division between allies/potential clients and adversaries. If potential clients were to have been included uniformly, we would have expected to find more material on the Bagratids and Artsrunis of Greater Armenia and Vaspurakan, which we do not.

⁵⁶ See Chapter 5, pp. 230-4.

The *DAI*, despite its many faults, stands out as the only treatise of its sort and as the Byzantine source that attempts to identify and organise into a schema the foreign peoples with whom Byzantium sought contact or simply had to coexist. As we will find in the rest of this study, the *DAI* remains the source of greatest importance when it comes to Byzantine relations with the northern world, the Balkans, and Italy. The Armenian and Iberian chapters provide our only insight into the world of Byzantine client management in this region, and highlight the diplomatic problems in both the lead-up to as well as the aftermath of any Byzantine intervention in Armenia. Despite the narrative historical record being particularly patchy and chronologically disjointed for foreign relations in the personal reign of Constantine VII, the *DAI* identifies the motivations of and offers insights into the workings of Byzantine foreign policy. Due to the easily identifying overlay of material from the mid tenth century or material from the late ninth/early tenth centuries, it is also possible to map how the focus of diplomacy and foreign policy had changed from ca. 900 to ca. 952. Through the omissions, we see how relations with certain peoples had been completely reoriented in the intervening period, so that any available analysis from the underlying dossier, if it existed at all, would have been entirely useless. From Constantine's most direct intervention, in the form of chapters one to thirteen, it is clear to see that the source of greatest uncertainty and insecurity for the empire was the north, and the challenges of maintaining the fragile web of client relations which kept the Rus from the door.

De ceremoniis

The *De ceremoniis* was conceived, during the reign of Constantine VII, as a treatise on imperial ceremonial in two books. The first was to be a book on past ceremonies, which were collected from a variety of now-lost sources from the eighth and ninth centuries.⁵⁷ The second was

⁵⁷ Hereafter, *De cer.*; *De cer.*, I.Preface, p. 4.

envisaged as a collection of current ceremonial ‘which did not have a written account’, but had been passed down ‘through memory’ to Constantine’s day.⁵⁸ This second book aimed to commit directions for the conduct of imperial ceremonial to a systematic text and would seem to have been based on pre-existing records of ceremonies which had taken place recently. The aim of correctly conducted ceremonial was to make the emperor’s majesty seem ‘more imperial and terrifying’, and for the emperor’s court to be appear ‘marvellous and highly regarded by all peoples’.⁵⁹ The text of the *De cer.* does not, however, come down to us in the form that Constantine or his atelier of compilers had intended. Most of Book I (chapters one to eighty-three of ninety-seven chapters) and considerably less of Book II (chapters one to fourteen and the first section of chapter fifteen out of fifty-six chapters) were probably put together in their final form by the end of Constantine’s reign (959), although they were most likely left, in a reasonably orderly fashion, in dossier form and not compiled into a single manuscript.⁶⁰ The archetype of the text which we now know as the *De cer.* is the *Lipsiensis*, a manuscript in a single hand, most likely copied for Basil Lekapenos, which took Book I and Book II of Constantine’s text and added to it a variety of texts on specific, datable ceremonies, inventories of expeditions to Crete and Italy, texts on the content of verbal and written addresses to foreign visitors and correspondents, and a series of miscellaneous treatises and notices.⁶¹ An analysis of the constituent parts of the *Lipsiensis* is beyond the purview of this thesis, but considerable research has been conducted into identifying and dating the various sections in the text.⁶² The last datable section pertains to the reign of Nikephoros II Phokas (963-969), but the majority of the additional material in Book II derives from documents collected in (and in many cases pertaining to) the personal reign of Constantine VII.

⁵⁸ *De cer.*, II. Preface, pp. 516-517.

⁵⁹ *De cer.*, II. Preface, p. 517.

⁶⁰ Featherstone (2004), pp. 113-114.

⁶¹ *Lipsiensis Univ. Rep. I, 17 (olim Mun. 28)*

⁶² Bury (1907a), pp. 209-227; *Ibid.* (1907b), pp. 417-439; *ODB*, ‘De Cerimoniis’; Featherstone (2002), pp. 458-479; Featherstone (2004), pp. 113-121.

The vast majority of ceremonies in Books I and II of the *De cer.* deal with audiences, processions, and observances on festivals and feast days, and a large number also deal with what happened when the foreign legates were to be received by the emperor. Even centuries-old information like the extracts from the treatise of Peter the Patrician at the end of Book I, composed in the sixth century and dealing with housing and receiving Persian emissaries, were still relevant in the tenth century, as demonstrated by the experiences of Liudprand of Cremona in 949 and 968.⁶³ The material that is of real interest to foreign relations is not what was left in the dossier by the end of the reign of Constantine VII, but what was added to it at the time that the *Lipsiensis* was compiled. Ceremonies for visiting emissaries from Tarsos and Olga of the Rus and for triumphs conducted in the Forum of Constantine and the Hippodrome provide us with some specific datable information, which can be correlated with other Byzantine and external sources.⁶⁴ From chapter forty-four onwards, we are provided with minimally edited archival material, which provides a vast amount of unique, uncorroborated information in the forms that it would have available in the imperial bureaux. There are three inventories for troops and materials sent on the two Cretan campaigns of 911 and 949, and an expedition to Longibardia in 935.⁶⁵ These have been the basis for assessing the changing naval capabilities of the empire and for understanding the administrative infrastructure of Byzantine military.⁶⁶

The inventories are followed by a series of three chapters that deal with verbal and written addresses to foreign emissaries and rulers. There is no apparent logic to the positioning of this particular dossier within the body of the text and it is immediately followed by a rate-list of payments which were made by holders of imperial dignities and offices for their positions in the

⁶³ *De cer.*, I.84-95, pp. 386-433.

⁶⁴ *De cer.*, II.15, pp. 566-98; II.19-20, pp. 607-15.

⁶⁵ *De cer.*, II.44-45, pp. 651-78.

⁶⁶ Haldon (2000) is the most comprehensive study on the inventories.

reign of Leo VI.⁶⁷ The only chapter which links back to the *De cer.* of Constantine VII is II.47, which reproduces the narrowly proscribed and formulaic exchanges between foreign ambassadors and the *logothētes tou dromou*.⁶⁸ The context within which these conversations would have been performed are described in the first part of Book II, chapter fifteen, which details the general procedure to be followed when a reception for a foreign emissary was held in the hall of the Magnaura.⁶⁹ Chapter II.46 is simply a list of titles and epithets which could be used to describe foreign potentates in written communications.⁷⁰ Chapter II.48 is of greater interest and reproduces precise forms of address used in letters to foreign rulers, helping us to understand Byzantine responses to changes in relationships with foreign powers and the extent to which imperial bureaux kept abreast to changes in the nomenclature and circumstances of those with which it corresponded. This is vital and unique information, which will inform the discussion in all of the chapters in the current study.⁷¹

In Book II of the *De cer.*, we also find two sets of documents which detail the civil, military, and ecclesiastical organisation of the state. The earlier of the two is the treatise known as the *Kleterologion* of Philotheos, the *prōtopatharios* and *atriklīnēs* (master of the feasts and banquets at the imperial palace), which was compiled in 899 and includes all civil and military ranks and dignities, their insignia, their order of precedence, and the order to be followed during feasts, which sometimes involved foreign visitors.⁷² The second is a list of salaries for the *stratēgoi* and *kleisourarchs* of all the themes and *kleisourai* which existed by the end of the reign of Leo VI.⁷³ These provide the only comprehensive lists of Byzantine commands between the *Taktikon*

⁶⁷ *De cer.*, II.44-45, pp. 651- 676; II.49, pp. 692-695.

⁶⁸ *De cer.*, II.47, pp. 680-686.

⁶⁹ *De cer.*, II.15, pp. 568-569.

⁷⁰ *De cer.*, II.46, p. 679.

⁷¹ *De cer.*, II.48, pp. 686-92.

⁷² *De cer.*, II. 52-3, pp. 702-91.

⁷³ *De cer.*, II. 49-50, pp. 696-9.

Uspenskij of the mid ninth century and the *Escorial Taktikon* compiled during the 970s.⁷⁴ They also provide a corrective to Islamic treatises on geography and taxation, which repeat ninth-century information well into the first quarter of the tenth century and do not seem to take on board the changing shape of the Byzantine frontier.⁷⁵ While our examination of the *DAI* has found that it was based on dossiers of pre-existing information and a motley assortment of reports, unrepresentative of the meticulous recordkeeping of the imperial bureaucracy, the material found in Book II of the *De cer.* is compiled, often in entirely unedited form, from the archival records which seem so lacking in the *DAI*. Together, the *DAI* and the *De cer.* provide unprecedented behind-the-scenes access to the Byzantine thought, ritual, and the practicalities of conducting the affairs of empire, and will be consulted regularly in the rest of the thesis.

⁷⁴ Hereafter, *Kleterologium*, *Escorial Taktikon*.

⁷⁵ See note in Chapter 2.

Chapter 1. Whose World? Tenth-Century Worldviews

Introduction

Any study of foreign policy must try to capture something of the essence of the beliefs of the peoples in question regarding the world and their geopolitical place in it. In the case of tenth-century Byzantium, a bureaucratic state with a long memory for key events in its history, and an even longer memory for imperial attributes and privileges, it is essential to separate the layers of propaganda and self-aggrandising ceremonial from the day to day functions of and motivations behind communicating with the outside world. This chapter first focuses on Byzantium, locates it within the various neighbourhoods it occupied, and then puts the extant sources to work in unveiling the answers to some fundamental questions that must be answered before delving into the specifics of relations in different arenas in subsequent chapters. These global questions interrogate Byzantium's knowledge of the surrounding world, the categories (if any) into which states and peoples were organised, and whether the popular theory that there existed a notion of a 'hierarchical world order' with the Byzantine Emperor at its apex, which was the underlying basis for foreign policy decisions, is still tenable in light of the correspondence and gift exchanges between Byzantium and foreign leaders.⁷⁶ This section ends with the identification of discernible spheres of interest, and highlights those which had emerged in the first half of the tenth century.

After addressing these key questions about the Byzantine worldview in the mid tenth century, the chapter turns towards two other categories of powers within the crosshairs of Byzantine foreign policy, the Ottonians in East Francia and the Arab-Islamic states in the Near East, both of which had imperial designs and produced written evidence of their ideas about the rest of the world. In the case of the Ottonians it will demonstrate that the Ottonian worldview was one that was

⁷⁶ Ostrogorski (1956/7).

largely confined to its immediate neighbours and sought only to understand them within the context of their relations with the Franks and not with each other. There was some broadening of this view with the brief advent into Italy and the opportunities for the exercise of imperial power that this brought with it. Finally, in the case of the Arab-Islamic world, we are fortunate that the reign of Constantine VII began about a century into the efflorescence of interest in geography; mathematical, physical, and human. It is from the works of the Arab historians and geographers, rather than in chronicle sources, that one can best arrive at an understanding of their view of the world and its inhabitants. The chapter examines Arab-Islamic views of Byzantium within the non-Muslim world before brief concluding remarks.

1.1 The Byzantine worldview in the tenth century

The Byzantine Empire in the middle of the tenth century had its heartland in western Asia Minor, extending from the western face of the Taurus and Anti-Taurus mountains in the south-west to the hinterland of Trebizond on the southern coast of the Black Sea. In the west, the empire controlled the Peloponnese and mainland Greece south of the Bulgarian domains, pockets of the Adriatic coastline centred on Dyrrachion, Dekatera, and Rhaousion, and the provinces of Longibardia and Calabria in Southern Italy, centred on Bari and Reggio. Local administration seems not to have been centrally directed in all imperial provinces, and some existed more as strategic outposts than organic settlements of subject peoples. In Longibardia, the imperial administration for at least half a century was mainly in the hands of *strategoi* who were local potentates, rather than centrally appointed governors despatched from Constantinople.⁷⁷

Cherson, on the Crimean peninsula, was an imperial outpost for the purpose of communicating with and gathering intelligence on the peoples of the Black Sea littoral, like the Pechenegs and the Khazars, and the people who regularly travelled to it for purposes of trade, the Rus. The Adriatic

⁷⁷ See Chapter 6, pp. 243-5, 251.

and Dalmatian possessions also provided a similar service in the Balkans and performed the military role of securing the Adriatic for Byzantium and providing naval support for the Italian provinces. By geography and design, Byzantium inhabited several zones of international interest: the Near Eastern world, flanked by the hostile Islamic emirates which held sway from Tarsos (Arabic: Tarsūs) to Melitene (Arabic: Malatya; annexed by the Byzantines in 934) and Theodosiopolis (Arabic: Qālīqalā), and the powers of the Georgian and Armenian world in Transcaucasia; the Turkic and Slavic world around the Black Sea, comprising the Khazars, the Pechenegs, the Rus, the Bulgars, and the Hungarians beyond; the Slavic Balkans; the Lombard and Frankish worlds which intersected with Byzantine interests in Italy; and the larger Mediterranean world, within which the empire participated alongside polities as far afield as the Umayyads of al-Andalus and the Fātimīds of Ifrīqiyah, as well as the fearsome piratical emirate of Crete.

This far-flung empire was governed from one of the best placed capital cities, Constantinople, which could alternate between being a gateway and a barrier to the empire. Geographically exposed and seemingly vulnerable, its double walls and sea defences had been impossible to breach even in the heyday of Arab expansionism of the late seventh and early eighth centuries, and it was protected from frequent direct attack by the prevailing currents, which made it difficult for an invading force to sail speedily up the Sea of Marmara.⁷⁸ In the mid tenth century, the most alarming threat to the city had come from the Rus, when they sailed across the Black Sea and attacked the Asian suburbs of Constantinople in 941. The city itself remained unscathed, though somewhat shaken.⁷⁹ The relative security of Constantinople, and its uninterrupted history as the capital of the Empire, allowed it evolve in a way that could be heavily dominated by the imperial

⁷⁸ Pryor (1988), p. 90.

⁷⁹ See Chapter 5, pp. 218-20.

presence, both in the restricted environment of the palace and in the public spaces of Hagia Sophia, the Hippodrome, the Forum of Constantine, the imperial mausoleum in the Church of the Holy Apostles, and the numerous churches that had been decorated and refurbished by emperors from Justinian to Basil I. The continuity of occupation allowed each subsequent emperor to mark his reign by enacting the same rituals as preceding generations of emperors and to gain access to all the old imperial staging grounds, upon which new ceremonial could be imprinted.

It is therefore unsurprising that eye-witness accounts of visits to Byzantium, like those of Harūn ibn Yāhyā and Liudprand of Cremona, describe ceremonial audiences and feasts in the Great Palace and in the Hagia Sophia at such great length.⁸⁰ In the Imperial City, it was particularly easy for the emperor to orchestrate lavish ceremonial for the benefit of foreigners and for the populace, who were participants in several public ceremonies where foreigners were present. Constantinople was also the location for the gathering of information about outsiders and their social organisation and customs, and for bestowing court titles upon leaders of states which were either notionally part of the empire, or at least agreed to participate in the Byzantine system for reasons of prestige, pecuniary benefit, or strategic imperatives.⁸¹

With territories extending over such varied geographical spheres, and a secure imperial capital playing host to cycles of foreign visitors, it would be natural to expect that the empire had access to a fair amount of knowledge about the outside world. However, if one had to rely solely on the extant chronicle sources for the period, it would be very difficult to say that Byzantium had any interest in the outside world whatsoever, beyond its dealings with those who troubled its borders

⁸⁰ Ibn Rustah, pp. 119-30; *Antapodosis*, VI.5-20, pp. 147-50.

⁸¹ *DAI*, 40, pp. 174-9.

or attacked the capital city. The two chronicle traditions that cover the personal reign of Constantine VII were both written in Constantinople and their representation of Byzantine dealings with the outside world were ultimately based on the events the imperial government in Constantinople chose to mark with triumphs or celebrations. *Theophanes Continuatus* and the *Synopsis Historiōn* of John Skylitzes, were both continuators of the history of Theophanes Confessor. The works conventionally known as *Theophanes continuatus*, or *Scriptores post Theophanem*, were commissioned by Constantine Porphyrogenetos and consist of at least three distinct parts: a history of the emperors who reigned between 813 and 867, an encomiastic life of Basil I, and a concluding part that covered the reigns of Leo VI, Alexander, Constantine VII, Romanos I, Constantine VII again, and Romanos II till 961.⁸² Skylitzes' account, covering the period from the death of Nikephoros I in 811 till the accession of Alexios I in 1057, makes ample use of the *Theo. Cont.* material, but expressly states that it, and other tenth century works by authors like Genesios and Leo the Deacon, were insufficient due to inaccuracies and hidden authorial agendas.⁸³ As continuators of the *Chronographia* of Theophanes the Confessor, they participated in the very Byzantine tradition of history writing, which viewed the history of the Roman Empire to be a continuous story from the Biblical creation of the world in 5508 BCE. This history was not a history of all the peoples of the world, but only of the Roman Empire, which, after the Incarnation of Christ, was the forerunner of the Christian Roman Empire, established by Constantine I, that would lead the world up to the Second Coming.⁸⁴ In acknowledging that each work had to be linked to the previous one in order to maintain this chain to the beginning of time, authors had to take a position on the last acceptable continuation and start from the point at which that continuation ended.

⁸² See also introduction to *V/B* in Mango (2012) pp. 3-4, Treadgold (2013), pp. 165-96, and Howard-Johnston (2014), pp. 24-7.

⁸³ Skylitzes, pp. 3-4.

⁸⁴ Mango (2008), p. 957.

The centrality of the history of the Romans to the very conception of history writing in Byzantium meant that the histories produced had an inward focus, and, in the case of our two sources, a focus that was largely limited to Constantinople. Hence, we hear only of the events which resulted in a reception or triumph for military leaders,⁸⁵ of attacks which had reached the hinterland of Constantinople,⁸⁶ and of visits by emissaries and leaders of foreign peoples.⁸⁷ The only glimpse that the texts provide of the inner workings of the imperial chancellery, in particular the office of the *logothetēs tou dromou*, are in the picture painted by *Theo. Cont.* of an emperor who was tirelessly engaged in sending letters to rulers of the *ethne*, reading theirs to him, receiving ambassadors, and sending letters to the various *archontes*.⁸⁸ Various examples of the international epistolary culture between different leaders can be found in the corpus of letters of Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos (d. 925), who had served briefly as regent for Constantine VII (913-14) and then corresponded on behalf of Romanos I with a variety of recipients until his death.⁸⁹

Another striking feature of the chronicle evidence is that there is no mention of the characteristics of the various peoples, their structures of rulership, or of the lands they inhabited, in either source. The state had to know the historical past and present realities of the various peoples in the inner and outer circles of polities that it communicated with, just to ensure its own preparedness to respond to a threat and, increasingly, to formulate a strategy of benefit to the empire, which was not wholly contingent on responding to exigencies. We know that there was robust information gathering from evidence for it in the *De administrando imperio* and the *De*

⁸⁵ *Theo. Cont.* : exchange of prisoners on Lamos by John Kourkouas and Magistros Kosmas 946, p. 443; parade in hippodrome of prisoners from Basil Hexamilites' 956/7, pp. 452-3; receipt of gifts and hostages after the defeat of the Fātimid navy by Marianos Argyros 957, p.454-5; victories of Nikephoros Phokas celebrated in Constantinople, p. 459-60; triumph in the hippodrome after Basil Lekapenos' victory against Samosata 958, pp. 461-2; Skylitzes: the capture and parading of Abū'l 'Asā'ir in Constantinople 956, p. 241.

⁸⁶ *Theo. Cont.* , pp. 462-3.

⁸⁷ *Theo. Cont.* , pp. 448-9; Skylitzes, pp. 239-40.

⁸⁸ *Theo. Cont.* , pp. 448-9.

⁸⁹ Hereafter, *Letters*.

cerimoniis aulae byzantinae, which form a separate category of source material, unique to the reign of Constantine VII. The *DAI*, a diplomatic handbook compiled by the emperor from dossiers of materials compiled during the reign of Leo VI and from more current material based on recent interactions with the northern peoples, reached its final form around the year 952 and was intended to provide instruction to the young Romanos II.⁹⁰ It begins with the empire's most volatile neighbours, those to the north, and to measures that could be taken to counter any threats from the direction of the Black Sea.⁹¹ Constantine VII then comes into full throat in denouncing the demands of these peoples for imperial vestments and crowns, the secret of Greek fire, and marriage within a member of the imperial family, before returning to his circuit of the different peoples of the world.⁹² Material culled from the *Chronographia* and ancient authors about the first centuries of Islam are brought up to contemporary times with a brief note on the political fragmentation of the Islamic world.⁹³ The imperial voice once more comes to the fore in the justification for claim of the line of Hugh of Provence to being the true heirs of Charlemagne in the Frankish lands in an obvious response to the recent *adventus* of Otto I into Italy.⁹⁴ Chapters twenty-seven to forty-six comprise what has been called the 'historico-diplomatic core' of the text and begin in Campania and Lombardy, before paying special attention to Venice, and then travelling down the Adriatic coast of the Balkans, going north to describe the political organisation of the Pechenegs and Hungarians, and then taking in an itinerary from Thessaloniki to Belgrade, across the Hungarian domains and the entire Black Sea littoral down to Abkhazia. The last section within this core with any internal coherence is on client management in

⁹⁰ Jenkins (1967), pp. 1, 5; Howard-Johnston (2000), pp. 306.

⁹¹ *DAI*, 1-13, pp. 48-65.

⁹² *DAI*, 13, pp. 66-77.

⁹³ *DAI*, 14-25, pp. 77-107.

⁹⁴ *DAI*, 26, pp. 109-13.

Transcaucasia.⁹⁵ What follows is additional material on a variety of themes, all of interest to the text as a whole, but not integrated into its schema.⁹⁶

The *De cer.* was another of Constantine's projects, which was aimed at collecting records of court ceremonial to mark religious and secular occasions; the ceremonies described were mainly from the mid ninth century onwards, but some dated as far back as the funeral of Patriarch Sergios in 638/9 and coronation of Empress Irene in 768. The ceremonies reinforced the notion of the Byzantine Emperor as God's viceroy on earth through the use of acclamations, processions ambulating sites embedded with the memory of the long Christian-Roman past, and the careful display of wondrous artefacts. Chapters twenty-five to fifty-six of Book II comprise a collection of un-integrated documents that vary in content from military mobilisation to the inspection of granaries and protocols of address for visiting dignitaries and letters to foreign rulers.⁹⁷ These last are of particular interest to determining the Byzantine worldview as they provide us with the subtle distinctions made between rulers as well as information on how attitudes towards certain states changed over time.

Neither the *DAI* nor the *De cer.* is exhaustive in its coverage of known recipients of Byzantine diplomatic attention, either via description in the case of the former or the insertion of protocols in the case of the latter. The *DAI* confined itself to describing the regions over which the empire (Byzantine, not Classical Roman) had prior territorial claims or which could be of use to the empire as potential clients. This would explain the absence of the great power over the horizon, the Ottonian Franks, who had been involving themselves in the affairs of the Kingdom of Italy and the Frankish duchies of Italy since 940, and the Khazars, who could still co-ordinate

⁹⁵ Howard-Johnston (2000), pp. 317-9, 326-7.

⁹⁶ *DAI*, 47-53, pp. 224-87.

⁹⁷ *ODB*, 'De ceremoniis'.

offensive action in the steppe regions, but could never be potential allies. The absence of detailed passages on the Bulgarians in the *DAI* can probably be explained by the fact that a great deal had already been written about the history of the Bulgarians from the mid eighth century, primarily in works commissioned by Constantine in his *Theophanes continuatus* project. The lack of interest in the Rus might be explained by the fact that they were no longer the primary Northern clients as they had been at the end of the reign of Leo VI, as the raid of 944 showed that they were still subject to the Khazars and the itinerary of the *monoxyla* makes it clear that they had little independent capability in the Black Sea region without the acquiescence of the Pechenegs.⁹⁸ The list of protocols in the *De cer.*, despite being far more comprehensive in listing even the smallest principalities of Transcaucasia, leaves out Umayyad Spain and the emirates of Tarsos and Aleppo, with both of which the imperial chancellery certainly maintained contact.

The survey of material about the outside world as found in the sources from Constantine's reign shows us that the coverage of the chronicle sources was very narrowly focussed on the world as experienced through Constantinople. The *DAI* is singularly uninterested in the physical geography of the world beyond its borders, with only the itinerary of the journey of the Rus *monoxyla* to Byzantium and the patchwork of itineraries in chapter forty-two showing any interest in the description of geographical distances and physical features.⁹⁹ These details must have been available to the administration for intelligence purposes, but were not central to the Byzantine understanding of outsiders. What Constantine's efforts in the *DAI* exemplify is a conception of the world in which it was enough to understand the rough location of one nation in relation to another, and in which the primary focus lay on listing peoples and describing their historical relationship with Byzantium in the remote and recent past. The view of the world was therefore

⁹⁸ Howard-Johnston (2000), pp. 334-336.

⁹⁹ *DAI*, 9, pp. 56-63; 42, pp.182-9.

ethnographical and historical rather than geographical. It is alleged that Constantine took a personal interest in the promotion of astronomy and the training of astronomers, but the survival of the Ptolemaic inheritance appears to have been limited to the stars and not to the earth.¹⁰⁰

Defining the role of the emperor *within* the borders of the Empire, or at least within the confines of the imperial capital is perhaps an easier task than defining his role in world affairs and his place in the constellation of the rulers within Byzantium's diplomatic reach. Within Constantinople, the emperor, popular or successful or neither, had access to all the places associated with imperial power from the beginnings of the empire of New Rome, and regularly imprinted them with his own authority, and, by association with these sites, absorbed the ritual sanctity of being one in an unbroken (though, by no means unsullied) chain of God's vice-regents on Earth. The eternal empire that was to play a central role in the end of days, according to Byzantine eschatology, was led by a figure who, in the words of Constantine VII's father, Leo VI, governed through his *pronoia*: a term that has both a secular meaning of foresight and a theological meaning of Divine Providence.¹⁰¹ The sacerdotal nature of the Byzantine emperor and the attempts by the Macedonian dynasts in particular to associate themselves with Old Testament kings, especially Solomon has been the subject of some interest to scholarship.¹⁰² It is also apparent that the continuation project to the *Chronographia*, initiated by Constantine VII, abandoned the annalistic style of the earlier chronicle for one made the reign of each emperor into a measure of time.

The regular presence of the emperor in the capital meant that the imperial administration, civil and religious, could organise a fixed calendar of processions and audiences, with which the populace would be familiar and which it could come to expect. While ultimately deriving from

¹⁰⁰ *Theo. Cont.*, p. 446; Skylitzes, pp. 237-8. Kaldellis (2013), pp. 33-42.

¹⁰¹ *Apocalypse of Daniel* in Alexander (1985), pp. 61-123; Noailles and Dain (1944), Novel 47, pp. 186-7.

¹⁰² Dagron (2003), pp. 192-200; Magdalino (1988).

time-honoured practices; the details of rituals, their routes, and sometimes their locales on both religious and more secular occasions could be changed in a variety of ways.¹⁰³ These were augmented at times of military victories, or the arrival of sacred objects, by triumphs and processions. In both the scheduled events as well as the one-offs, outsiders, be they churchmen, visiting traders, high ranking hostages, ambassadors, or prisoners of war, played multiple roles as participants, spectators, and curiosities. The emperor, imperial authorities, and foreign emissaries played a part in the tableau in which the Byzantine emperor could be seen as presiding over disparate nations of the world, like a latter day Solomon.¹⁰⁴ The visitors themselves were dazzled as they processed through a variety of rooms, which were specially decorated to impress each legation with soft furnishings and precious objects that each particular group of visitors might find awe-inspiring.¹⁰⁵ The grandeur of the empire was made manifest to them through audiences, participation in festivals to the extent that one visitor was even witness to the handing out of the annual *roga* to the civil and military administration in the week before Palm Sunday.¹⁰⁶ Thus, no opportunity was spared to impress upon visiting emissaries the great wealth and vivid ritual of the Byzantine court.

Splendid as it seemed to visiting Franks (the only memoir of an ambassador to the court of Constantine VII is that of Liudprand of Cremona, who represented the Kingdom of Italy), Byzantium was not the only court society with sophisticated courtly displays. The ‘Abbāsid court in Baghdad and the Umayyad court in Cordoba were equally opulent and the practice of a labyrinthine procession through a series of palace buildings was well established in both, and perhaps replicated in all Islamic courts in the Near East and North Africa. This ritual language was mutually intelligible between the grander powers, as were the meanings conveyed by the gifts

¹⁰³ Moffat (1997).

¹⁰⁴ A. Walker (2012), p. 90.

¹⁰⁵ *De cer.*, II.15, pp. 566-82.

¹⁰⁶ *Antapodosis*, VI.10, p. 128.

exchanged.¹⁰⁷ At the same time as trying to prevent the copying of Byzantine style courts in pagan lands, the empire had accepted a begrudging parity with the ‘Abbāsids, in the secret depths of the *logothete’s* bureau at any rate, and the letter of Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos to Caliph al-Muqtadir in 913/4 clearly demonstrates that there was a thread in the Byzantine worldview that acknowledged that there were two lordships in the world, that of the Saracens and that of the Romans, which were above all the others on earth. This worldview also recognised that all earthly authority emanated from Divine Will, and that the continuation of divine favour rested upon frequent contacts between the two unique nations.¹⁰⁸

For at least two decades before Constantine began his personal reign, it was known that the ‘Abbāsīd lordship over the Muslim world had become functionally ineffectual. With its well-established office of foreign affairs and long memory, Byzantium was better placed than any other Christian state to respond to changes in nomenclature, religious beliefs, and cultural practices of its traditional antagonists. In the formulae of address and the protocols for letters in the *De cer.* for Islamic rulers, we again meet all the main protagonists who were described in the *DAI*. The protocols for letters in chapter 48 of the *De cer.* can be divided into two sections. The first consists of anonymous formulae, like the one to the Emir of the Faithful, which do not mention the names of the emperors. The second section appears to have been culled from a list of protocols used on actual correspondence issued in the name of Constantine VII and Romanos II— with inconsequential differences having been preserved, indicating that they were taken down from copies of actual letters. If we, for example, home in on the protocol for letters to the ‘Emir of Africa’, we find that, the addressee is referred to as ‘the most noble *exousiastes* of the Muslims’. This short protocol is very revealing. From the *DAI*, we know that Constantine was well aware

¹⁰⁷ A. Walker (2012), p. 83.

¹⁰⁸ *Letters*, 1, pp. 2-13.

of the fact that the Fātimids claimed to be Caliphs and that they did not consider themselves emirs, or provincial governors, ruling in the name of the Abbasid Caliph. However, the Byzantines also knew that this claim was entirely rejected by their allies and rival caliphs, the Umayyads. This protocol is a subtle exercise in obfuscation – the Fatimid Caliph is not called an emir and neither is he called the *amīr al-mūminīn* or Commander of the Faithful. However, he is addressed as ‘*exousiastēn ton Mousoulēmiton*’; *ton Mousoulēmiton* being a term that is never used anywhere else by either Constantine or any Middle Byzantine author. The empire was therefore nervous of acknowledging the caliphal title in this particular letter, but acknowledged the fact that the Fatimids wanted to project themselves as leaders of the entire Muslim *umma* and not just the inhabitants of Fatimid controlled North-Africa. A similar point can be made about the address to the ruler of Blessed Arabia, who is referred to as lord or *kurieuonta* and not as emir, reflecting the breakaway Shi’a federation in Southern Arabia.¹⁰⁹

Although the *De cer.* does not contain a protocol for letters sent to the Caliph in Spain, an Arabic translation of the salutation of letter to Cordoba from 949 has come down to us, which can be rendered in English as follows.¹¹⁰

‘Constantine and Romanos, who believe in the Messiah (Christ), Great Kings (Augustii?) of the Country of the Romans, to the exalted, meritorious, most excellent, and of noble descent, ‘Abd ar-Rahmān, Caliph and ruler of the Arabs of al-Andalus, may God prolong your life!’

It plays upon all the features of their rule that the Umayyads most wanted to project to outsiders. Firstly, that their power derived from their descent from the Umayyad caliphs in Syria, secondly, that the Umayyad ruler was *the* Caliph (not *a* Caliph), and that he was the ruler of the Spain. The origins, titles and geographical extent of the Umayyad Caliph’s power were all addressed in this short protocol. What the care taken in addressing different Islamic rulers correctly displays is that

¹⁰⁹ *De cer.*, II.48, pp. 689, 691.

¹¹⁰ Makkarī, I, p. 368.

the Byzantine worldview could incorporate competing claims to suzerainty across long distances. This was a pragmatic approach, and the changes in the protocols shows that they were not frozen and changed according to changing relations. It was in the empire's interests to constantly recalibrate its response to threats and opportunities and there were no strict categories of friend or foe. Constantine VII went so far as to assist the ruler of an Islamic state, the Umayyads, in recreating some of the splendour of its Syrian past by sending columns and fountains for the building of the new palace-capital of Madīnat az-Zāhrā, as part of a diplomatic initiative to broker an alliance against the Fātimids.¹¹¹

This accommodating attitude towards Islamic rulers certainly existed before the accession of Romanos I and was evolved further by Constantine VII's chancellery, but there is evidence that Romanos I might have abandoned this policy briefly. In a letter from Muhammad ibn Tugj al-Ikhshīd, the emir of Egypt, to Romanos, it is clear that the Ikhshīd had received a letter which explicitly stated that the emperor of the Byzantines did not usually correspond with anyone other than the Caliph (Abbāsīd). In his letter, Romanos had also allegedly stated that this was due to the fact that the Byzantine Empire had been given by God in all eternity and would last as long as the world. This slight did not go unnoticed by the emir, who proceeded to tell Romanos about his vast lands and resources and quoted the Qur'an to refute Byzantine claims to a special place amongst earthly kingdoms. This refutation was based on a view that the only empire conferred by God was one which followed the prophet of Islam and the leadership of his heirs.¹¹²

In the case of the great Islamic powers, Byzantium could not use its other mechanism of exerting its influence beyond its borders: Orthodox Christianity. For nations which did not profess a

¹¹¹ See Chapter 3, pp. 142-5.

¹¹² Ibn Sa'īd, pp. 18-23.

universalist faith, the Middle Byzantine worldview had an active policy of exporting religion, from the top down, through the baptism of their rulers, assisted by a programme of missionary activity. The Macedonian view on the role of ‘apostolic work’ is best elucidated in the *Vita Basilii*, which praises Basil I for converting Jews, strengthening the faith in Bulgaria by sending an archbishop and creating a network of bishoprics, and sending an archbishop to the Rus. The mechanisms outlined for the spreading of the faith were various, ranging from titles and exemption from taxes for converted Jews; to receptions, presents, and donations for the Bulgarians; and gifts of gold, silver, and silk to entice the Rus.¹¹³ These methods were not failsafe, as the author only too openly admitted; the majority of the Jews returned to their former faith after Basil’s death. Although some conversion activity certainly took place in the lands of the Rus, the miraculous fable that accompanies the account is a clear sign that the conversion was not a wholesale success. If there had been an expanding network of bishoprics and rapid conversion, the account would not have had to be padded out with a story about an incorruptible Bible, which survived intact despite being thrown into a furnace. Nevertheless, it was a Macedonian imperial attribute to expand Orthodox Christianity to the hitherto pagan Caucasian and Slav peoples, an initiative from the days of the last Amorian emperor, Michael III.

While it is clear that the notion of a single, divinely appointed imperium could never be upheld in dealings with Islamic powers, it has often been argued that the Christian (pre-existing or neophyte) powers were organised into a ‘family of princes’ or a ‘hierarchical world order’ by the Byzantine Empire.¹¹⁴ This was argued on several grounds, including the fact that it was not deemed a violation of sovereignty by the participating nations to be recognised as being in spiritual kinship with the Byzantine Emperor, and many rulers gained prestige through holding

¹¹³ *VB*, 95-8, pp. 309-317; Ciccolella (2000).

¹¹⁴ Grabar(1954); Ostrogorski (1936, 1956); Dölger (1940).

Byzantine dignities. The giving of titles was effectively restricted to two categories of rulers. The first category comprised states which Byzantium considered to be part of its outer domains, governed by independent rulers, which acknowledged the Byzantine Emperor as a superior ruler. These included the rulers of Campanian city-states (Naples and Amalfi), Gaeta, Venice, the Lombard principalities of Capua and Benevento, as well as the *curropalates* of Iberia. To this list of leaders for whom imperial titles are attested can probably be added all the other rulers to whom a command (*keleusis*) was sent instead of a letter (*grammata*) according to chapter forty-eight of the *De cer.*¹¹⁵

Even within this inner group, Byzantium could not ensure that the title was used or that the 'subject' rulers properly understood their place in Byzantine internal hierarchy.¹¹⁶ Titles therefore fell into abeyance when local rulers no longer had use for them, and most Byzantine titles conferred in Southern Italy ceased to be used in official documents and coins past 940. Providing titles was also no guarantee of the recipients' acquiescence to larger Byzantine political aims if they came into conflict with their own local concerns. Chapter forty-five of the *DAI* outlines the difficulties faced by Leo VI and Constantine VII in gaining access to valuable strategic vantage points from which to attack Theodosiupolis from the Iberians.¹¹⁷ Title holders did sometimes exert their rights to stipends and properties granted by the emperor, but it was always difficult for Byzantium to weigh up the demands of competing rulers. Therefore, the granting of titles, gifts, and properties to 'subordinate' rulers was often contested by neighbouring rulers, and Byzantium had to repeatedly renegotiate its relations with them in order to maintain its influence.¹¹⁸

Subordinating the demands of so called 'subject' rulers to Byzantine foreign policy was therefore

¹¹⁵ *De cer.*, II.48, pp. 687-8, 690-1.

¹¹⁶ See Chapter 6.

¹¹⁷ *DAI*, 45, pp. 204-15.

¹¹⁸ *DAI*, 43, pp. 188-99.

entirely impossible without constant negotiation, and the map of Byzantine influence within this inner circle was in a perennial state of flux.

The second grouping of foreign potentates who received imperial titles were leaders of northern peoples like the Hungarians and the Rus. In Constantine's time, these were bestowed in lavish court ceremonies, which also included baptism sponsored by the emperor.¹¹⁹ These titles were perhaps necessitated by the need to incorporate these visitors within court ceremonial, in order for them to be baptised and to appear and share a table with the imperial family and *patrikioi*. Outside Constantinople, the acceptance of a title did not mean that the recipients had received a firm place in any system of ordering instituted by Byzantium. They independently entered into relations with other great powers, particularly Ottonian Saxony, and engaged in hostile action against Byzantium, whenever the time seemed opportune. The Rus and the Hungarians, alongside those from the Caucasian regions provided crucial martial manpower for Byzantine military campaigns, and the empire was certainly at some pains to create channels of continuous contact, mainly through enticements. Again, Byzantium must have provided lucrative opportunities, and these nations might even have, over time, formed an 'international commonwealth' based on the adoption of Byzantine religion and cultural practices, but none of this was conditional on the acknowledgment of the Byzantine emperor as the head of a political confederation.¹²⁰

In the list of protocols for imperial correspondence with foreign rulers in the *De cer.*, there are ten correspondents who are addressed as family members. There has been a tendency to see these as attempts by the Byzantium to create a 'spiritual family' which could stand in for any actual

¹¹⁹ *De cer.* II.15. pp. 594-8; Skylitzes, pp. 239-40.

¹²⁰ Obolensky (1971), pp. 13-14.

temporal control.¹²¹ The Pope in Rome is addressed as ‘spiritual father’ and both the ruler of the Alans and the Prince of Princes of Armenia (the Bagratid ruler) are addressed as ‘spiritual son’. There is a second category of such familial relations, but these are addressed as ‘longed-for spiritual brother’, and include the kings of Saxony and Bavaria. While some of these kingdoms were territorially specific, there are also protocols for ‘longed-for spiritual brother’ addressing the King of Germania and the King of Gallia. The most bewildering development is that the ruler of Bulgaria is once addressed as ‘spiritual son’ and later as ‘longed-for spiritual son’. The traditional theory that this was a hierarchical spiritual family tree, with the Byzantine emperor at the apex, begins to crumble at a closer analysis of the protocols. Despite being called ‘spiritual son’ in the protocol, the Prince of Princes of Armenia was a monophysite ruler, who was not in communion with the Chalcedonian Byzantines. The addition of the word *pepothēmenon* of longed-for in the case of the Bulgarian prince (and then emperor) was possibly indicative of some tensions between Byzantium and Bulgaria. In the case of the Germanic rulers, we clearly have protocols from at least two or three different stages. The recipient of the letters to the King of Francia was likely Otto I, at various stages of his career. The title *rex Teutonicorum*, which would have been the equivalent of *rēga Germanias*, is a title attested in Southern Italy, in a few instances, for the Ottonian emperor at the turn of the eleventh century, but never in the tenth-century.¹²² Italian *diplomata* from 950-1 frequently refer to Otto as *rex Francorum*, which is the same as the Byzantine *rēga Phrangias*.¹²³ This Byzantine spiritual family as set out in the protocols of address appears to have no internal coherence whatsoever. The main longed-for spiritual brother was Otto I, and, as the empire’s greatest Christian rival, he was rightly targeted by Byzantine diplomacy. The title of ‘longed-for spiritual brother’ might have been intended to flatter Otto, or even simply to

¹²¹ A. Grabar (1954) is the prime example of this.

¹²² Müller-Martens (1999), p. 265.

¹²³ *De cer.*, II.48, pp. 691.

suggest parity, but it cannot be seen as an effort to deliberately co-opt the distant ruler into any family, spiritual or political headed by the Byzantine Emperor.

The Byzantine view of the world took into consideration immediate neighbours and those beyond the horizon who could have an impact on the Empire's interests. The natural question to ask would be whether there is any apparent way in which the nations were graded or categorised. Some categories are immediately apparent, but the notion of a 'spiritual family' does not seem to hold true, and if there were a 'Byzantine Commonwealth' based on religious affiliation, it does not seem to have exerted a great deal of influence on Byzantine foreign policy – at the very least, the empire does not seem to have, in the reign of Constantine VII and before, been able to call upon its spiritual network for substantive assistance in fulfilling foreign policy objectives. The category of the northern people and the so-called Scythians is brought in for particular criticism for avariciousness in the *DAI*, and these included the nomadic and semi-settled Hungarians, Rus, and the Khazars. However, even those in this category of peoples, the vast majority of whom remained, in the words of Constantine VII, 'professors of other faiths and unbaptised', were accorded the status of independent nations with their own laws and institutions.¹²⁴ Scholars of Byzantine history have for some time posited that the ancient duality of the empire and the barbarians had to be abandoned by Byzantium, and a new worldview was developed which took account of the increasing influence wielded by self-regulating states that encircled the empire.¹²⁵ However, the nature of this new worldview, especially between the mid ninth and the mid eleventh centuries, when the empire had renewed freedom to steer its engagements with the outside world, has not been convincingly or comprehensively addressed.

¹²⁴ *DAI*, 13, pp. 70-1.

¹²⁵ A. Grabar (1954), pp. 117-8.

The 'Byzantine Commonwealth' or the Byzantine 'family of princes' are modern notions that attempt to describe the Macedonian policies which were aimed at Christian polities or those that the Empire wished to draw into the Orthodox fold as a part of a concerted drive to lessen tensions and extend imperial influence over its neighbours. However, this tendency for baptisms and missionary activity must be understood as mechanisms for projecting the emperor's power *within* the core Byzantine territories, especially in the capital city, and to remind the populace that its ruler was fulfilling the empire's prophetic mission of spreading the faith and restoring peace. In terms of foreign policy, the most the empire could hope for were eyes and ears within the ecclesiastical infrastructure of these nations, which could report back to the centre and which could be relied on for putting the empire's interests forward. With the rise of indigenous religious organisation in states like Bulgaria accelerating in the tenth century under Symeon, and the inefficacy of religious bonds in the realms of the Rus and the Hungarians in creating any political allegiance to Byzantium, neither concept was much use to the empire in its foreign affairs. The paradox that the concept of the Byzantine emperor as an exemplar of Christian rulership grew stronger in the external realms after the contraction of the empire in 1204 proves that while the empire was in a position to intervene in the wider world from a position of strength (as it certainly was under the Macedonians), it could not exert its moral right to have dominion over foreign peoples without facing serious resistance.¹²⁶

1.2 The Ottonian Worldview

Reconstructing the worldview of the Ottonian realm, the only major Christian power in continental Europe with both the ambition and the organisational wherewithal to respond to opportunities beyond its borders, is a task beset with some difficulty. This is despite the fact that there is an abundance of extant source material on the key events during the reign, which was

¹²⁶ Shepard (2006a), pp. 18-27.

contemporaneous to that of Constantine VII, that of Otto I (r. 936 to 973). The historiography of the reign of Otto I will be examined in some detail in the relevant chapter.¹²⁷ In brief, one can identify two major historical traditions in this period – one which concerned itself solely with key events which happened in every year, i.e. the annalistic tradition, and the other which attempted to provide an analysis of the events which occurred, i.e. the histories. The annals which are of primary importance to our study are the mid eleventh century *Annales Quedlinburgenses* and the mid twelfth century *Annales Hildesheimensis*, which were certainly based on older records kept in the monasteries where they were written. They relied for their information on digests of the deeds of emperors and important kinsmen, which reached the prominent German monasteries as a matter of course – either through court circulars or through the accounts of the bishops and abbots who attended the imperial court on festival days, councils and elections.¹²⁸ Monasteries and nunneries were closely associated with leading families and Ottonian royal queens and princesses often ended their lives as abbesses of these communities.¹²⁹ Bishops and abbots were often handpicked from powerful families with strong connections to the royal court. The events which found a place in the annals were those which were inherently linked either to the monastic setting or to the royal family. The world that they were interested in was Saxony, their main players were the Saxon aristocracy and their dealings with the ruler, and any major foreign campaigns or the arrival of embassies were mentioned within the context of the deeds of the ruler.

Apart from the sparse notices in monastic annals, the detail and analysis of the rule of the Saxons can be found in a series of histories, written after the Otto had established both his primacy within its own immediate family and clan as well as his ability to deal effectively and decisively

¹²⁷ See Chapter 4, pp.162-72.

¹²⁸ For the existence of written records, see Thietmar, I.21, II.9, pp. 26-8, 48.

¹²⁹ Widukind of Corvey's *Res Gestae Saxonicae* is dedicated to Mathilda, abbess of Quedlinburg and daughter of Otto I.

against its most pernicious external enemies, the Hungarians. Written around 958, Liudprand of Cremona's *Antapodosis*, the narrative of which ends in 950, is the earliest available history that deals comprehensively with the rise and deeds of both Henry I and Otto I. By this time, the Italian courtier and man of letters was a member of Otto's court. The second history, the *Res Gestae Saxonicae* of the Saxon monk Widukind, of the monastery of Corvey, was written circa 967/8, well after Otto I's *adventus* into Italy and his coronation as emperor by John XII in February 962.¹³⁰ The last major work to focus on the reigns of Henry I and Otto I was the *Chronicon* of Thietmar, Bishop of Merseburg, which was written from 1012, in the reign of the last of the Ottonians, Henry II.¹³¹ While Widukind and Thietmar were attached to monasteries and were men of religion, Liudprand straddled the ecclesiastical and secular worlds with ease and exemplified the Ottonian preference for placing worldly men in positions of ecclesiastical power. All three wrote from positions of authority; Liudprand and Thietmar were bishops, while Widukind was a monk in the very powerful abbey of Corvey, in the Saxon heartland. While Thietmar and Widukind were firmly entrenched in the ecclesiastical system that provided the legitimisers of Saxon rule, Liudprand was a relative new-comer, and his flexible loyalties had an impact on his writings.

The annals and histories which deal with the reign of Otto I, provide us with a continuous history of warfare with neighbouring peoples. Otto's battles with the Danes in Lotharingia, his constant skirmishes with the Slavs between the Elbe and the Oder, the frequent Hungarian raids that devastated different duchies in the East Frankish realm, as well as the king's interventions in Italy are dutifully enumerated, especially by Widukind. From Widukind's writing, it is clear that military victories were seen as the primary instruments of maintaining power by Otto and his

¹³⁰ Ed. Hirsch and Lohmann (1935). Hereafter, Widukind.

¹³¹ Ed. Holtzmann (1935). Hereafter, Thietmar.

followers. This was no doubt due to the fact that the East Frankish kingdom inherited by Otto was largely landlocked and without any real physical barriers apart from crossable rivers. The Alps in the South were the only significant barrier, but the fragmentary nature of Northern Italian rulership ensured that there was no political threat from the region to the south of the Alps, while opportunities for intervention were multiple and involved fairly low risks. Within the kingdom itself, the heartland of Otto's power lay in Saxony, Thuringia, and Franconia (between the Elbe and the Rhine), while the outer duchies of Lotharingia, Swabia, and Bavaria had their own historic relations with their neighbours and were the seats of dissent for much of Otto's reign until the mid 950s. As a rule, all three histories are much more interested in internal conflict between senior aristocrats in the localities and the king, and much more emphasis is placed on describing the plots and intrigues within the Saxon hierarchy which drew the Hungarians into the East Frankish realm in the 950s, than on the actual engagements with the Hungarians and their characteristics.

Otto's ability to formulate and enact an independent foreign policy for his realm was therefore constrained by the fact that the socio-political organisation of Saxony, and of the duchies which were part of the kingdom, enabled individual notables to exercise a great deal of autonomy in their relations with the outside world. Unlike his father, Otto I was not satisfied with being considered first amongst equals, and tried, in a number of ways to ensure that men favoured by him, and members of his own family, were appointed in dukes and margraves.¹³² This resulted in civil wars and external attacks spearheaded by disgruntled royals and other notables, which engaged Otto for the vast majority of the period under consideration in this thesis. While the power to make critical appointments was seized and maintained with some force by the king, the fact that each notable, whether duke or margrave, commanded a section of the kingdom's army,

¹³² See Chapter 4, pp. 174-80.

which was immediately loyal to the local leader and not to the king, routinely meant that Otto's engagements with the outside world were mediated by or dependant on the continued support of the very notables he hoped to bring under a centralising command. This was nowhere more the case than on the marches to the east of the Duchy of Saxony, where the margraves lead their own campaigns against the neighbouring Slavs and entered into peace agreements with them.¹³³ If notables loyal to Otto could conduct a semi-independent foreign policy, it is not surprising that the rebel dukes who opposed him in the first half of the 950s created strategic alliances with both the Hungarians and the Italians.¹³⁴ In the north, at least one major Wend campaign against Saxony was instigated by disaffected nobles who had been overlooked for an office in Otto's regime.¹³⁵

Despite these restrictions on the manner in which the kingdom's resources could be used or deployed by the king, it is exactly for his achievements in the field of international affairs that Otto was most praised. In the verse prologue to Book II of his *Chronicon*, Thietmar listed what he thought, or what were generally accepted, to be Otto's major achievements. Apart from his generous foundation of and support for bishoprics in the eastern marches, the king is lauded for defeating Berengar II, forcing the Lombards to submit to his rule, his coronation as emperor in Rome, his ability to extract tribute from Southern Italy, pacifying the other Franks and the Danes, and ensuring that the kingdom faced no further enemy in the East.¹³⁶ Widukind had previously summed up his achievements by saying that he had defeated the Hungarians, the Saracens, the Danes, and the Slavs, and subjugated Italy. He was also praised for having destroyed pagan shrines and established missionary orders.¹³⁷ This was no doubt how Otto

¹³³ Althoff (1999), pp. 285-8.

¹³⁴ See Chapter 6, pp. 181-7.

¹³⁵ Widukind, III.52-5, pp. 131-5.

¹³⁶ Thietmar, II. Prologue, p. 36.

¹³⁷ Widukind, III.75, pp. 151-3.

himself wanted to be commemorated, as Widukind's elegy must derive from a written account of the emperor's last days and death in Memleben on 7 May 973.

From these postscripts to Otto's life, and from the details of his various campaigns in the *Res gestae* and Otto's *diplomata*, it is clear that imperial court did not have a worldview that extended much beyond its borders.¹³⁸ From the historical narrative, it is clear to see that the names of Slav tribes and their locations were well known to the Saxon authors. This is unsurprising, as these regions bordered Saxony, and lists of the different tribes to the north of the Danube had been compiled in the mid ninth century, if not earlier.¹³⁹ None of the historical sources concern themselves with anything apart from the names of the various Slavic formations to the East of the Elbe, and those of prominent leaders. We gain a little more information from Thietmar about the Slav toponyms of places where Ottonian *burgs* had been founded, but the information is often based in legend rather than linguistic or ethnographic details.¹⁴⁰ The *burgs* themselves were fortified garrison towns surrounded by small village clusters at strategically important portages and vantage points along the eastern frontier.

To the south and east of the Slavs were the Hungarians, who menaced the East Frankish realm with frequent raids until 955. Despite detailed accounts of the great defeat of the Hungarians at Lech in at least two sources, there is no interest whatsoever in naming the raiders or describing their language, their homeland, or their customs.¹⁴¹ For one historian at least, there is a parallel to be drawn between Charlemagne's defeat of the Avars and Otto's destruction of the Hungarians, but comparisons between Charlemagne and Otto were frequently made, especially after the

¹³⁸ *Diplomata regum et imperatorum germaniae I*, pp. 89-638. Hereafter, *DOI*.

¹³⁹ On the so-called 'Bavarian Geographer', see Reuter (1991), pp. 80-1.

¹⁴⁰ Thietmar, I.3-4, pp.6-8.

¹⁴¹ Widukind, III.44-9, pp. 123-9; Thietmar, II.7-10, pp. 46-50.

latter's entry into Rome.¹⁴² The situation does not much improve for the Saxon knowledge of what Otto wanted to achieve on his Italian campaigns. It is only Liudprand, with his special interest in and knowledge of affairs in the Kingdom of Italy, who provides the reader with details about the different political groupings, but his account falls silent before Otto's first campaign into Italy. Having been absorbed into the Ottonian court, Liudprand must have realised that his frank manner and easy condemnations of rebels and opponents would have been out of place in Saxon historiography.

Otto I was crowned anointed emperor in Rome on 2 February 962, and received dominium over all of Italy from the Pope (which was fairly notional, considering the Pope's limited political influence beyond the Latium).¹⁴³ Although there is some debate over whether establishing imperium had been his long term goal in Italy, it seems clear that Otto wanted to be seen to be in command of Italy, at least from the time of his first Italian campaign, when he took on the prerogative of the King of Italy to confirm ecclesiastical benefices in Northern Italy, though this only occurred during his physical presence south of the Alps.¹⁴⁴ There is also little doubt, from his coronation in Aachen to his use of the Carolingian imperial title *imperator augustus*, that Otto I wanted to be perceived as a latter-day Charlemagne, but for the chroniclers of his reign, the fact that he was proclaimed emperor by his troops on the battlefield was enough.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, it was essential that the emperor won victories over outsiders, but not necessarily important for these victories to involve permanent occupation or direct rule. Forcing the submission of foreigners and exacting tribute was enough, as the expansion of territories and the usurpation of rightful rule were uncomfortable subjects for the Saxon authors. Both Widukind and Thietmar went out

¹⁴² Widukind, III.49, p. 129.

¹⁴³ DOI, no. 235, pp. 323-7.

¹⁴⁴ *Regesta Imperii I, Band 3, Teil 3*, pp. 97-107; Keller (1999), pp. 30-2.

¹⁴⁵ Widukind said Henry I was an emperor because he had been proclaimed as such by his troops after the Battle of Riade, II.14, p. 79.

of their way to avoid any direct criticism of notables from the Saxon elite who had rebelled against Otto, and Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim made it appear that Otto's victory over these rebels was a matter of divine providence and not of his right to enforce his will upon other notables with their own hereditary claims on power. Otto himself pardoned even the most egregiously disloyal Saxon aristocrats, as the hereditary rights of members of established families had to be respected.¹⁴⁶

Otto's advisors and statesmen might have known more about the outside world than the sources lead us to believe. Interventions in West Frankish affairs, often involving complex negotiations with Northmen meant that the emperor was well informed about the north and the west. Merchants travelling to Mainz, Magdeburg and other centres, and diplomatic relations brought with them additional knowledge about Spain. Additional information might also have been available from missions to unbaptised Slavs and Rus to the east, who were targetted by the Ottonian ecclesiastical establishment from the 960s.¹⁴⁷

1.3 The Islamic Worldview

As outlined in the previous sections, Byzantine foreign policy was directed at a number of distinct Islamic polities and the empire kept track of the changing ambitions and allegiances of their leaders. While we have had to piece together the Byzantine worldview from a handful of sources which were compiled by the emperor or imperial chancellery, the extant tenth-century sources for Islamic views of the world originated in the hands of mainly non-state actors. Compared to the meagre offerings of Byzantine texts, there is not only a greater plurality of surviving texts, but there was also, in the ninth and tenth centuries, a particular interest in

¹⁴⁶ See Chapter 4, pp. 174-80.

¹⁴⁷ See Chapter 4, pp. 177-8.

geographical literature in the Islamic world. This need not pose too grave a methodological quandary, as the exercise here is not to compare worldviews, but rather to reconstruct them from whatever sources are available. As was the case for the discussion on the Byzantine worldview, theological views on the world and contacts with outsiders will not be discussed. The aim will be to set out the origins and nature of the source material and to draw out some of the main features of the Islamic world's approach towards its various component parts and towards those outside it. As this study is primarily interested in Byzantine foreign policy, a special focus will be on the Muslim view of the Byzantine Empire.

Before proceeding with an analysis of the extant sources, it is important to chart out the extent of the world of Islam. The Islamic world in the middle of the tenth century was one of both fragmentation and immense opportunity. By 936, the 'Abbāsīd caliphs in Baghdad ruled over nothing at all; they simply provided legitimacy to whoever held sway in Iraq. Islam, as the religion of the ruling classes, was wide-spread. The eastern extremes of the Islamic realm lay in plains of the Lower Indus in Sindh and the Hindu Kush. The northern extremes were Transoxiana and Khwārazm to the east of the Caspian Sea, and Gīlān and Ādharbayjān to the south of the Caucasus. It held sway in Persian regions of Kirmān, Khūzistān, Fārs, and Khurāsān, and in the Arab heartland of the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, the Jazīra, Syria, and Egypt. To the west of Egypt, Arabic speaking rulers controlled the territories of the Maghrib, chief among them the Fātimids in present-day Tunisia and the Umayyads in Southern Spain. The Maghrib also incorporated the bedouin-controlled areas north of the Sahara, which extended to the Atlantic Ocean, as well as a number of islands in Islamic hands, such as Sicily. Apart from these lands, which all formed core territories under Islamic rule, there were also satellite territories under Muslim rulers like Volga Bulgaria at the confluence of the Volga and Kama rivers, territories where Muslim troops and

commanders played a significant role such as Khazaria, and raiding settlements like Fraxinetum and Crete, the former of which was a satellite of the Umayyad state in the Golfe du Lion.¹⁴⁸

The vast territories listed above were carved into smaller emirates, some no larger than a city and its hinterland, as in the case of the small states which bordered Byzantium along its eastern frontier. Large ‘successor states’ to the ‘Abbāsids included the Būyid confederation based on Rayy, Isfahan, and Fars; the Hamdānids of Mosul and Aleppo; the Fātimids in North Africa; and the Zaydī *imāms* of Yemen. To these we can add the states which had never been under ‘Abbāsīd rule, like the newly unified Umayyad state in Southern Spain, and those which were only very notionally subordinate to ‘Abbāsīd caliph, like the Ikhshīdids of Egypt and the Sāmānids of Khurāsān and Kirmān. Even if regions continued to hold the ‘Abbāsīd caliph as their spiritual leader, any fiscal responsibility to Baghdad was well and truly at an end once the Būyids conquered it on 11 January 946.¹⁴⁹

With such a complete lack of political unity, it would seem a futile task to recreate an Islamic view of the non-Islamic world. However, the changes brought about in the administration of the ‘Abbāsīd realms from the last quarter of the eighth century provided for a common language for literary expression and scholarly debate, Arabic, to spread across all the territories subject to the ‘Abbāsīd rule. It can be argued that the administrative changes were introduced by the Umayyad caliph, ‘Abd al-Malik, but the ‘Abbāsīd interest in secular subjects and the translation of ancient knowledge into Arabic led to the extension of *adab*, a moral and intellectual education, to all the important centres of the Islamic world.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, from Khurāsān to Egypt, the establishment of an élite of highly educated administrative secretaries or *kuttāb* meant that Arabic became the

¹⁴⁸ Ibn Rustah, pp. 142-3; Mas‘ūdī, II, pp.12-18; The best known traveller to Volga Bulgaria was Ibn Fadlān.

¹⁴⁹ Miskawayh, pp. 105-9.

¹⁵⁰ Khalidī (1994), pp. 83-96; *EP*², ‘Adab’.

main language of élite literary expression, although many of authors came from Persian backgrounds, and looked upon the Pre-Islamic Persian heritage favourably.¹⁵¹ In the middle of the tenth-century, despite the growing inefficacy of the Caliphate, the proportion of the world which professed the Islamic faith was bigger than ever, and paradoxically, in a period of greater fragmentation, the efflorescence in literary activity in Arabic, bound audiences from Baghdad to Balkh.

Unlike our main Byzantine sources for determining the worldview of the empire, none of the sources that have survived from the Islamic world in this period are manuals or records of diplomatic activity, bar the stray survival of lists of diplomatic gifts from the ninth to the twelfth centuries.¹⁵² Nor does any of the pertinent material originate in the chancelleries of any one of the states that made up the Islamic world. Some histories of regimes, biographies, and panegyrics were written by close courtiers and notables associated with ruling regimes.¹⁵³ A large proportion of contemporary material of interest to issues of foreign policy comes from historians and geographers who were wealthy enough to be well-educated, but who did not derive their information directly from years spent in state service. This reflected the fact that, in the Islamic world, especially in Iraq and Persia, there were scholars who formed views on the outside world which were independent from the state. There is no evidence in Byzantium for this kind of scholarly activity amongst the élites.

The two chief scholars who were active in the mid 900s were Abū al-Hasan ‘Alī ibn al-Husayn ibn ‘Alī al-Mas‘ūdī¹⁵⁴ (d. 956, hereafter Mas‘ūdī) and Muhammad Abū al-Qāsim ibn Hawqal¹⁵⁵ (d.

¹⁵¹ Kennedy (1990), pp. 3-4.

¹⁵² Qaddumi (1996).

¹⁵³ Most of the surviving material is from the Fātimid court (Qādī an-Numān, Jawdhārī). Miskawayh was secretary to Būyid *viziers*. The court poets Ibn Hānī, Mutanabbī, and Abū Firās all lauded their patrons' foreign policy.

¹⁵⁴ Hereafter, *Murij*.

¹⁵⁵ Hereafter, Ibn Hawqal.

after 988, hereafter Ibn Hawqal). Mas'ūdī was a polymath who listed thirty-four works that he had composed on subjects as varied as medicine and jurisprudence. Only two of his works survive, the *Murij adh-Dhabab wa Ma'adin al-Jawāhar* (hereafter *Murij*) and the *al-Tanbih wa al-'Asbrāf* (hereafter *Tanbih*), the first of which is a historical-geography, and the second of which is a précis of a now lost historical text.¹⁵⁶ Mas'ūdī was famous enough in his day to be included in the biographical dictionary of Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 995 or 998), and although the biographical details are incorrect, the *Murij* is singled out as his best known work.¹⁵⁷ All that we know about Ibn Hawqal comes from his one surviving work *Kitāb al-Sūrat al-Ard* (hereafter *KSA*). Unlike Mas'ūdī, he was not featured in the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm, his work perhaps too closely based on the cartographic work of Balkhī (d. 934), who is mentioned, and on the work of Istakhārī (d. after 957).¹⁵⁸ The *KSA* is primarily a geographical and ethnographical survey of the Islamic world, based on twenty maps with associated commentaries. The surveys contain information about the climate and products of each region, its people, and travel itineraries, with the odd historical fact thrown in based on information gathered by Ibn Hawqal on his journeys. What both Mas'ūdī and Ibn Hawqal had in common, however, was that they had both travelled extensively - Mas'ūdī in India and the Eastern Islamic World, before settling in Egypt; Ibn Hawqal in most of the Islamic East and Near East, as well as in North Africa and Sicily - and *ijān*, or experience, informed their works as much as did scholarly transmission.¹⁵⁹

Although both of them were born in the 'Abbāsīd heartland (Mas'ūdī in Baghdad and Ibn Hawqal in the Jazīrā), they represent two strands of thought on both the discipline of geography and on the non-Islamic world. Mas'ūdī was an innovator in his field in that he was the first to

¹⁵⁶ Hereafter, *Tanbih*.

¹⁵⁷ Ibn al-Nadīm (1970), p. 338.

¹⁵⁸ Ibn al-Nadīm (1970), p. 302-4, 702. For the Balkhī school, see Tibbet (1992).

¹⁵⁹ On *ijān* see Miquel (1967-88), vol. I, pp. 277-8; Khalidī (1975), pp. 38-9; Antrim (2012), pp. 108-9.

combine a comprehensive history of the world and a universal geography in one work.¹⁶⁰ The *Murij* addresses the entire inhabited world, and has a great interest in the histories of the ancient nations. The ancient Persians, Chaldeans, Greeks, Egyptians, Turks, and Indians are singled out for their sophisticated cultures. The Greeks were particularly lauded for their philosophy, geometry, meteorology, astronomy, logic, and physics; and the adoption of Christianity in Byzantium was viewed as having led to the demise of Greek wisdom. Mas'ūdī had no qualms in asserting that the true heir to the wisdom of the ancients was the Arab-Muslim world.¹⁶¹ The geographical core of the work can be found in chapters seven to fourteen, which begins with the division of the world into Ptolemaic climes and the influence of the stars on each clime. The bulk of the geographical attention is paid to the sources of rivers, explanation of tides, and the description of the extent and the littorals of the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and the Caspian Sea.¹⁶² More geographical material is inserted into the chapter thirteen, which deals with the Caucasus, and into chapters thirty-three to thirty-four and thirty-six, which deal with East Africa, the Slavs, and the Lombards.¹⁶³ These areas seem to have been singled out for further geographical description for two reasons, the first of which was that they were relatively unknown in to the Arab-Islamic world. The second reason was that the political history of these peoples was still unknown to Mas'ūdī, who instead described them in terms of their customs and state formation. The *Murij* also describes different conventions of dating amongst the Copts, the Syrians, the Pre-Islamic Persians, and the Pre-Islamic Arabs. The second half of the *Murij* returns to the more conventional model of Arab-Islamic histories, covering the period from the birth of Muhammad to Jumāda I 336 (November-December 947), which was when Mas'ūdī finished the work.¹⁶⁴ After the advent of Islam, the history of Byzantium is primarily presented in terms of its

¹⁶⁰ Miquel calls Mas'ūdī the “imam” of encyclopaedism; Miquel (1967-88), vol. I, pp. 202-12.

¹⁶¹ *Murij*, V, p.119. For a detailed study of Mas'ūdī's historical method, see Khalidi (1975).

¹⁶² *Murij*, I, pp. 149-286.

¹⁶³ *Murij*, I, pp.272-5; III, pp. 1-65; pp. III. 76-78.

¹⁶⁴ 17 November- 17 December, 947.

relations with the Muslim world, with some attention paid to the court intrigues that led to the rise and fall of emperors. This is unsurprising as this would have been the material Mas'ūdī would have found in the historical record. No judgement is offered on the Byzantine state or its legitimacy – its existence is simply accepted as fact.

With the exception of some parts of India, both Mas'ūdī and Ibn Hawqal travelled mainly in the Islamic world, but their view of the world outside cannot have been more different. The geographical tradition to which Ibn Hawqal belonged was one that was almost singularly interested in the *Mamlakat al-Islām*, and attempted a cartographic as well as narrative description of this world. The *KS4* begins with a well annotated map of the world, in which the non-Islamic polities and principle cities on the northern edge of the Mediterranean are clearly marked. The peoples surrounding the Black Sea are also duly noted on the map, as are the known territories of the Indian Subcontinent and the Far East. The map and the commentary are embedded in a chapter that deals with a description of the physiognomy of the known world and all the nations in it.¹⁶⁵ The non-Islamic world is also duly recorded in maps and in the commentary on the Persian Gulf, the Mediterranean, and the Caspian Sea. When it comes to the description of territories, climate, and products however, the only non-Islamic regions included are Naples, Amalfi, and Khazaria. The reason for the inclusion of the first two is perhaps that, being the only geographer to have travelled extensively in the Maghrib, Ibn Hawqal encountered Southern Italian traders who described their territories to them. As for Khazaria, the fact that it was incorporated was due to the fact that the majority of the population of Itīl was allegedly Muslim.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Ibn Hawqal, pp. 5-17.

¹⁶⁶ Ibn Hawqal, pp. 386-98.

The rise of a more cartographic approach to imagining the world, coupled with copious amounts of travel, necessarily gave rise to a situation in which authors had to limit themselves to lands to which they could travel, or to which Muslims regularly travelled. While Ibn Hawqal merely mentions that he proposed to deal exclusively with the lands of Islam - region by region - , the subsequent geography in this school, that of Muqaddasī (d. 991), categorically states that the author had no interest in the countries of the unbelievers and could not see any use in describing them – he went so far as to excise all details of non-Islamic cities from all maps, including that of the Mediterranean.¹⁶⁷ In his *Akhsan al-Taqāsīm fī Maʿrifat al-Aqālīm*, al-Muqaddasī claims that the book was aimed at travellers and merchants, and it was certainly a much expanded version of the Istakhrī/ Ibn Hawqal franchise. Therefore, even though the works dealing exclusively with the Realm of Islam might have excluded the non-Islamic world for practical reasons initially, there was an expanding rhetoric of the futility of learning about the realms of the unbelievers. Later geographies building on the cartographic tradition would go on to single out certain areas for their role in the holy war against the Christians.¹⁶⁸

The concept of the Realm of Islam, as evidenced in both the *Murūj* as well as in *KSA*, is in itself a surprising one in a period when there was such a proliferation of independent Islamic polities. The *KSA* and the rest of the Balkhī School geographies paint a picture of a monolithic Islamic world, spiritually centred on the Mecca, but otherwise lacking any clear political centre or focus. Doctrinal and political differences are also mentioned, but cautiously, with only Muqaddasī going so far as to say that there the Fātimid rulers were caliphs, some three-quarters of a century after the establishment of the Caliphate. The main acknowledged division in the Realm of Islam for

¹⁶⁷ Ibn Hawqal, p. 8; Muqaddasī, p. 9.

¹⁶⁸ In the eleventh century *Book of Curiosities*, digitised E. Savage-Smith and Y. Rappoport, fol. 32a, Sicily is singled out for praise for playing this role.

http://cosmos.bodley.ox.ac.uk/hms/mss_browse.php?reset=1&state=main&act=chunit&unit=1&expand=732,803,#a1

both Ibn Hawqal and Muqaddasī, was the one between Arabs and non-Arabs, but this was in line with Mas‘ūdī’s notion of nationhood, which was based on language.¹⁶⁹

The Islamic worldview from historical and geographical texts is therefore a mixed one. On the one hand scholars with an encyclopaedic bent of mind still thought it important to write about the entire world and sought out information regarding the non-Islamic peoples, sedentary and nomadic. These works provided coverage on the basis of what information could be gathered, and therefore it was not uniform in depth. There was also a greater interest in ancient history, as the Arab-Islamic world could lay claim to be the inheritors of the wisdom of the ancients without undermining the legacy of Islam. The other stream of writing was more technical and cartographic, and therefore acknowledged the existence of a world outside the Realm of Islam, but did not write about it in detail as there was not enough geographical information available. This new inward focus sometimes hid the internal political and sectarian divisions within the Realm of Islam, and led to almost a Roman conception of the inner world and all that lay beyond its borders. Like the Post-Imperial Roman world, the Islamic world was not politically united, but shared a religious and linguistic history, and an élite culture, which allowed this unified self-perception to persist.

If the historico-geographical literature provides an ambiguous view of the outside world, the sources which deal directly with the conflicts with the Christian realms might seem entirely unambiguous in their import, but still offer only a partial picture of attitudes towards the Christian world. The texts in question will be dealt with in detail in the relevant chapters, but one can make some general observations about their view of the outside world. The historians of individual states (Fātimid and Umayyad) did at times single out raids against the Christian targets

¹⁶⁹ Khalidi (1975), pp. 89-91.

and action against apostasy as praiseworthy and as signs of divine favour, but the major part of the narrative was concerned with quelling internal dissent (Fātimid) and on internecine conflict between Islamic rulers. When the histories do try and paint a picture of an uncompromisingly hostile view of Christians, it is often a partial recounting of an event for propaganda purposes. The *Majālis* of Qādī an-Numān, for example, use the pejorative *'ilj* or barbarian to describe the envoy from Constantinople, who came to al-Muizz in 957/8 to negotiate a truce and would have us believe that the caliph refused as no such agreement could be reached with non-believers. This was only a part of the truth, as another source confirms that a five-year truce was in fact arranged.¹⁷⁰ The Umayyads carried out their own hostilities against the Frankish realm through Fraxinetum, and Ottonian accounts of dealings with Cordoba paint an unmistakably antagonistic picture of relations between the two.¹⁷¹ Umayyad relations with Byzantium, however, were treated with great curiosity and favour in the Arabic texts from al-Andalus, and Byzantine diplomatic gifts were discussed by historians several centuries after the Umayyads themselves ceased to exist.¹⁷² The most polemically anti-Byzantine tirades are found in the panegyrics of the Hamdānid court poets Mutanabbī and Abū Firās, which detail the destruction wrought by Sayf al-Dawla on raids into Byzantine territory, but the purpose of these poems was to flatter the patron and to capture his strategic genius and personal valour.¹⁷³ They provide no view of Byzantium beyond the inability of its military to prevent Sayf's incursions and destruction. The ideological notion of war against Byzantium as a religious duty is implicit, but they certainly do not allege a policy of outright conquest or usurpation. Repeated raids against the unbelievers reaffirmed Sayf's credentials as an Islamic ruler, but that is all that the panegyrics expected from him.

Conclusion

¹⁷⁰ See Chapter 3, p. 153.

¹⁷¹ *Vita Iohannis Gorziensis*, pp. 370-6.

¹⁷² See Chapter 3, p. 143.

¹⁷³ See Chapter 2, pp. 77-8.

In summary, the Byzantine worldview in the middle of the tenth century was nuanced and constantly recalibrated to meet changing circumstances. In the personal reign of Constantine VII, the ruling regime made great use of the capital, Constantinople, to attract and dazzle foreign visitors and to display its wide ranging foreign contacts to the populace. It developed a far more pragmatic approach to the Islamic world and sought to understand the opportunities provided by the demise of the unipolar 'Abbasid regime. Channels of communication were opened with Islamic regimes which could provide strategic assistance, without altogether abandoning the internal rhetoric of suspicion and condemnation when it came to raiding emirates. The spread of Orthodox Christianity was encouraged but does not seem to have been actively monitored once newly baptised potentates left the shores of the Sea of Marmara with a priest or two in tow. It was certainly not an active policy of the state towards its own notional subjects in Apulia and the Campanian City States, who, by and large, followed the Latin rite.¹⁷⁴ Those in the imperial chancellery found in Constantine VII, or perhaps the emperor himself led the way, an emperor who could make Islamic friends and have Christian rivals.¹⁷⁵ The worldview of the new regime under Constantine VII was amply illustrated in the proem to the *DAI*, that it was important to know which states could benefit or harm the empire and which ones could be called upon to counter a threat from another.¹⁷⁶ Despite the complete lack of interest in these matters in the historical narrative, the *DAI* and the *De cer.* demonstrate that the state had an undeniable interest in maintaining records of the peoples with whom they communicated, based on an understanding of their origins, social organisation, beliefs, and aspirations.

Unlike the Byzantine or Islamic worlds, Saxon society under Otto I was bound by customary rights and entitlements which made it resistant to territorial expansion. The political and

¹⁷⁴ See Chapter 6, pp. 243-4, 246-7.

¹⁷⁵ Raffensberger (2004) asserts that cultural influence could be absorbed by rivals without them ceding any political allegiance.

¹⁷⁶ *DAI, Proem*, pp. 44-47.

institutional organisation in Saxony had emerged relatively un-‘Frank-icised’ from the Carolingian period, and political leadership was based on ‘pre-eminence within a gens’.¹⁷⁷ This was reflected in the more insular worldview of the Ottonian Saxons in relation to the wider outlook of the Carolingians under Charlemagne. The defeat of outsiders in battle provided regular ritual and financial reward, but without an administrative, social, and military command structure that was personally loyal to the ruler, the early Ottonians did not conceive of themselves as much apart from the pre-eminent regime in Europe. The arrival of gift-bearing legations from vanquished neighbours and far-away rulers like the Byzantine emperor were registered in annals and histories, but it was not until the late 960s that one finds any sign of active Ottonian engagement across the Mediterranean.¹⁷⁸

Finally, the Islamic worldview divided the world first into the nations of the believers and those of the unbelievers. This division could be more or less value-laden, depending on the personal views of the authors. For Mas‘ūdī, it was a natural division, but one that did not preclude an active interest in investigating the non-Muslim world. For Muqaddasī, the division was one between what was relevant to an Arab-Islamic audience, and what was superfluous. Strictly geographical works stopped at this division and obscured further internal political division, but histories brought the internal divisions to the fore. The notion of the Realm of Islam crumbled in the text of regional histories and memoirs, which were far more interested in defending their regimes *within* this politically divided world, and mainly used conflict with the Christian world, be it Frankish or Byzantine, to bolster their credentials as legitimate Islamic rulers. By the mid tenth century, the targets of conquest of Islamic rulers were solely the territories under other Islamic regimes, with the odd attempt to conquer a strategically important location in Christian hands.

¹⁷⁷ Althoff (1999), pp. 267- 278.

¹⁷⁸ Thietmar, II. 15, pp. 54-6.

The Umayyads targeted territories in North Africa, the Fātimids' main goal was the conquest of Egypt, the Hamdānids were mainly interested in maintaining their position in Aleppo and Mosul, and the Būyids aimed to consolidate their control in Iraq and the Sawād. The internal break-up of the Realm of Islam provided regimes enough opportunities for conquest and expansion, thereby making the Outer World only relevant when contacts were profitable or unavoidable.

Chapter 2. The 'New' Near East

To the east and south east of the plateau of Asia Minor lay the Byzantine Empire's longest and most regularly breached frontier. Beyond it lay Islamic lands which had been united under the great power of the 'Abbāsid caliph. This had, until the second quarter of the ninth century, far outmatched Byzantium's material and ideological resources. The empire also shared this frontier with a host of politically and ethnically diverse neighbours, which necessitated a foreign policy approach encompassing multiple, simultaneous tracks. No single strategy could operate across the entire frontier, but some success was achieved by the early Macedonian emperors in advancing the empire's aims through an interweaving of different measures. This chapter will first outline the nature of the frontier, followed by sections dealing with the empire's activities in the first half of the tenth century, the sources for diplomacy and foreign policy in the personal reign of Constantine Porphyrogenetos, events in Constantine's personal reign, and, finally, conclusions about the evolution of Byzantium's engagements and aims in this sector.

2.1 The geographical setting

The heartland of the Byzantine Empire lay in Asia Minor, which is essentially a large peninsula between the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean. Edged to the north, west, and south by bands of fertile, coastal plains, the chief geographical feature of the peninsula is the triangular Anatolian plateau. The plateau in itself is undulating and traversable, and was successfully defended through the period of the Islamic raids from the mid seventh century to the advance of the Seljuq Turks from the mid eleventh century. To the south east of the plateau, the Taurus range separates the plateau from the plains of Cilicia. The Cilician plain is further divided into three by the rivers Jayhan and Seyhan, with Tarsos/Adana, Mopsuestia (Arabic: al-Massīṣah), and Anazarba each commanding individual sectors, separated by the rivers and bounded by the

ranges to the north. Curving north east from the Taurus range, the ranges of the Anti-Taurus separate the Anatolian plateau from the low-lying plateau of the Jazīra, specifically the Diyār Rabī'a in the east, the Diyār Mudar in the west, and Diyār Bakr in the north. These three sub-regions formed the northern section of Mesopotamia.¹⁷⁹ To the north east of the Anti-Taurus lie the Armenian highlands; an aggregation of volcanic and mountain ranges with an average elevation higher than the Anatolian plateau, plains, and large lakes, which abut onto the Caucasus Mountains in the north, Azerbaijan in the east, which itself extends into the Iranian plateau, and the Mesopotamian plain in the south west. As the ranges in Armenia run mainly east-west, there was relatively easy access to and from Anatolia and Azerbaijan. Travel from north to south and south to north was more restricted and was only possible through passes like the Bitlis pass to the south west of Lake Van and the Ergani pass, which was on the main route between Melitene (Arabic: Malatya) and Amida (Arabic: Āmid) across the basin of Anzitene (Arabic: Khanzīt).¹⁸⁰

While these mountainous zones in the east provided natural barriers for the protection of Anatolia, they were by no means impenetrable, especially in the case of the Taurus and Anti-Taurus frontiers. They were fairly easy to cross on foot or on horseback, but armies needed practical routes for large numbers of troops and needed control of the length of a pass, especially the defiles, before attempting to pass through.¹⁸¹ The fact that there was only one reliable pass in the Taurus Mountains - the Cilician Gates, or the Gülek Pass as it is now known, between Podandos and Tarsos – and only two feasible routes across the Anti-Taurus – one linking Kaisareia to Germanikeia (Arabic: Mar'ash) and the other linking Kaisareia to Melitene – meant that the approach routes of the Islamic raids were well known, if not entirely predictable.¹⁸²

Although it was logistically impossible to station garrisons to repel raiders coming into Anatolia,

¹⁷⁹ *EP*, 'al-Djazīra'; 'Djuhrāfiyā.

¹⁸⁰ Hewsen (2001), p. 8; Whittow (1996), pp. 199-200.

¹⁸¹ *De vel.*, 11, pp. 182-185.

¹⁸² Anderson (1897), 28-31.

the limited number of routes allowed for networks of watch posts to relay information about enemy movements with relative ease. The organisation of watch posts is of primary concern in Byzantine military manuals as the efficacy of the communication system was the key to mounting any opposition to incursions.¹⁸³

The second limitation posed by this natural frontier to ninth- and early tenth-century Byzantine defences was that, despite the fact that Muslim raiders were cut off as they were from communications and reinforcements once they crossed the mountains, it proved very difficult for the early Macedonian armies to capture or disable the raiding bases in Cilicia or Northern Syria. The campaign season for attacking Muslim positions was very short, as reinforcements and supplies could only be brought through the passes in the summer months, and investing fortresses exposed the army to attack from Muslim forces sent to relieve sieges. There were audacious winter raids, especially in the reign of Basil I, but these were risky due to heavy snowfall and rain. The loss of men who had been expensively trained and drilled for action on the frontier was to be avoided at all costs, and the key strongholds on the Muslim side of the frontier were often double-walled and well stocked enough to hold fast against a siege.¹⁸⁴ In such a situation, accurate intelligence about the location of Muslim raiding parties and the preparedness of a targeted stronghold to withstand a siege was pivotal to the possibility of success. The use of traders/merchants as spies and the cultivation of individual frontier emirs through letters and gifts were recommended in the mid tenth century as a way to find out about troop mobilisation and movements in Syria.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ *De vel.*, 1-2, pp. 150-154; *De re strategica*, 6, pp. 22-27.

¹⁸⁴ The author of the *Vita Basilii* elucidated the importance of the drilling of soldiers in the techniques described in manuals of warfare. The author's explanation for Basil I's abandoned siege of Melitene (863) outlines the difficulties of besieging well supplied and well-defended Islamic frontier cities. *V.B.* 36, pp. 132-135; 40, pp. 144-147.

¹⁸⁵ *De vel.*, 7, pp. 162-163.

The eastern frontier of the Byzantines can be divided into three broad, contiguous zones with the Taurus, the Anti-Taurus, and the Armenian plateau as barriers. The first two are mountain ranges with hill country behind them and the third is the western half of the Armenian highlands. Two of these zones were singled out by Arab geographers as the *thughūr* or frontiers with the Byzantine realms. The Byzantines have not left us a geographical description of the frontier as they saw it or of the divisions therein, and the information we gain about it from Byzantine sources comes from the lists of commands in the orders of precedence produced at the end of the ninth century and during the reign of John I Tzimiskes.¹⁸⁶ Stray references in historical texts, our knowledge of Byzantine operations on the Islamic side of the frontier from sources in Arabic, and lead seals with the names and designations of officials flesh out what we know, but the most comprehensive treatment of frontier comes to us from Arabic geographers and historians. Unfortunately, the view from the early geographers is somewhat idealised, and assumes the existence of an ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate as a strong organising centre capable of coordinating action against the Byzantines. Geographers like Ibn Hawqal and Muqaddasī, who wrote after the ‘Abbāsīds and their overlords had been completely cut off from the frontiers in the mid tenth century, provided only the sketchiest of descriptions of the way in which they were supplied with men and arms to continue the fight against a resurgent Byzantium.¹⁸⁷

The classical ninth-century Islamic conception of the frontier, which was still evident in 928-32 when Kudāma ibn Ja‘far was writing, divides the frontier into two or three.¹⁸⁸ Some geographers made a further division into *thughūr* and *‘awāsīm*, the latter being the protecting cities to which the Muslims of the frontiers could flee or where they could regroup after an encounter with the

¹⁸⁶ *Kleterologion*, pp. 100-12; *Escorial Taktikon*, pp. 262-9.

¹⁸⁷ Ibn Hawqal, pp. 183-4.

¹⁸⁸ Ibn Khordadhbēh, pp. 97-100; Kudāma, pp. 252-256.

enemy.¹⁸⁹ The first sector of the frontier extended from Tarsos to Germanikeia (but not including the latter) and was the *thughūr al-Sham* or the Syrian frontier. It was backed by the fertile plains of Cilicia and an adjoining part of northern Syria, between the Taurus and the Amanus ranges.¹⁹⁰ This region was responsible for the defence of the Taurus ranges and was highly urbanised with the cities of Tarsos, Adana, and Mopsuestia. According to Kudāma ibn Ja‘far, the region received between two and three times the revenue it generated from within its domains from Baghdad in order to fund summer and winter raids into Byzantine territories and its *awāsīm* were Antioch (Arabic: Antākia), al-Juma, and Kurros (Arabic: al-Qurus).¹⁹¹ This support must have dried up by 935/6 at the latest, when all of Syria was attached to the territories of the Ikhshīd, although there is mention of the fact that Caliph al-Qahīr attempted to repopulate and refortify frontier towns including Tarsos, Adana, Mopsuestia, and Germanikeia. This frontier was hotly contested between the Ikhshīdids, the *amīr al-umara’* Ibn Rā‘iq, and the Hamdānids, until Sayf al-Dawla took definitive control of the Syrian *thughūr* in 945. The political uncertainty in Syria meant that no raids were launched from Tarsos after 931 except one in 942, and sea raids from Tarsos stopped altogether.¹⁹² The only reason Tarsos was not taken before 965 was its sheer size and the extent of fortification, despite not having been an active raiding city for over three decades.¹⁹³

To the east of the Syrian frontier was the Jazīran frontier, which, in light of the merger of overall political control under Sayf al-Dawla, was attached to Syria by later tenth-century geographers.

Unlike the Cilician plains, the Jazīran frontier was mountainous. It extended from Germanikeia to

¹⁸⁹ Bonner (1994), pp. 17-24, argues that the term *awāsīm* was never the second tier of the frontier system as imagined by Arab geographers and was entirely a ‘unit of ideological unity’ by the time of Kudāma. See *EF*², ‘al-‘Awāsīm’, for the establishment of this category in the reign of Harūn ar-Rashīd.

¹⁹⁰ Kudāma, pp. 253. Ibn Hawqal, p. 168, following Istakhrī, pp. 55-75, maintains that the Syrian frontiers included the Jazīran frontiers in his time. Haldon and Kennedy (1980), pp. 106-7.

¹⁹¹ Al-Juma, near ‘Azaz, was a dependency of Antioch in the time of Kemāl al-Dīn. Hönigmann (1935), pp. 127-8.

¹⁹² Ibn al-Athīr, VIII, pp. 172-4, 293.

¹⁹³ A distinction has to be made between an actively raiding city, from which expeditions of soldiers and trained men were launched in a systematic manner, and a city which provided men to raids originating elsewhere.

Asmosaton (Arabic: Shimshat). Despite the settlements being more isolated from each other in discrete, but fertile, river valleys, there were also large fortified cities with additional fortresses called *husūn* (sing, *hisn*) protecting them.¹⁹⁴ The most important was Melitene, which, despite having four fortresses protecting its approaches, succumbed to forces under the command of the *domestikos tōn scholōn*, John Kourkouas on 19 May, 934.¹⁹⁵ Important cities in the Jazīran *thughūr* that were still in Islamic hands at the beginning of Constantine VII's personal rule were Germanikeia and Adata (Arabic: al-Hadath), with Asmosaton probably having fallen into Byzantine hands around 938. Kudāma's account of the revenues and expenditure on maintaining fortifications and garrisons in this region is particularly garbled. Anything between 30,000 to 170,000 dinars could have been sent in a year to the region by the 'Abbāsids for the annual raids and for defensive purposes.¹⁹⁶

This view of the organisation of the *thughūr* was outdated. This is shown by the treatment of all the other settlements that performed some sort of frontier role but could not fit neatly into this conception. Kudāma places Samosata (Arabic: Sumaisat) and Theodosiupolis (Arabic: Qāliqalā) in the same district, that of Diyār Bakr, despite the distance between the two, and has nothing to say about the intervening Armeno-Byzantine province of Tarōn which effectively cut one off from the other at some point before 901.¹⁹⁷ About Mayyāfariqīn's (conquered) role as the emerging organising centre south of the Bitlis Pass, he has nothing to say at all, and Amida also escapes his attention. In later geographies, Samosata and Mayyāfariqīn were both included as a part of Syria, and Theodosiupolis is mentioned as a part of Armenia.¹⁹⁸ This is unsurprising as they were written after the 'Abbāsids were rendered irrelevant to the management of the frontier,

¹⁹⁴ Haldon and Kennedy (1980), pp. 107-109.

¹⁹⁵ *LC*, p. 329; Ibn al-Athīr, VIII, p. 296.

¹⁹⁶ Kudāma, p. 254.

¹⁹⁷ Kudāma, pp. 254-255.

¹⁹⁸ Ibn Hawqal, pp. 165-178; Muqaddasī, pp. 154-155, p. 374.

and the *thughūr* no longer formed distinct units as they had in the ninth-century ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate. As the Hamdānids and then the Fātimids and Būyids attached different sections of the frontier to their domains, they became parts of larger administrative and military units. They continued to be fortified with garrisons *in situ* and remained centres where *jihād* was preached and fighters assembled, but they were not military districts from which an organising centre administered regular raids into enemy territory.¹⁹⁹ They depended on overlords for support in sieges and to rebuild destroyed fortifications, but this support was *ad hoc*, depending on whether the money or forces were available.

When Byzantine generals determined their targets for expansion, it is this disparate collection of fortified Islamic settlements in key strategic areas with which they had to contend. The Byzantines held the higher terrain leading up to the Islamic realms in a network of garrisons and fortifications. All major settlements, from Kaisereia inland, were over two hundred kilometres from the nearest Islamic raiding base. Apart from Kaisereia itself, there were no other cities.²⁰⁰ Smaller frontier themes, many starting out as imperial *kleisourai*, had been proliferating from the reign of Leo VI, but there was no move to create urban settlements as thematic capitals.²⁰¹ We know from Arab accounts of the theme of Lykandos, created around 916 and administered by the general Melias, that military organisation revolved around a networks of fortresses, which were ‘impregnable’.²⁰² These were probably garrisoned by locally mustered infantrymen and cavalrymen and provided sheltered stops for expeditionary armies on the march and refuges for local populations at times of attack.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ Ibn Hawqal, pp. 182-4; Ibn Nubāta, pp. 187-90.

²⁰⁰ Cooper (2002), p. 57; Leo the Deacon, p. 117; Ibn Hawqal, p. 199; Haldon and Kennedy (1980). Haldon (2005), pp. 77-83.

²⁰¹ After Oikonimides (1972), pp. 348-63 and Oikonomides (1976), pp. 285-302 for list of themes and dates of creation.

²⁰² Kudāma, p. 254 does not identify Lykandos as a theme.

²⁰³ Howard-Johnston (1971), pp. 140-142. Haldon, Kennedy (1980), pp. 97-101.

With Tarsos quiet since the 930s, Melitene in hand in 934, and Theodosiopolis under surveillance and ready for capture by 949, it is interesting that we do not find more Byzantine campaigns in Syria and Mesopotamia. Without pre-empting the arguments in the rest of the chapter, it can be stated that the main restrictions to all-out seizure of Islamic strongholds can be explained by the terrain of the Byzantine borders and by the limitations of its armed forces. The terrain ensured that massive armies could not move safely through narrow pinch-points in the passes. Furthermore, the ability to raise such large armies had been altogether lost after centuries of contraction. With smaller forces, targets had to be carefully selected and subjected to pressure over long periods, with allowances made for the enemy to refortify when the weather forced the besieging army to return and resupply. The new military organisation was geared towards quick and forceful action with small numbers of heavily armoured cavalry and infantry. To make these campaigns economically worthwhile, it was also necessary to extend into the rich cities of the Fertile Crescent, which had been raided since the early campaigns of Basil I and then, with greater vigour, under John Kourkouas. They only started to be conquered outright in the reigns of Romanos II and Nikephoros II Phokas, but the groundwork of clearing resistance in the approaches to the plains was laid in the personal reign of Constantine VII.

2.2 The eastern frontier before the personal reign of Constantine VII

The Byzantine frontier around 860, shortly before the seizure of power by Basil I (r.867-886), looked very different from that described in the preceding section. Neither the Taurus nor the Anti-Taurus sectors were secure, as Islamic strongholds encroached upon the highlands to the north of the Cilician Gates and around the headwaters of the Euphrates. The Paulician stronghold of Tephrike behaved like a raiding Islamic state and acted in concert with the emir of Melitene to undertake punishing assaults on Byzantine Anatolia, reaching as far as Ephesus in

869.²⁰⁴ The southern approaches to the Armenian plateau from Mesopotamia, across the Armenian Taurus and round the Bingöl dağ, were also in Islamic hands. The same was true of the eastern approaches from Azerbaijan, up the Araxes and Kur river valleys. The turning-point in Byzantine-Arab relations came in 863 with the destruction of the army of ‘Umar ibn ‘Ubaydallāh al-Aqta’, emir of Melitene, in an ambush upon its return from a raid, which had reached the Black Sea. In the same year, Byzantine forces also defeated the forces of ‘Alī ibn Yahyā, the emir of Armenia and Azerbaijan, who was killed in battle.²⁰⁵ The freedom of manoeuvre gained by these momentous victories allowed Basil I to concentrate on matters in the west and to reorganise the army, creating a fighting force which was to carry him on to many victories and triumphs. His main targets were the obvious ones - Tephrike and the emirate of Melitene. The opening offensive disabled the Paulicians, with attacks on Tephrike in 871 and the killing of the leader Chrysocheir in 872. Attention then turned to Melitene. Offensive operations targeted on the city in 873 were followed in 878 by thrusts against Germanikeia and Adata in its hinterland, on the southern edge of the Anti-Taurus. A second attempt, again unsuccessful, was made on Melitene in 882, but the balance of power in the Anti-Taurus borderlands had plainly swung decisively in Byzantium’s favour.²⁰⁶ Something similar was achieved at the same time far to the west on the approaches to the northern outlet of the Cilician Gates. Applying pressure from 873 at the very latest, Byzantine forces managed to sack a number of minor fortresses and, by 877, captured the strategically important fortress of Loulon, which commanded access to the pass. But a premature attempt on Tarsos, in the summer of 883, resulted in a crushing defeat, after which there was a marked diminution in the appetite for large-scale warfare in the East.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Genesisios, p. 121.

²⁰⁵ Tabarī, pp. 1509-1511; *Murūj*, VIII, pp. 73-5; *Theo. Cont.*, p. 181-2.

²⁰⁶ *VB*, 38-49, pp. 132-77; Tabarī, pp. 1880, 1886, 1916-7, 1930-1, 1937, 1942, 2026, 2103.

²⁰⁷ *LC*, p. 269.

In contrast to Basil I, who wanted to project himself as a robust, campaigning, emperor, Leo VI (886-912) never went on campaign. Leo's interest in military affairs and in foreign policy as a whole can also be seen in the *Taktika*, which, for eastern and naval matters, is not simply a paraphrase of strategists from Late Antiquity.²⁰⁸ Leo's main policy in the east was one of increasing Byzantine influence over the Bagratids of Greater Armenia, who were involved in relentless conflict, principally with other Armenian princes, but also with the Sajid governors of Azerbaijan.²⁰⁹ He also spearheaded the reorganisation of the territory opened up by the defeat of the Paulicians, by creating the kleisoura of Leontokōme around Tephrike and the theme of Mesopotamia along the Upper Euphrates, creating a forward base of operations on either side of the Munzur Dag. But he also had to cope with a growing maritime threat from Tarsos. The Byzantine response was initially defensive: the *logothetēs tou dromou*, Himerios, commanding the fleet, succeeded in defeating at least one raiding force between 905 and 906.²¹⁰ He was able to move onto the offensive in 910 and 911, when he led two expeditions, the first to the region of Laodikeia (Arab, Lādiqiyya), and the second to Crete. Operations had to be halted in the middle of the second decade of the tenth century, when all available troops, including Melias and the men from the 'Armenian themes', were needed in the west for the invasion of Bulgaria scheduled for 917 (which ended in disaster on 20th August at the battle of Acheloos).²¹¹ The regency council that ruled in Constantine VII's name sued successfully for peace with Caliph al-Muqtadir. Only Tarsos proved refractory and continued to launch raids for the next two years.²¹²

Once the Bulgarian War was at an end from 927, Romanos I's generals focused on the capture of Melitene and on putting pressure on the network of increasingly isolated Islamic strongholds in

²⁰⁸ See below, p. 72.

²⁰⁹ The best coverage of this can be found in the *History of Armenia* of Hovhannes Draskhanakerttzi and the *History of the House of Artsrunik* of Tovma Artsruni. See bibliography for details.

²¹⁰ *LC*, pp. 293-4.

²¹¹ *LC*, p. 304.

²¹² Miskawayh, I, pp. 53-55.

Armenia. In 926, John Kourkouas, the *domestikos tōn scholōn*, assisted by the forces of Lykandos under Melias, destroyed everything up to walls and tried to take it outright.²¹³ Sustained pressure was then applied until the city finally capitulated on 19 May 934, as a result of famine brought on by blockade.²¹⁴ Running in conjunction with military operations against Melitene was a campaign to strengthen Byzantine influence in Armenia. Armenian diplomacy had been high on the agenda in the reign of Leo VI, but had been undermined by the formidable opposition of Yūsuf ibn Abī'l Sāj. Kourkouas led a raid to Dvin in 927, possibly upon news that Yūsuf had been sent against the Qarāmīta in Iraq, and stayed long enough to build siege engines and attempt to enter the city.²¹⁵ Asmosaton fell to the Byzantines in ca.938, and it was in its defence that we again hear of an engagement between the forces of Kourkouas and the young 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh, the future Sayf al-Dawla, the Hamdānid emir who was engaged, in the second half of the 930s, in imposing his authority on the Diyār Bakr. Any headway made by Byzantium in winning Armenian principalities and emirates as clients seemed to be in jeopardy, when in 940 at Tatvan, after a deep westward raid, Sayf received the submission of the Atrsrunis of Vaspurakan, the Bagratids of Greater Armenia, the Qaysite emirs around Lake Van.²¹⁶

If Sayf had harboured ambitions of extending his authority in Mesopotamia and Armenia over the course of the 940s, they were put aside because of his brother's bid to seize power in Baghdad, which he did for a brief period in 942, when he was declared the *amīr al-umara'* and appointed Sayf to the post of walī of Wāsīt. It was also in 942 that the Hamdānids first attempted to take northern Syria, which had been seized from the Ikshidīds by Ibn Rā'ik, the former amīr al-umara', in 939-40. Aleppo was taken by the Hamdānids in early 943, only to be abandoned in the summer of 944 when the Ikshid returned to reclaim the Syrian territories he had lost to Ibn

²¹³ Ibn al-Athīr, VIII, p. 175.

²¹⁴ *LC*, p.329-30. Ibn al-Athīr, VIII, pp. 296.

²¹⁵ Ibn al-Athīr, VIII, p. 60; DAI 45, pp. 208-9; Madelung (1975), 198-249.

²¹⁶ Ibn Zafīr, pp. 122-3.

Rā'ik. From the Byzantine perspective, things began to go well. Edessa was targeted. Annual attacks continued until peace was negotiated and an extraordinary trophy, the Mandylion, the towel bearing the image of Christ's face, arrived in Constantinople on 15 August 944. Romanos himself led the celebratory liturgical procession the next day.²¹⁷ Four months later he was overthrown by his sons Stephen and Constantine in a coup (16 December), the usurpers then meeting the same fate when they were ousted by the partisans of of Constantine VII on 26 January 945.²¹⁸

This, then, was the situation along the eastern frontier when Constantine VII finally took control of affairs. John Kourkouas had succeeded in annexing Melitene and had continued to put pressure on Theodosiopolis. Most of his activities in the east were confined to the sector between these two strongholds and to the Islamic emirates on Lake Van. Raids from Tarsos, though described in great detail in Arabic sources, were not considered particularly dangerous, and had dried up altogether after 931. The late 930s saw the rise of the Hamdānids in the Jazīra, particularly Sayf al-Dawla, who, in creating a base for himself in Mayyāfariqīn, tried to win over the local notables through daring raids into Byzantine Mesopotamia and Armenia, thereby demonstrating his ability to storm through the Ergani and Bitlis passes, two of the three access points in this part of the Armenian Taurus, which becomes a single line of mountains once you cross the Euphrates. The appearance of Hamdānids in northern Syria forced Kourkouas to shift focus to the Syrian frontier, which was to be the locale of all engagements commanded by the Phokades in Constantine VII's personal reign.

2.3 Sources for the east in the personal reign of Constantine Porphyrogenetos

²¹⁷ *LC*, pp. 338-9.

²¹⁸ *LC*, pp. 340-2; *Antapodosis*, V.20-24, pp. 134-8.

As with most historical narratives, the quality and coverage of the primary source materials inevitably colours the conclusions drawn from them. In comparison to the paucity of information on several other fronts, sources for the eastern policies and campaigns in the personal reign of Constantine VII are comparatively plentiful. They include both Greek and Arabic sources, with minor mentions in the Armenian universal history of Step'anos Tarōneci. As we have already seen, the eastern frontier was the liveliest front for the Byzantine world, which saw almost yearly military forays into enemy territory, be they initiated by the Muslim populations of the *thughūr* or by the Byzantines. The Byzantine sources comprise the treatises *De administrando imperio* and the *De cerimoniis*, the histories of *Theophanes Continuatus* and Skylitzes, as well as a number of military handbooks – the most important of which is the *De velitatione bellica*, attributed to Nikephoros Phokas, and two battlefield harangues delivered in the name of Constantine VII at an unknown date.²¹⁹ For the period of Constantine's sole rule, there are no surviving letters either to an Islamic power or from one.²²⁰ The details of operations and outcomes will be discussed in the next section, but it is important to make a few remarks about the nature of the Byzantine sources in terms of their interests and coverage.

The one observation that must be made before looking at the individual sources is that, unlike the sources for the Western or Islamic world, there survive no annals from the Byzantine world. The writing of history ordered by year, exemplified by the *Chronographia* of Theophanes, was completely rejected in favour of histories ordered by reigns wherein the contents were further divided by themes. The chronological progression of events was not entirely abandoned, especially when dealing with the contexts of the beginnings and ends of reigns, and key dates of the accessions and deaths of emperors and patriarchs of Constantinople continued to be

²¹⁹ The text and translation of *De velitatione bellica* can be found in Dennis (1985). For the imperial harangues, see Vári (1980), Ahrweiler (1967) and McGeer (2003).

²²⁰ *Letters*; 1, 2, 75, 102, 139, pp. 2-17, 322-9, 372-83, 446-51. The letter from Muhammad ibn Tughj al-Ikshīd to Romanos Lekapenos can be found in Ibn Sa'īd, pp. 203-13.

recorded.²²¹ The reason for this can probably be traced to the fact that none of our sources come from a monastic milieu, which provided the Latin West with its annals. Although composed by bureaucrats in the main, they were also not written with the bureaucratic precision, which ensured that most Arabic historiography placed so much emphasis on writing history as a precise record of events in the order in which they occurred.²²² Writing histories in the Islamic world was a leisure activity for post-holders, and conducted for the benefit of a wider milieu of officials and men of letters. Precise records of troop movements and engagements were maintained by the imperial bureaux in Byzantium, but were rarely used by the writers of histories, who instead focussed on evaluation and analysis of key events and policies. It is essential to make this point in the context of Byzantine relations with the east, as there were regular and complex engagements on that front, which are impossible to piece together from the Byzantine sources alone. The histories and the miscellaneous sources provide some indication of Byzantium's strategy in this arena and, in the case of the Cretan inventories, provide precise and minute details about campaign organisation. They are, however, of little use when trying to locate troops on the frontier or when reconstructing their movements.

The *DAI* provides little in the way of contemporary information about events in the east, but does provide an insight into the workings of Byzantine diplomacy in detailing the feud between the Iberians and the Byzantines over the distribution of territory after the conquest of Theodosiopolis.²²³ At the time the *DAI* was composed, it seems that the emperor also harboured hopes of extending Byzantine influence over the territories of the Qaysite emirs of Chliat (Arabic: Khilāt, Armenian: Xlat'), Arzes (Arabic: Dat al-Jauz, Armenian: Arckē), and Perkri (Arabic: Barkiri, Armenian: Berkri), territories along the north of Lake Van, which had been

²²¹ *OHBS*: "Historiography", pp. 841-3; The *LC* is the only exception to this, but does not cover our period.

²²² Kennedy (1986), pp. 364-74

²²³ *DAI*: Chapter 45, 204-14.

attacked by Byzantine forces as recently as 931.²²⁴ However, this policy was abandoned as the empire was increasingly troubled by Sayf al-Dawla in the first half of the 950s, and again when his waning power made it possible to strike deeper into northern Syria and the Diyār Bakr from 956 onwards. Therefore, the *DAI* reflects an eastern policy which was abandoned in the early 950s after the conquest of Theodosiopolis in 949. It offers no further clues to either policy or action in the east in Constantine's personal reign. Any further attempts to bring Armenian potentates into the imperial fold, along the model set in Tarōn, have remained unrecorded in our sources.

As mentioned above, the historical narratives in *Theo. Cont.* and the *Synopsis historiōn* are of little use in providing a chronological account of the Empire's engagements in the east. In *Theo. Cont.*, the bulk of the fighting in the east is collapsed into one chapter extolling the unspecified victories of the Byzantines after Nikephoros Phokas was named *domestikos tōn scholōn*.²²⁵ The only events where the names of the Byzantine commanders and the location of their engagements are mentioned are the prisoner exchange on the Lamos in 946, Basil Hexamilites's naval campaign against Tarsos in 956, and Basil Lekapenos's victory in Samosata in 958.²²⁶ The imperial administration in Constantinople organised the exchange, the naval campaign was possibly coordinated from Constantinople, and Basil Lekapenos was the *parakoimoumēnos*, Constantine's chamberlain. While *Theo. Cont.* only highlights events for which the emperor could take direct credit, the *Synopsis Historiōn* is equally devoid of information, and has major chronological errors. Skylitzes also collapsed the entire eastern campaign into a single chapter, beginning with Bardas Phokas's disastrous stint as *domestikos* and leading up to Leo and Nikephoros Phokas' successful campaigns in the East.²²⁷ So committed is the text to this view of events that it places Sayf al-Dawla's disastrous expedition of 950 at the end of the chapter, after the capture Constantine

²²⁴ *DAI*: Chapter 44, 198-204, esp. 204; Ibn al-Athīr, VIII, pp. 234-5.

²²⁵ *Theo. Cont.*., 459-60.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 442-3, 425-3, 461-2.

²²⁷ Skylitzes, pp. 240-2.

Phokas by the Hamdānids in 954, which was in turn placed after the capture of Abū'l 'Ashā'ir in 956. The Cretan campaign, which occurred in 949, appears in the text four pages later and offers nothing in the way of operational detail.²²⁸ The great victories in the east in 958 and 959 are not mentioned at all, as these would have been difficult to reconcile with the generally negative view of the reign.

The best contemporary sources in Greek on the Byzantine encounters with the Islamic world in the Near East are the manuals on military organisation and strategy, which proliferate from the first decades of the tenth century onwards. The earliest is the *Taktika* of Leo VI, which is largely a paraphrase and reorganisation of the *Strategikon* of Maurice (ca. 600) and earlier works by authors such as Aelian and Onasander, organised in twenty constitutions (*diataxeis*). The section which interests us can be found in Constitution Eighteen, where Leo departs from his sources by presenting his knowledge on current warfare in the East.²²⁹ Leo's text casts light on an earlier phase of Byzantine campaigns in the East, when the Empire faced its greatest threat from land and sea raids from Cilicia, and is almost exclusively concerned with defensive warfare. The next phase is dealt with by the *De velitatione bellica* attributed to Nikephoros Phokas, which concerns itself with guerrilla warfare and fighting against Islamic raids within Byzantium's mountainous frontier.²³⁰ By the time of composition, in the early 960s, the author concedes that this type of warfare was already a thing of the past, as the Byzantines were now engaged in offensive warfare in Islamic territories.²³¹ Instructions for operations in this third phase are best described in the *Praecepta militaria*, a concise handbook detailing the kitting out of the various infantry and cavalry units, military administration, and the formations and protocols to be observed during combat.

²²⁸ Ibid., pp. 245-6.

²²⁹ *Taktika*, 18, pp. 474-501; Haldon (2014), pp. 331-82.

²³⁰ Dennis (1985), pp. 137-41; *contra* McGeer (1995), p. 80.

²³¹ *De vel.*, Preface, pp. 146-9. The purpose of writing about this phase was said to be to make the strategies deployed available to the Christians in case they should ever need them in the future.

The *Praecepta militaria* was paraphrased and expanded in the *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos, Basil II's plenipotentiary in the east until at least 1007 if not 1011, at the end of the tenth century or first decade of the eleventh century, with crucial additions on the logistics of campaigning in northern Syria.²³² The work of Nikephoros Ouranos, a massive compendium in 178 chapters, represents all the trends in strategic literature in the tenth century. It begins with the a paraphrase of the *Taktika* of Leo VI, continues with a large collection of ancient tacticians, and concludes with an updated version of the *Praecepta militaria* followed by three chapters on raids, encampments, and siege warfare in Syria, i.e. all-out offensive warfare.

The *Praecepta militaria*, of all these, was the only work that could logically be considered a handy manual, which could have been disseminated widely and carried onto the battlefield. All of them, however, were based on actual experience of war with the Muslims, even the *Taktika* of Leo VI, which was used by both the author of the *De velitatione bellica* and by Nikephoros Ouranos. The treatises all had utility according to the test devised by Dagron – they reflect changes in military technology, they describe the enemy and, crucially, its way of fighting, and they describe the state of the army at a particular point in time.²³³ Although the *De velitatione bellica* is the only text that mentions a particular enemy, Sayf al-Dawla, by name, they all focus on specific threats, emanating from identifiable frontier towns, which are often named. The texts were all interested in the principles of mounting different kinds of campaigns, and the day-to-day protocols for keeping the frontier secure, but these principles were very much embedded in the actual practice on the frontier. The changing nature of the frontier warfare has been addressed in the preceding section, and will be evaluated in greater detail in the conclusion, but it is important to mention that the

²³² McGeer (1991), p. 131. McGeer (1995), pp. 79-80.

²³³ Dagron (1976), pp. 141-2

military treatises are our best guide to the tactics employed in, and the military organisation of, the eastern frontier, and are corroborated by historical information from the Arabic sources.

The Arabic sources for Arab-Byzantine relations on the eastern frontier in the reign of Constantine VII are plentiful and cover a range of genres. Despite the break-up of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate into multifarious regional emirates in the tenth century, the sense of the Islamic world as a consolidated political and cultural force was particularly strong in this period, and has been discussed in some detail above.²³⁴ Dramatic changes in the frontier between the tenth century and the time of composition notwithstanding, Arab historians continued to collect and collate information about events on the tenth-century frontier until as late as the fourteenth century, and there are several instances when sources far removed in time provide unique information, based on contemporary sources that are now lost. Apart from historians, geographers and poets also provide additional information about the nature of the frontier and the engagements between the two historic adversaries.

There are no surviving tenth-century histories in Arabic, which cover the period of Constantine VII's personal reign. The greatest Arab historians of the tenth century, Abū Ja'far al-Tabarī (d. 923)²³⁵ (hereafter, Tabarī) and Mas'ūdī (d. ca. 956), understandably provide us with no concrete information on the eastern frontier in the middle of the tenth century. Mas'ūdī's unique historical method, lauded today for its rigour, humanism, and philosophical reasoning, might have had admirers in his day, but it had no contemporary emulators, and its geographical organisation made it particularly unsuitable for continuation.²³⁶ Tabarī's *Mukbtār tarikh al-rusul wa 'l-mulūk wa 'l-khulafā* (*History of the Prophets and the Kings*) was the apogee of a new annalistic tradition which

²³⁴ See Chapter 1, pp. 46-55.

²³⁵ *EP*: 'al-Tabarī'.

²³⁶ Khalidī (1975), pp. 26, 28-54; Shboul (1979), pp. 81-2, 305-4.

sought to amalgamate disparate accounts into coherent, composite compilations, disposing of *akhbār* (unwieldy direct quotes from named sources) in favour of a unified year-by-year narrative.²³⁷ So influential was Tabarī's history, that it was followed almost exclusively for all events before 915 and spawned a generation of continuators, to whom we are indebted for our information on the Arab-Byzantine frontier in the 940s and 950s. The most influential of these was the Jazīran, Thābit ibn Sinān, who is thought to have continued Tabarī's account until ca. 974. Now lost, this account is said to be the basis for most of our information about the mid tenth century, and was used extensively, directly or indirectly, by historians like Abū 'Alī Miskawayh (d. 1030), Elias, Metropolitan of Nisibis (d. by 1056), Ibn Zāfir (d. 1226), Ibn al-Athīr (d. 1234), Sibṭ ibn al-Jauzī (d. 1257), and Dhahabī (d. 1348).²³⁸

A supplementary strain of information comes from the history of Yahyā ibn Sa'īd al-Antakī (henceforth, Yahyā ibn Sa'īd), which reflects a combination of Arabic, Christian, and Byzantine sources.²³⁹ Yahyā's history, focussing on Egypt, Syria, and Byzantium, was compiled from unknown chronicle sources found in Egypt and Antioch (the latter having become a part of the Byzantine Empire in 969), and from personal experience. It was a continuation of the history of Eutychius (d. 940), the Melkite Patriarch of Alexandria, who had also extensively used contemporary Byzantine sources, making it the only Arabic history written outside the empire to have used them since the seventh century (Eutychius's account is wild and fanciful on Late Antiquity).²⁴⁰ For our period, Yahyā's information provides additional details to events already known from the sources following Thābit ibn Sinān, as well as unique notices on the fall of Theodosiopolis and on campaigns in Antzitone. The Eutychius-Yahyā narrative was not as

²³⁷ Rosenthal (1968), pp. 71-85; Kennedy (1986), pp. 364-5; Robinson (2003), pp. 32-6, 41.

²³⁸ Elias of Nisibis, p. 107; Ibn Zāfir, pp. 118-20; Sibṭ ibn al-Jauzī, pp. 163-5; Dhahabī, pp. 236-7; Kennedy (1986), pp. 368-9.

²³⁹ *BA*, II.2, pp. 80-91; *EF*: al-Antākī; Kennedy (1986), pp. 377-8.

²⁴⁰ Eutychius (Sa'īd ibn Batriq), p. 24.

widely-dispersed as the Thābit ibn Sinān narrative, but it was used as late as 1250 by Damascus-based al-Makīn.²⁴¹

The information on the Byzantine-Arab frontier is generally found in short notices, which reprise the basic locales and outcomes of engagements without proffering much in the way of analysis. For a Būyid court historian like Miskawayh, Arab-Byzantine relations were of only marginal concern after the withdrawal of the ‘Abbāsids from the frontier, and his account includes only three events for the fifteen years of Constantine’s personal reign. The historical sources all but disappear for nearly two centuries before the next wave of fortunate survivals in the form of the thirteenth-century works written in Egypt and Syria. These include the universal histories of Ibn al-Athīr and Sibṭ ibn al-Jauzī, and the regional histories of Kamāl ad-Dīn and Ibn Shaddād. Despite having been compiled approximately three centuries after the events took place, these sources can be taken as broadly reliable due to their demonstrable adherence to extant sources like Tabarī for the earlier period.²⁴² This is not to say that they are absolutely free from distortion; for example, the numbers of troops involved in any engagement cannot be taken at face value. However, unlike the Byzantine sources for the period, the Arabic sources are rich in topographical and operational information. The availability of ‘new’ information continues until the fourteenth century, with the *Ta’rīkh al-Islām* of Shams ad-Dīn ad-Dhahabī, a jurist from Damascus, who used, apart from the sources already mentioned, two lost continuations of Tabarī, for his historical and biographical work.²⁴³

It remains to reiterate that all of the histories that provide substantial information on the Arab-

²⁴¹ Makīn, pp. 188-91.

²⁴² Franz (2004), pp. 93-94.

²⁴³ *EF*²: ‘al-Dhahabī’; Dhahabī, pp. 236-244; Franz (2004), pp. 101-2.

Byzantine frontier in the mid tenth century, were composed by authors who had a strong association with Syria. They were writing about the deeds of a short-lived dynasty, the Hamdānids of Aleppo, whose feats had achieved legendary status due, in no small part, to the panegyrics written in honour of Sayf al-Dawla by his court poets, chiefly Abū'l Tayyib Ahmad al-Mutanabbī (hereafter Mutanabbī), and, to a lesser extent, Abū Firās al-Hamdānī, the emir's first cousin.²⁴⁴ Mutanabbī was presented to the Sayf by his cousin Abū'l 'Usha'ir, the governor of Antioch, in 948. His epic poems commemorating the campaigns of his patrons found their way into later Arab accounts of the period, especially that of Dhahābī. Our understanding of the campaigns on the Byzantine-Arab frontier become, from 949, coloured to no small degree by the poetry of Mutanabbī, who accompanied Sayf on multiple expeditions and composed one, if not two, poems for every campaign until he fell from favour in early 957 and left Aleppo for Damascus.

For our purposes it is the items of historical interest found in the poems that are of particular utility in plotting Sayf's expeditions and the Byzantine activity on the frontier. Four characteristics of Mutanabbī's oeuvre were identified by Marius Canard, two of which were in the sphere of practical information, while the other two were to do with the 'moral atmosphere' of the Arab-Byzantine frontier and the destiny of the Muslims to prevail.²⁴⁵ Mutanabbī displayed a keen interest in topographical details, making it possible, from the poems, to plot Sayf's movements on a map. Furthermore, Canard identified three places, Darb al-Qulla and Darb al-Mawzār to the south of Melitene, Hisn ar-Rān on the left bank of the Euphrates between Arqanīn and Samosata, and Summīn near Charpete, which can only be placed on a map thanks to the itineraries provided within the poems of Mutanabbī. As an eye-witness, he was also very useful in

²⁴⁴ *EP*: 'al-Mutanabbī'; Canard (1950), pp. 304-7.

²⁴⁵ Canard (1936), pp. 102-11.

describing the Byzantine army, with mentions of heavy cavalry, *scholarioi*, and mercenary regiments of Rus, Bulgars, and Slavs. The poems also capture the ideology of the time, voicing eloquently the sentiments of the glory of war and heroism, and taking particular pleasure in relating acts of carnage and desecration wreaked upon Christian cities. It is unsurprising, given the court milieu in which these poems were performed, that the inevitability of the defeat of the Greeks, especially the humiliation of their *domestikos*, was a leitmotif through most of the battlefield poems.

Mutanabbī's poems sometimes read like field dispatches put to verse and were interpreted as such by contemporary commentators who prefaced several of the poems with further details of the campaigns gleaned from official records. The earliest commentaries are anonymous, but further details can be found in the commentaries of Wāhidī (d.1075) and 'Ukbarī (d. 1291), who must have been working from similar pre-existing collections as their glosses often provide identical information, albeit not verbatim.²⁴⁶ These commentaries provide us with further topographical and prosopographical details, and also provide specific dates for the departure of expeditions, for the start of battles, and for the arrival of embassies.²⁴⁷

While the earliest collators of Mutanabbī's *diwān* are anonymous, the first commentary and collection of Abū Firās's poems was assembled by his friend Ibn Khālawayh, who provided his own introductions and glosses. Only three of Abū Firās's poems cover Arab-Byzantine affairs between 945 and 959, and Ibn Khālawayh's source for the commentary were conversations with Abū Firās himself, who had also accompanied Sayf al-Dawla on campaign. Of particular interest in the commentary are precise details about the Byzantine commanders of campaigns, the

²⁴⁶ Blachère (1935), pp. 267-90.

²⁴⁷ Mutanabbī, pp. 307, 314, 317, 319, 320, 323, 328, 331, 334, 337, 340.

relationship between the different Phokades, and, for 958, information about Constantine's diplomatic activities on the eve of the penetrating and multi-pronged annual Byzantine expeditions, which ravaged city after city in Cilicia and northern Syria.

2.4 The east in the personal reign of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos

Phase one (945-948): preparation and first forays

Shortly before the accession of Constantine VII, the political landscape of the eastern frontier changed dramatically. Taking advantage of the power struggles within the 'Abbasid world, and investing in long term military pressure on targets in the Islamic borderlands had borne fruit for successive regimes. By the time that Melitene capitulated, the power of the *jibād* bases had been broken. The greatest threat by land and sea in the reigns of Basil I and Leo VI, Tarsos, had become entirely inactive and had allowed its overlords, the Ikhshīdids to negotiate a peace treaty on its behalf in 934. For much of the first year Constantine's reign, the battle for the Syrian frontier raged between the Ikhshīd and Sayf al-Dawla, until a peace was signed in Rabī' I 334 (4 October - 9 November 945) granting the latter free reign in Aleppo, Homs, and Antioch, as long as Damascus and the territories to the south remained untouched.²⁴⁸ This treaty held until the Ikhshīd's death on 11 July 946, at which point Sayf initially pushed towards Damascus and then Palestine, taking advantage of the uncertainty during the transition of the rule from Muhammad ibn Tughj to his minor son, Unūjūr. Sayf was roundly defeated near Haifa by an army led by Unūjūr and his uncle, on 21 December 946, effectively ensuring that his attention for the next decade was focussed on consolidating his hold over northern Syria and the *thughūr*. With the retreat of the Ikhshīdids from northern Syria, Constantine faced the prospect of the entire *thughūr*,

²⁴⁸ Kamāl al-Dīn, pp. 370-2.

from Cilicia to the shores of Lake Van, being allied under a single leader, who had no territory apart from that which faced Byzantium, and who was eager to display his prowess at leading campaigns into the territory of the tyrant of the unbelievers. Thus, while Romanos's campaigns in the east usually required small detachments of elite troops, which faced little more than the garrisons of the emirates under attack (the Caliphate ceased to offer any additional manpower after 928), Constantine had to re-evaluate the eastern strategy in light of this re-organised border, where the forces of a far from distant overlord could be called upon to offer support to a besieged frontier town.

One of the first decisions that Constantine VII took was to appoint the Phokades to key military positions on the empire's eastern frontiers. Both the *Logothete's Chronicle* and *Theo. Cont.* place the elevation of Bardas Phokas to the position of *domestikos tōn scholōn* right after the overthrow of Romanos Lekapenos, in December 944, and before the beginning of Constantine VII's personal reign on 27 January 945.²⁴⁹ The other people who were rewarded with elevated positions were the monk Marianos Argyros, who was raised to the position of *komēs tou staulou*, Basil Peteinos, who was named the *megas betaireiarches*, and Manuel Kourtikes, who was made *droungarios tēs viglēs*, all positions which were key to the personal safety of the emperor and of the capital city. They were specifically named as co-conspirators in the plot hatched by Stephen and Constantine Lekapenos against their father, while Bardas Phokas' role in the actual overthrow of the Lekapenos brothers was through his sons, Nikephoros and Leo, whom Skylitzes places at the actual scene of the putsch on 27 January.²⁵⁰ However, both the *Logothete's Chronicle* and *Theo. Cont.* place only the Tornikoi - the brothers Leo and Nicolas - and Marianos Argyros at the scene.²⁵¹ The passage in the *Synopsis Historiōn* that includes Bardas Phokas in the group of conspirators

²⁴⁹ *LC*, pp. 340-2; *Theo. Cont.*, p. 436.

²⁵⁰ *LC*, pp. 341-2; Skylitzes, p. 236.

²⁵¹ *LC*, pp. 341-2; *Theo. Cont.*, p. 437.

seems to typify Skylitzes' attempts to mould his source materials to fit his preconceived conclusions.

Regardless of his true role in the overthrow of the Lekapenoi, Bardas Phokas was given command over the Byzantine army as the *domestikos ton scholon*, while his sons Nikephoros, Leo, and Constantine were awarded the positions of the *stratēgos* of Anatolia, the *stratēgos* of Cappadocia, and the *stratēgos* of Seleukia respectively. These appointments were of singular significance as the Phokades were to become the executors of Byzantium's operations in the east against Sayf al-Dawla and the hostile emirates of the *thaghr* for the duration of Constantine VII's reign. As one of the premier Anatolian families, the Phokades were never far from power in the tenth century. With their new commands, the Phokades immediately gained hegemony over the eastern defences of the empire and strengthened their hold over the Anatolian heartland.²⁵² We cannot gain any insight into the way the reshuffle of posts affected the fighting capability of the empire on the ground in the first years of Constantine's personal reign. The reluctance to launch campaigns into Islamic territories for over three years might indicate that there was some uncertainty over the stability of the regime. Any question of the initial weakness of the new regime was left out of *Theo. Cont.* because of its narrative of an inevitable Macedonian restoration. It might have also taken that amount of time for the thematic troops of the frontier themes to be trained up for their more forward role, as the Phokades were soon to launch annual raids into the Syrian *thaghr* and put pressure on key emirates, especially Adata and Germanikeia, in a far more sustained way than had been attempted under John Kourkouas. Ambitious campaigns against Crete and Theodosiupolis, executed in 949, must also have taken considerable coordination, necessitating the presence, in Constantinople, of both the *domestikos tōn scholōn*,

²⁵² Cheynet (1986), pp. 289-315.

Bardas Phokas, and other officials charged with working out the logistics of allocating, transporting, and equipping troops.

While all was quiet on the operational front in 946, the sources tell us of intensified diplomatic activity. Both Greek and Arabic sources are united in their focus on the prisoner exchange on the River Lamos, which took place in the month of Rabī' I 333 or October 946. According to Ma'sūdī, two thousand four hundred and eighty-two prisoners of both sexes were exchanged on the river. The Greeks held two hundred and thirty extra prisoners, who were then redeemed through money sent by Sayf al-Dawla. Due to Sayf's munificence, Ma'sūdī calls this the *fidā Ibn Hamdān*.²⁵³ The author of *Theo. Cont.* singled out this exchange as an example of Constantine VII's 'philanthropy'.²⁵⁴ This is significant as the writer was generally disinterested in foreign affairs and only illustrated four episodes from the entire reign (the others being the successful operations in Italy by Marianos Argyros in 957, the truce with the Fatimids in 958, and unspecified diplomatic overtures with the Emir of Egypt).²⁵⁵

Although Ma'sūdī and *Theo. Cont.* differ widely in their coverage of the event, both agree that the Byzantines initiated the exchange. According to Ma'sūdī's account, the Byzantines sent the monk John, an *anthypatos*, *patrikios* and *mystikos*, to the Ikhshīd whilst he was in Damascus. He was accompanied by the negotiator, Abū 'Umayr 'Adi. The same Abū 'Umayr had also accompanied the envoy from Romanos I to Caliph al-Muqtadir two decades earlier to sue for a prisoner exchange and a truce.²⁵⁶ Ma'sūdī places the event in the month of Dhū'l-hijja 334, which began on 4 July 946. Considering the lengths of time for which envoys were kept waiting before gaining an audience in all medieval courts of the time, it is unlikely that John would have been

²⁵³ *Tanbih*, pp. 192-5.

²⁵⁴ *Theo. Cont.*, p. 443.

²⁵⁵ *Theo. Cont.*, pp. 453-5.

²⁵⁶ Ibn al-Athīr, VIII, 157.

able to meet the Ikhshīd before he died on 11 July of the same year. John and Abū ‘Umayr rode with the powerful general Kafūr, who was rushing back to Egypt, and they were given thirty thousand dinars when they reached Palestine. They sailed from Tyre to Tarsos and arrived around the time that the Emir of Tarsos, Nasr al-Thamalī, had arranged for the *khutba* to be read in the name of Sayf al-Dawla in the mosques of the city. This was an overtly political act indicating that, with the Ikhshīd dead and uncertainty raging about the future of the dynasty, Tarsos had cast its lot in with the Hamdānids. Nevertheless, the prisoner exchange took place on the Lamos and Sayf al-Dawla paid the excess for the Muslim prisoners still held by the Byzantines after equal numbers were exchanged by both sides.

The prisoner exchange illustrates the complexities of the political landscape in Syria in the mid 940s. *Theo. Cont.*, written in Constantinople, tells us nothing of the proceedings on the Muslim side, but it does tell us that the exchange was overseen on the Byzantine side by John Kourkouas and the *magistros* Kosmas. There must have been a reception for the two of them on their return as the writer makes a point of mentioning that they were warmly received by Constantine.²⁵⁷ This is the last we hear of John Kourkouas in an active role in any Byzantine source, but might be seen to provide evidence of the rehabilitation for the former *domestikos*. Although he had fallen from favour under the Lekapenoi, it was not for long, and we soon hear of his nephew, John Tzimiskes, in active service in the principal arena of Kourkouas’s military involvement, Armenia.

Were it not for *De cer.*, the scenario of Byzantium initiating the prisoner exchange would have seemed incontestable. The picture that emerges after a close reading of the account of the receptions organised for the emissaries from Tarsos and for the Emir of Amida reveals a far

²⁵⁷ *Theo. Cont.*, p. 442.

more intricate diplomatic process.²⁵⁸ Concerned as it is with recording precisely the protocols observed, the *De cer.* provides us with a clear date, 31 May 946, when emissaries from the Emir of Tarsos, on behalf of the *amirime* (caliph), were received by the emperor in the *triklinos* of the Magnaura. As was also customary at both the ‘Abbāsīd court in Baghdad and the Umayyad court in Cordova, the emissaries were paraded through a variety of especially decorated rooms in the palace while imperial officials and soldiers stood in attendance in ceremonial uniforms.²⁵⁹ After a ceremonial meeting, they were escorted out again and waited in the *triklinos* of Justinian where they were brought different robes sent by the Emperor. They then dined with him and the co-emperor Romanos, though this too was an entirely ceremonial exercise, accompanied by choristers singing imperial praises throughout the meal. At the end of the meal, both Constantine and Romanos left, after which the Master of the Table presented the legates five hundred *miliaresia* each in jewelled golden bowls and distributed three thousand *miliaresia* among their party. The opportunity for the emissaries to actually converse with the emperor came ‘after several days’.²⁶⁰ It was about this time that the emperor must have despatched his envoy John to meet Abū ‘Umayr, in order for him to have reached Damascus in July/August 946. As already mentioned, the embassy probably failed to reach before the death of the Ikhshīd. The *De cer.* account, taken with that of Ma’sūdī, also helps us to solve the puzzle of why the Byzantine envoy was sent to Damascus to treat with the Ikhshīd, when, ultimately, the exchange was effected in the name of Sayf al-Dawla.

The probable scenario is as follows: the emissaries of Tarsos were detained in the capital while the Byzantine envoy went across to Tarsos, as guarantors for his safety perhaps, to be sent back at the time of the conclusion of the exchange. While the Tarsiot emissaries were held in

²⁵⁸ *De cer.*, II.15, pp. 570-594.

²⁵⁹ Ibn al-Khatīb’s account of the Byzantine embassy to the court of Caliph al-Muqtadir can be found in O Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (Yale, 1978), pp. 168-171.

²⁶⁰ *De cer.*, II.15, pp. 570-594.

Constantinople, their overlord, the Ikhshīd, had died and their emir, Nasr al-Thamālī had declared allegiance to Sayf al-Dawla. This was the message that the emir of Amida had brought to Constantine and to the Tarsiots emissaries in Constantinople. The *thughūr* had submitted to Sayf al-Dawla. The *De cer.* account goes on to say that the reception for the emir of Amida in every way replicated that for the Tarsiots, and he was seated at the same table as them at the dinner that followed so as to not differentiate between them.

The exchange therefore was negotiated with the Tarsiots, who had initially acted as representatives of the Ikhshīd, but carried out by them under the banner of Sayf al-Dawla when it emerged that the latter had been acclaimed the new overlord. The position of overlord of the Tarsiots was taken over by the Hamdānids before the exchange came to fruition. However, the change in allegiance had no real impact on Byzantium's decision to go ahead with the prisoner exchange. It was with individual emirs of Tarsos that previous prisoner exchanges had also been organised and this was no different. The individual towns in the *thughūr* had a tradition of independence, which meant that they made direct treaties with the Byzantines, although notionally in the name of an overlord. Tarsiots *dinars* and *dirhams* in the name of the emir are known from at least the time of Rustam ibn Bardaw (905-912).²⁶¹ For the prisoner exchange of 938, the then emir, Bushrā al-Thamālī, is mentioned as the organiser, albeit in the name of the Caliph.²⁶² Prisoner exchanges were also regularly accompanied by some sort of truce, and this was possibly the purpose of the negotiations in 946.²⁶³ The most recent reference to a truce, one that did hold, was the one between Edessa and Byzantium in 943, which was accompanied by the return of Edessan prisoners and the agreement of a 'perpetual peace'.²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ Stern (1960), p. 221.

²⁶² *Tanbih*, pp. 194-5.

²⁶³ Ibn Sa'īd, pp. 203-13.

²⁶⁴ Yahyā Ibn Sa'īd, pp. 730-3.

With Syria mired in the conflict between the Ikhshīdids and the Hamdānids and Baghdad in the hands of the Būyid Mu'izz al-Dawla, there could not have been a better time for a truce. Neither the Ikhshīdids nor the Hamdanids recognised the Būyid-appointed caliph al-Muṭī' in their coinage for the year 334 and continued to strike coins in the name of the erstwhile *amir al-umarā'*, Tuzun, and caliph al-Mustakfī, who had been deposed soon after the Būyid capture of Baghdad the year before.²⁶⁵ For Tarsos, this was an opportunity to retrieve its prisoners and conclude a short-lived peace, while for Sayf al-Dawla it became an opportunity to project his power over the influential city-state. It is from this point in time that Sayf al-Dawla became the supreme leader of the eastern offensive, though his early years were spent establishing himself in Aleppo and forcing the submission of leading notables in Syria, before he led the men of the marches on their annual raids into Byzantine territory.

In Rabī' II 336 (October-November 947) Sayf al-Dawla concluded peace with the new Ikhshīd Unūjūr and his hold over Northern Syria was confirmed further. The Ikhshīdid forces returned to Egypt to put down a rebellion fomented by the prefect of Rīf (Lower Egypt). While the Ikhshīd's armies were still in confrontation with Sayf, there was no Byzantine intervention, in part because the new regime in charge needed time to settle and in part because of the danger of both the Egyptian forces and Sayf's forces putting aside their differences momentarily and making common cause against Byzantine aggression. Once the Egyptian forces had retreated and Sayf was concentrating on strengthening his hold over Northern Syria, many cities which were in the hands of Arab and Kurdish tribesmen with a long history of internecine feuding, the Byzantine forces made their first foray into the *thughūr*.

²⁶⁵ Bacharach (1974), p. 366.

In the spring of 948, Sayf was occupied in the siege of Barzūya, held by the independent Kurdish emir Abū Taghlib al Kurdī who, from this vantage point on the Alaouite massif, exerted his control over the southern Orontes and was a considerable hindrance on the route between Antioch and Tripoli, on the one hand, and on the road connecting Laodikeia and Aleppo on the other. Sayf besieged the fortress at some time in the year 336 (22 July 947 – 10 July 948), most probably in the spring of 948, in order to break the Kurd-Kilāb nexus that disturbed the coast between Antioch and Tripoli. Taking the fortress was so important to Sayf that when pleas for assistance reached him from Adata, besieged by Leo Phokas, the *stratēgos* of Cappadocia, he refused to leave Barzūya until he had conquered it.²⁶⁶

The fact that the Byzantine army launched an opportunistic attack on one of the most important fortresses in the *thughūr* when Sayf was otherwise detained shows a certain degree of tactical forethought and planning. The choice of target was unsurprising, considering the first forays of John Kourkouas towards Germanikeia just before his removal from the post of *domestikos* in 944.²⁶⁷ The attack followed the established Byzantine pattern of repeated attacks on a target in the *thughūr*, which were aimed at weakening its defences until it was ready to be taken outright. The intention was not to occupy the target, but to deprive it of its fortifications, so that it could no longer effectively shelter enemy combatants or be used as a launch pad against Byzantine forces. We are told that the city capitulated and its ramparts were destroyed. As we have noted, Adata was on a well-traversed route from Melitene to Germanikeia, and south of one of the main routes that led from the theme of Lykandos to Northern Syria. The next Arab stronghold to be attacked in the following year was Germanikeia. The first foray into the east followed the pre-

²⁶⁶ Yahyā ibn Saʿīd, p. 767.

²⁶⁷ Kamāl al-Dīn, p. 367.

existing pattern of engagement, and the Phokades, especially Leo at the helm of the troops from Cappadocia, were firmly in charge.

Phase two (949-950): Turning point and reprisals

The year 949 can be considered the Byzantines' most active year of engagements in the east until Nikephoros Phokas replaced his father, Bardas, after the campaigning season of 955. Three unconnected and pre-planned eastern expeditions were launched almost simultaneously, in the same year. These expeditions encompassed an attack on Crete (Arabic: Ikrīsh), the conquest of Theodosiopolis, and an attack on the ramparts of Germanikeia, with a concomitant raid on Būqa in the vicinity of Antioch. The campaigns were conducted by different segments of the thematic and *tagma* forces of the Empire. The combined attack, deploying a large number of troops on three different fronts, was made possible by the preceding four years, which had seen no strikes by Arab forces against Byzantine targets. This gave the Byzantines the strategic advantage of choosing the locations of their encounters with the Arabs, and of organising the land and naval forces to achieve fixed gains in the field.

The Cretan campaign, amongst the three campaigns for the year, was organised by the imperial centre and did not have any recent antecedents in Byzantine frontier policy as no interest in the emirate is perceptible since the last year of the reign of Leo VI. Mounting a naval expedition against Crete was not a matter to be taken lightly and had been last attempted by the naval general Himerios in 911/12, perhaps as the conclusion of campaigning in Syria in the previous year.²⁶⁸ It has been argued that Constantine staked his imperial prestige on this campaign 'thereby

²⁶⁸ Vasiliev (1968), pp. 214-6; Ahrweiler (1966), p. 113; *EF* : 'Ikrīsh'; Christides (1981), p. 94; Haldon (2000), pp. 241-2.

placing himself in the honourable if unsuccessful tradition of his father's efforts in the eastern Mediterranean'.²⁶⁹ However, the Cretan campaign of 949 was not in response to any known escalation in the corsairs' activities. The only evidence for their attacks on the Peloponnese comes from the *Vita* of St Paul the Younger, but its evidence is inconclusive as to whether there was any notable increase in the attacks in the decades preceding 949.²⁷⁰ The narrative sources do not provide any specifics of Cretan attacks on Byzantine territories, choosing only to say that their attacks were incessant or indeed that there were increased attacks *after* the expedition of 949.²⁷¹ Crete had found itself more isolated than before from its traditional allies in coastal Syria, which had itself been cut off from the Caliphate by the struggle between the Ikhshidids and the Hamdānids. None of the Arab geographers of the tenth century could provide any accurate description of the island or its settlements, and concentrated on agricultural produce and exchange.²⁷² The expedition of 949 was not a reactive measure, but whether it was part of a methodical plan of conquest or a declaration of intent will be debated below. Whichever it was, had it have been successful, it would have boosted Constantine's credibility as a ruler and overall commander of the forces.

The 949 expedition does not appear in Byzantine narrative sources before the *Historia* of Leo the Deacon, which covered the period between 959 and 976.²⁷³ The narrative calls the expedition of 949 an 'immense misfortune' and is entirely certain that it was an attempt at outright conquest.²⁷⁴ The *Synopsis Historiōn* borrows some elements of the narrative from the source used by Leo, but is more ambivalent as to the reasons for the expedition, stating only that the ambition was to

²⁶⁹ Shepard (2001), pp. 34-5.

²⁷⁰ *Vita S. Pauli Iunioris* (1892), pp. 72-4; Vasiliev (1968), pp. 320-41.

²⁷¹ Skylitzes, p. 245; Leo the Deacon, p.6.

²⁷² Ibn Hawqal, pp.203-4.

²⁷³ Leo the Deacon, pp. 6-7.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p.7.

frighten the Cretan Arabs.²⁷⁵ The only near contemporary source for the period is silent about the Cretan campaign as it had no place in a panegyric to Constantine, but tries to counterbalance the condemnation of contemporaries by speaking of the emperor's expertise in shipbuilding and mentioning his personal input in building warships.²⁷⁶ Some of the official records of the expedition have survived thanks to the insertion of documents pertaining to the numbers of ships and men utilised, the cost of pay and rations, the manufacture and cost of equipment, and the itinerary followed by the expedition, into the Leipzig manuscript of the *De cer*.²⁷⁷ They directly follow documents pertaining to the 911 expedition and to Romanos Lekapenos's Italian campaign in 934/5.²⁷⁸ These records were taken from several imperial departments engaged in the campaigns, perhaps forming parts of dossiers collected for accounting purposes at the end of the campaigns.²⁷⁹ The special interest in Crete can be explained by the fact that the putative owner of the Leipzig manuscript, Basil Lekapenos, had an interest in naval literature, and harboured some ambition of conquering Crete before his deposition in 959, according to the dedicatory poem at the beginning of the naval manual he had commissioned.²⁸⁰

The number of vessels, sailors, infantry, and cavalry sent across on each of the Cretan campaigns is very difficult to ascertain from the inventories, with no two historians agreeing on final numbers based on the same evidence.²⁸¹ Any calculation based on the inventories runs into serious difficulties when separating the total numbers of ships and men available from those which actually went on the campaign. What most calculations point to is the fact that the 949 expedition was roughly half, or somewhat less than half, the size of the 911 campaign, and

²⁷⁵ Skylitzes, p. 245.

²⁷⁶ *Theo. Cont.*, p. 451.

²⁷⁷ *De Cer*, II.45, pp. 662-678.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, II.44-5, pp. 651-662.

²⁷⁹ Haldon (2000), pp. 265-8.

²⁸⁰ *Anonymous Naumachia of Basil, Patrikiōs and Parakoimoumenos*, ed. Pryor and Jeffreys (2006), p. 522.

²⁸¹ Vasiliev (1968), pp. 333-341; Tsougarakis (1988), pp. 54, 57-8; Makrypoulias (1995), pp. 153-158; Whittow (1996), pp. 185-6; Haldon (2000), p. 242; Makrypoulias (2000), pp. 353-7.

involved fewer than one hundred vessels, carrying between eight and ten thousand active soldiers. It is impossible to determine how many of these soldiers were from the cavalry, as the calculation for the cavalry in the inventory must include marines, infantrymen, and guides – if it were to be taken at face value, there were over five thousand cavalrymen deployed, which is an impossibly large number.²⁸² In both expeditions, the bulk of the vessels were provided by the imperial fleet and the three naval themes of the Kibyrrhaiotai, Samos, and the Aegean Sea. The assembled forces set off from Constantinople and arrived, via Samos, Naxos, and Ios, at Dia, to the north of Chandax.²⁸³ It is likely that the imperial fleet left from Constantinople, and met with the rest of the forces along the way at either one or a number of *aplektai*, or fortified military bases.²⁸⁴ It is interesting to note that none of the stages beyond Ta Peukia (identified as Tekke Burnu at the head of the Gallipoli Peninsula) are on the mainland – thereafter, only islands are mentioned.²⁸⁵ We know that the theme of Thrakesion had been charged with providing food and a variety of specialised nails for the expedition of 911, while the Kibyrrhaiotai were to be supplied with additional cereals by the Anatolikon, to be brought by the latter to Attalia (now Antalya), which was probably the seat of the *stratēgos* of the Kibyrrhaiotai.²⁸⁶ This suggests that centrally-planned naval offensives could have multiple supply chains and that fleets from the themes and transports could join in as the imperial fleet came closer. The inventory of 949 only tells us about the kitting out of the imperial fleet, but nothing about the food provisions and the equipping of the forces joining in from the themes.²⁸⁷ Nikephoros Phokas' campaign in 961 embarked from Phygela, near Ephesus, which might have been utilised by Himerios in 911 as well, judging from where the food rations were provided.²⁸⁸

²⁸² *De cer.*, II. 45, pp. 666-7.

²⁸³ *De cer.*, II. 45, p. 678.

²⁸⁴ Kazhdan (1991), p. 131.

²⁸⁵ Haldon (2000), 235 n. 118.

²⁸⁶ *De cer.*, II. 44, pp.658-9; Ahrweiler (1966), p. 82.

²⁸⁷ *De cer.*, II. 45, pp. 671-8.

²⁸⁸ Tsougarakis (1988), pp. 58- 73.

What seems to have been an expedition planned in minute detail failed in its mission, with many contingents having been unable to land in Crete, due in some part to the lack of transport vessels.²⁸⁹ It is difficult to ascertain the reasons for the failure of the mission as our sources, starting with and then following Leo the Deacon, place the blame squarely on Constantine Gongyles, the commander of the campaign, who was a eunuch of the bedchamber.²⁹⁰ They blame him for not fortifying the Byzantine camp nor sending out spies, thereby betraying his lack of experience to the Cretans. The army was overwhelmed and Constantine Gongyles himself barely escaped upon the flagship. The catastrophic scenario provided by the sources, which would have us believe that the expeditionary force was annihilated and few escaped alive, cannot have been true as Byzantium began active naval engagements in the central Mediterranean in 951, and the defeat finds no mention in any of the Arabic sources which would have revelled in the Byzantines' misfortune. It is the personal and physiological shortcomings –as well as a few strategic ones - of the commander, Constantine Gongyles, which are singled out, indicating that the views of the sources are a reflection of political rivalry in Constantinople. The defeat could not have been so spectacular if Liudprand of Cremona, who arrived in Constantinople in 949 and stayed till after Easter in 950, did not mention the failure.

The question that still remains to be answered is whether the campaign was an attempt at outright conquest. It can be argued that the campaign was not supposed to last long, as the Mardaites were only paid for four months.²⁹¹ From past attempts at conquering heavily fortified cities, Byzantine strategists would have known that four months was probably not long enough to achieve an outright takeover of the central stronghold of Chandax and then the entire island.

²⁸⁹ *De cer.*, II.45, pp. 663-4, 667.

²⁹⁰ Leo the Deacon, pp. 6-7; Skylitzes, pp. 245-6.

²⁹¹ *De cer.*, II. 45, p. 668.

Both Himerios' campaign and Nikephoros Phokas' successful campaign had overwintered in Crete, the latter in an attempt to force the city to capitulate through a blockade.²⁹² The campaign inventory for 949 does expressly mention provisions for siege artillery, and a large number of forces were left to guard the coastal areas of the Empire while the siege was being carried out.²⁹³ The inventory mentions troops left behind to guard Constantinople, the theme of Kibyrrhaiotai, which was in the direct line of attack from the Cretans, and, within the theme, additional forces were deployed to guard the cities of Antalya and Antioch on Cragus. Dyrrachion, Dalmatia and Calabria were provided ten *ousiai* (a ship's complement of 108-110 men) between them to protect them from opportunistic Slav invasions.²⁹⁴ Further troops were left behind to guard the islands of Rhodes and Karpathos.²⁹⁵

From the numbers of troops left behind on guard duty, it would seem that the Byzantines had clear aims for the campaign, which involved a siege, and possibly envisaged at least the destruction of the fortifications at Chandax. The Cretan campaign was very expensive and long in preparation, and it would seem wholly wasteful if Constantine did not at least hope to gain a foothold on the island, if not use the element of surprise to take it altogether. The four month-payment for the Mardaïtes, was a supplementary payment, an expeditionary advance, which could have been supplemented by their regular pay had the siege progressed. Basil Lekapenos, Constantine's *parakoimoumēnos*, who, from his collection of military and naval documents was almost certainly involved in the preparation for military expeditions, might have been involved in preparations for another campaign while Constantine VII was still alive. As it was to turn out, Basil's dream would remain unfulfilled, as Nikephoros Phokas undertook the final campaign

²⁹² Leo the Deacon, pp. 11-12.

²⁹³ *De cer.*, II. 45, p. 670.

²⁹⁴ Pryor and Jeffreys (2006), pp. 255-58.

²⁹⁵ *De cer.*, II.45, pp. 664-5.

himself. This was utterly unprecedented for the *domestikos*, who was usually to be found along the land frontier, with limited say in naval matters.

The Cretan campaign was a part of the general escalation in the deployment of the navy under Constantine, especially in offensive actions in Italy.²⁹⁶ Naval missions were an area in which the emperor and the ruling regime could have greater input as they were organised centrally, and, unlike the overland engagements in the east, they were not dictated by the movements of enemy forces and the control of Byzantine territory. The Byzantine navy was utilised to more spectacular, if ultimately unsuccessful, effect against Sicily in the 950s and was also used against the port of Tarsos, another highly fortified Islamic city which had made naval raids against the coast of Asia Minor, with more favourable results.

The year famous for its failed naval campaign also saw significant overland campaigns along the eastern frontier. In Syria, most of the Arabic sources mention the first part of the campaign, which was the Byzantine assault on Germanikeia in the spring offensive, and two of them note the summer assault on Būqa in the vicinity of Antioch.²⁹⁷ Among the sources in Arabic, only the history of Yahyā ibn Saʿīd mentions the sack and conquest of Theodosiupolis and the campaign also finds mention in the *Universal History* of Stephen of Taron.²⁹⁸ The campaigns in northern Syria were definitely of greater significance to Arab historians as the attack on Germanikeia meant a further inroad into the Syrian *thaghr* after the sack of Adata in the previous raiding season, and it was this event that they naturally wrote about. Germanikeia was defended by a garrison of ‘men of Tarsos’, probably stationed there by Sayf al-Dawla after the previous year’s attack on Adata.²⁹⁹ Yahyā focussed on the attack by Leo Phokas on Būqa, an area close to his

²⁹⁶ Explored further in Chapter 3 and Chapter 6.

²⁹⁷ Miskawayh, C.V, p.159; Ibn al-Hamadāni, p. 111; Dhahabī, p. 241; Yahyā ibn Saʿīd, pp. 767-8.

²⁹⁸ Stephen of Taron; Ter-Ghewondyan (1976), p. 91.

²⁹⁹ Ibn al-Athīr, VIII, p. 517.

domicile in Antioch, and also had knowledge of the attack on Theodosiupolis as he had access to a variety of Christian sources at the time of writing. Sayf al-Dawla was allegedly in Mayyāfāriqīn at the time of the attack on Būqa, in which the army of his nephew, Muhammad ibn Nāsr al-Dawla, was routed by Byzantine troops led by Leo Phokas. Meanwhile, John Tzimiskes led another force eastwards towards Theodosiupolis, taking it before Sayf could cross over through the Bitlis pass. In subsequent campaigns, Mayyāfāriqīn itself became a target of Byzantine raids, the forces occupying a forward position in order to repulse any attempts by Sayf and his raiders to enter Armenia near Lake Van. For the rest of the reign, Sayf was unable to intervene in Armenia at all, although we do not know if the town of Bitlis (Arabic: Bidlīs; Armenian: Balesh) was ever in Byzantine hands outright in this period.

Theodosiupolis was the northern extremity of the fourth division of ‘Abbāsīd Armenia, which extended from Asmosaton, to the south of the Arsaniās River (now Murat Su), across to northern Lake Van (Chliat and Arjesh), thereby guarding the lower and upper headwaters of the Euphrates.³⁰⁰ Theodosiupolis overlooked fertile plains to the east (Basean) and west, and was well served by roads and riverine networks.³⁰¹ Previous reports of Byzantine intervention in the region of Theodosiupolis consisted of a possible attack by John Kourkouas in 929, the destruction of its hinterland in 930 by Theophilos, *stratēgos* of Chaldia, and the construction of the fortress of Hafjīj to the south-east of it, which was abandoned by the Byzantine garrison during Sayf al-Dawla’s campaign of 939. Theodosiupolis was probably held by an independent emir, as we find that Abnikon (Awnik), the stronghold to the south of the Araxes in the Basean plain, captured by the Byzantines (most probably, in the late 920s), had been independently ruled at the time.³⁰² Despite its relative isolation after it could no longer count on ‘Abbāsīd or Sājīd military

³⁰⁰ Ibn Khurradadhbih, pp. 92, 135, 122, 174.

³⁰¹ *DAI*, 45, p. 208-9.

³⁰² *DAI*, 45, pp. 212-13.

support, Theodosiupolis held out against the Byzantine onslaught for decades and finally fell in the month of Rabī I 338 (29 August – 27 September 949).

Apart from being a strategically important city that had been in Arab hands consistently from the mid ninth century, Theodosiupolis was also a bone of contention between Byzantium and Iberia. In the *DAI*, chapter 45 is dedicated to a discussion about Iberia and focuses on the detailed negotiations between the *kouropalatēs* and the emperor on rights over any territory captured from the emirs. This chapter is the only one to deal extensively with contemporary events as it relates the negotiations that occurred after the fall of Theodosiupolis and mentions a *prōtopatharios* Theophilos as the *stratēgos* of Theodosiupolis, indicating that the city had already fallen.³⁰³ The chapter is also rare in that it provides us with a date of composition of the *DAI*, placing it firmly in 952. This was probably Theophilos, younger brother of John Kourkouas, who is attested to have been involved in action against Theodosiupolis in the 930s. It is clear, therefore, that the theme of Mesopotamia, facing Armenia and the Diyār Bakr, was undoubtedly a Kourkouas sphere of influence, with strategic commands held by different members of the family, since the 920s.

This post-facto feud between the Byzantines and the *kouropalatēs* sheds a considerable amount of light on why the fall of Theodosiupolis was such an important event. There is reference to a *chrysobull* of agreement from the time of Romanos I, which promised that the emperor would not shift the borders of the empire if the Iberians continued in their loyalty to the empire and made common cause against the Arabs with the imperial army. Another *chrysobull* of Constantine himself is mentioned, which states that only territories taken by the Iberians themselves could be

³⁰³ *DAI*, 45, pp. 204-15.

held by the *kouropalatēs* ‘as sovereign lord’.³⁰⁴ Then Constantine reveals that the *kouropalatēs* offered no assistance in the subjugation of any of the territories around Theodosiopolis, but that his forces nonetheless staked claim and took possession of villages that had been acquired by the Byzantine army. While the Byzantines were able to annex all the territories south of the river Araxes, they had to cede Basean to Iberia in order to keep the peace. As they had found out from the Ardanoudj affair, when Byzantium had to ignominiously back down from its claim on the city, the Iberians were far more worried about losing face in front of other local potentates than they were of the continued presence of pockets of Muslim control, which, by this time, had lost their links to a strong Islamic centre.³⁰⁵ Despite accepting imperial titles and receiving property from the empire, the Iberians could be counted on to act to their own political advantage and were suspected of forming alliances with any power who would respect their political and territorial ambitions.

The three Byzantine successes in Germanikeia, Buqā, and Theodosiopolis in the same campaigning season must have shaken the foundations of Sayf al-Dawla’s authority in the *thughūr*. His response was to launch his most ambitious raid ever into Byzantine territory during the campaigning season of 950. The poems of Mutannabī for this campaign allude to the fact that Byzantium had sued for peace in the year 949 and the history of Kamāl al-Dīn speaks of an envoy from the emperor sent to Sayf’s court at this time. Both Marius Canard and Alexander Vasiliev put this plea for peace down to the recent defeat in Crete, and the widespread shock in Byzantium as a result of this.³⁰⁶ However, there is no reason to believe that the military strategy on the land frontier was in any way linked to the naval campaign in Crete. At the same time that Byzantine forces were being routed in Crete, they had an undeniably successful campaign season

³⁰⁴ *DAI*, 45, pp. 210-11.

³⁰⁵ *DAI*, 46, pp. 220-21.

³⁰⁶ Canard (1953), p. 763; Kamāl al-Dīn, p. 375.

in the east, and the embassy to Aleppo must be seen as an exercise in sizing up an opponent whom Byzantium had not yet faced in open battle. There is no denying that there was an embassy, perhaps headed by the *magistros* Niketas Chalkoutzes, and Mutanabbī mentions that ‘the Domestic is not satisfied with the decision to use sabres and lances, but we are’.³⁰⁷

In 950, Sayf was pursuing a clear offensive agenda in order to seize some of the initiative back from the Byzantines, who seemed to have attacked at will in Adata and Germanikeia, and had blocked his attempts at crossing the Bitlis Pass when the final campaign for Theodosiupolis was underway. Based on Mutanabbī’s boastful verse about how the emir was willing and able to rendezvous with the Domestic at the Bosphorus, it might seem that Sayf had equipped himself to reach Constantinople, but on the basis of troop movements and his return before he was seriously pursued, this must be dismissed as an empty boast.³⁰⁸ The campaign was an attempt by Sayf to demonstrate his qualities of leadership and display his suitability for leading the *jihād* against the empire.

Sayf not only performed his duty as the leader of the raiding party, but also assembled a vast force, by his standards, to undertake it. Arabic sources notoriously overestimate the numbers of armed forces, especially in the case of the size of the adversary’s army, but the numbers for Sayf’s campaign seem particularly large for a crack raiding party that had to move fast over difficult terrain. Dhahabī puts the total number of troops at thirty thousand and follows with information from an unknown source saying that a part of this contingent was made up of four thousand men from Tarsos under the command of a certain Abū Husain. While the numbers cannot be trusted,

³⁰⁷ Skylitzes, pp. 241-2; Mutanabbī, p. 307.

³⁰⁸ Mutanabbī, p. 307.

the fact that such exaggerated figures made it into later accounts indicates, at the very least, that the raiding party assembled was the largest that Sayf al-Dawla could muster.

Leaving Aleppo in Rabīʿ I (18 August – 16 September), Sayf joined the forces from Tarsos and entered Byzantine territory near Germanikeia. The initial target of the raid was perhaps Tzamandos, but Sayf chose to march past, across the Halys, to Charsianon Kastron, the headquarters of the theme of Charsianon. Apart from gaining booty and ravaging the territories that he passed through, Sayf also destroyed churches in the region.³⁰⁹ When it was time to return, the Tarsiots and a detachment of Arab Bedouins returned before Sayf along different routes, either as a result of a disagreement on the course the campaign was taking, or to provide smaller, scattered targets for the Byzantine forces instead of one large party returning laden with booty.³¹⁰ The scouts of the Byzantine army must have been closely following Sayf's movements, deciding that the best possible moment to capture him was on his return through the mountainous passes between the empire and the *thughūr*. While Sayf was on campaign within their territories, there is no indication that the Byzantine military attempted to face him head on and the strategy of combating him was through ambush upon his return, in line with the advice found in *De velitatione bellica*.³¹¹

Sayf chose to return through the Darb al-Kankarūn, near the headwaters of the Jeyhān, in the region of Germanikeia. When he arrived, an ambush had already been prepared for him. The employment of this tactic against Sayf is mentioned in *De velitatione bellica*, which prescribes the stationing of infantry on the higher ground on either side of a pass armed with javelin, bows and arrows and even rocks.³¹² In the confrontation which followed, Sayf al-Dawla barely escaped with

³⁰⁹ Mutanabbī, pp. 309-14.

³¹⁰ Dhahabī, pp. 240-2.

³¹¹ *De vel.*, 4, pp. 156-9.

³¹² *De vel.*, 2, pp. 154-7

his life, and most of the raiders were either captured or killed. Sayf's near capture must have been viewed as a victory by the Byzantine forces. The reaction to this victory, however, was to send another embassy to Sayf, suing for a truce.³¹³ Constantine's emphasis on keeping channels of diplomacy open was at work here. The victory over Sayf's raiders at the end of the campaign had come at the heavy cost of a penetrating raid that had reached the very heart of Asia Minor, and one which was celebrated for its daring in the emir's court. Sayf's resources were finite, but a cessation in warfare might have allowed the Phokades to marshal greater resources for the inevitable eruption of hostilities once the stipulated period was at an end.

Phase three (951-955): Sayf al-Dawla on the offensive

The main lesson of Sayf's raid in 950 had been that, in order to prevent the Byzantine forces from carrying out their planned campaigns, it was essential for the emir to lead raids into Byzantine territory and disrupt the empire's plans. After Sayf's refusal to conclude a truce with Byzantium following his narrow escape, it would appear that he got wind of proposed Byzantine action near Amida.³¹⁴ This campaign is missing from the histories of Ibn al-Athīr, Yahyā ibn Saʿīd and Kamāl al-Dīn, but is related by Dhahabī, who copied it from an unknown source. The details provided, though scant, cannot be dismissed as a fabrication or a duplication of a previous raid, as they include a separate attack carried out by the Ṭarsiots by land and by sea, an event that is unique in our period. We know nothing more about this attack or about whether it was launched from Ṭarsos, but it was utilised to provide cover for the main action of the year. Sayf launched a raid from Harrān into unspecified Byzantine territory. Harrān was an unusual place to muster

³¹³ Dhahabī, pp. 240-2.

³¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 242-3.

forces, being much further away from the frontier than Amida or Edessa, so it would seem that the 'raid' was in retaliation to the presence of Byzantine forces in the vicinity of Amida.

Byzantine forces besieged Amida in an attempt to destroy what was a major fortified city on the way to the passes leading into Anzitene. Amida was very powerfully defended and a major city in the Jazīra, and the dramatic attack by the Byzantines was certainly designed to make a splash. Dhahabī, following the same source as Ibn al-Azraq al-Fāriqī, paints a picaresque setting in which, the Byzantines connived with a Christian in the town to construct a four-mile tunnel, in order to breach the defences of the fortress. Having been found out, however, the man was executed. The story might be a gross exaggeration, but tunnelling under the foundations of the fortifications was an attested practice at the time. The *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos instructs generals planning sieges to deploy a contingent of men to find 'a suitable place for there to be tunnels underground.'³¹⁵ Upon reaching the walls, these tunnels would then be filled with dry wood and set alight, thus causing the walls to collapse. We do not know whether there was fighting between Sayf and the Byzantines outside Amida, or whether the latter withdrew upon news of his impending arrival.

In the summer of the same year, we are told that Sayf gathered troops from Mosul, Mesopotamia, and Syria, along with some Arab tribesmen, to make another incursion into Roman lands.³¹⁶ The details for this campaign come from the commentary to a poem by Mutanabbī, which places Sayf in Arabissos in Jumādā I (5 October – 3 November) of that year.³¹⁷ The commentator goes on to say that Sayf arranged his troops to march on the assembled Byzantine troops in Tzamandos, but that his army refused to do so because it might have delayed

³¹⁵ *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos, pp. 160-161.

³¹⁶ Sibṭ al-Gauzī, pp. 174-5; Dhahabī, p.243.

³¹⁷ Mutanabbī, 314-7.

their return before the coming of winter. Hence the raid passed without any confrontation between the foes. The Byzantines are reputed to have assembled a particularly large force in Tzamandos (though the figure of forty thousand is vastly inflated), and hence were unprepared to give chase to the fast moving cavalry forces led by Sayf, without having to radically reconsider their logistics and strategy. The mustering of a large field army to face the raiders in open battle was an unusually risky strategy for the Byzantine military, but one that would be applied against Sayf in successive campaigns in the following years. It is also possible that what the poem portrays as a force mustered in the face of Sayf's attack was actually an army assembling for the next year's campaigns.

In 952, Sayf decided not to go on campaign, but to repair the fortifications of Germanikeia, which had been compromised by Byzantine forces in 949. It is perhaps useful to mention here that though the sources mention that the Byzantines 'took' Germanikeia in 949, it is apparent that this did not mean outright capture and occupation.³¹⁸ They had captured it long enough to destroy its infrastructure, or perhaps just its walls, as the texts tell us that Sayf was able to repair the damage within the year. For the military strategy of the Byzantine Empire, the refortification of Germanikeia was particularly undesirable, as removing its fortifications was the first phase in the campaign of conquest. There is a cast forward in the *Vita Basilii* in which Basil I is said to have predicted that the city would not fall until the reign of his grandson.³¹⁹ Considering that it was completed by the year 950, it would seem that the 949 expedition came very close to taking it outright, and must have certainly breached the city's defences.

³¹⁸ Ibn al-Athīr, VIII, p.480.

³¹⁹ *VB*, 48, pp. 168-73.

Before considering a direct attack against Sayf in Germanikeia the Byzantines launched two diversionary attacks in an attempt to lure Sayf away from his refortification project. The first attack took place at Sarūj in the Diyār Mudar, a town that was, according to Ibn Khurradādhbih, a post-station on the Euphrates route between al-Raqqā and Samosata.³²⁰ It was also a day's journey from both Edessa and Harrān, the latter of which had been used by Sayf to gather forces before launching a raid in the previous year.³²¹ The reportage of the raid in the Arabic sources is largely based on Miskawayh, who wrote that the Romans took prisoners and destroyed mosques in the town.³²² The destruction of mosques was a regular method of intimidation employed by the army under John Kourkouas, and is reminiscent of the attack on Chliat in 928 and the capture of Melitene on 19 May 934, when the inhabitants were given the choice between conversion to Christianity or expulsion from the city.

This attack into the Islamic *thughūr* was fairly risk-free for the Byzantines, but the rewards were two-fold; both physical and psychological losses were inflicted on the enemy. A second detachment of the army under the Emir of Melitene, ʿUbayd Allah al-Ahwal, attacked Ergani (Arabic: Arqanīn), just north of Amida, but was repulsed by the governors of Mayyāfāriqīn and Amida.³²³ This emir, from his *kunya*, appears to have been the first emir of his dynasty, and might have been a Christian, or Christianised Arab, in command of his own troops. This is the first mention of the Byzantines utilising an emir within its boundaries to lead its campaigns, though there was a precedent for Arab tribes which had defected to Byzantium to be resettled and absorbed into the social hierarchy.³²⁴ No other source provides any insight into how the elite of captured Muslim territories were integrated into Byzantine society; it is far more likely that the

³²⁰ Ibn Khurradādhbih, p.73

³²¹ The raid in the previous year had been despatched from there.

³²² Miskawayh, II, p. 143.

³²³ Ibn al-Azraq al Fāriqī, p.116.

³²⁴ Banu Habib in Holmes (1999), pp. 188-9.

old elite was exiled from its territory, to be replaced by more willing candidates. Sayf had left the defence of Arqanīn to the local emirs, and was successful in beating back forces under Bardas Phokas near Germanikeia.³²⁵

The attack on Amida in 952 elicited an attempt by Sayf to occupy the forces of the Emir of Melitene in the city's plains with raids in the area around Sozopetra and Arqa. The Byzantine forces blocked the Darb al-Mawzār in the region of Adata, through which he had planned his return and one of our sources tells us that it is at this point that he confronted a detachment led by Constantine Phokas.³²⁶ There was a bloody engagement and, as Sayf changed course to leave via Anzitene, he was pursued for some of the way. Finally, however, he was able to travel through the Ergani pass into Asmosaton on the Murat Su. At Asmosaton, Sayf heard that the Byzantine army led by the *domestikos* himself had entered Syria in his absence and set off in pursuit. Mutanabbī tells us that he covered the distance between Amida and the Jayhān in three nights.³²⁷ Beside the river Jayhān, in the region of Germanikeia, he caught up with the Byzantine forces, and dealt them a great defeat.³²⁸ The Byzantine strategy was to operate on two targets at once, Amida and Germanikeia, and the Byzantines seem to have been able to hold on to the initiative despite Sayf's raids.

None of our sources tell us about the intention behind the Bardas' incursion into Syria; neither the target nor the extent to which the plans were carried out is known. They understandably concentrate on Sayf's escape from Byzantine territory and on the fact that Constantine Phokas, the son of Bardas Phokas, was taken hostage. The target of the raid had probably been Germanikeia itself, the aim being to destroy the fortifications that Sayf had erected the year

³²⁵ Ibn al-Hamadāni, p. 112; Ibn Zafīr, p. 126.

³²⁶ Yahyā ibn Sa'īd, p. 771.

³²⁷ Mutanabbī, p. 327.

³²⁸ Ibid., pp. 322-3.

before. The defeat of the Byzantines and the capture of Constantine was a great personal blow to Bardas Phokas and must have been much reported in Constantinople as Skylitzes mentions the incident.³²⁹ An anonymous commentator on Mutanabbī's poems provides the date of the battle at which he was captured as 10 Rabī' I (25 July 953). This precise dating of one among many decisive victories over the Byzantine forces indicates that this particular victory, because it ended with the capture of such an important Byzantine aristocrat, was celebrated in Aleppo. When Constantinople witnessed a great triumph at the capture of Abū'l 'Ashā'ir in 956, it was perhaps in revenge for the capture of Constantine Phokas. With a scion of the Phokas family in Sayf's custody, a certain Paul Monomachos was sent to the court of Sayf al-Dawla to request an exchange of prisoners in Safar 343 (6 June - 4 July 954). Mutanabbī's poems paint a lively picture of the attendance of large numbers of troops and familiars of the court at the reception for the envoy.³³⁰ As there was no change in the situation in the east as a result of the embassy, we must conclude that it failed to achieve its objectives. Sayf al-Dawla had only once participated in a prisoner exchange, and this was in the context of affirming his new position as the leader of the Arab marches in 946.

Instead of initiating a raiding campaign into Byzantine territories, Sayf's main objective in 954 was to repair the fortifications of Adata, which had been breached in the course of Byzantine incursions in 948. Repair work might have started before he arrived and he might have mobilised when he got wind of an impending Byzantine attack. It had been in the environs of Adata as well that Byzantine forces had almost captured him on his return from his raid in 950, and where they confronted him after his raid in Sozopetra and Arqa in 953. The sources are very precise about the date of Sayf al-Dawla's arrival in Adata. On Wednesday 17 Jumādā II (18 October), Sayf

³²⁹ Skylitzes, p. 241.

³³⁰ Mutanabbī, pp. 328-331.

arrived with his forces to oversee the repairs and secure the site. Within two days Byzantine forces comprising 'Greeks, Armenians, Rus, Slavs, Bulgarians and Khazars' arrived to prevent the refortification.³³¹ The mention of all these different nationalities, though based in fact, can also be seen as an attempt by the Arabs to emphasise the strength of the opposition that Sayf faced, and, combined with a figure of fifty thousand Byzantine troops, it can also be seen as a gross exaggeration of the enemy that Sayf would go on to defeat. The battle took place on Tuesday 29 Jumādā II (30 October).

The Byzantines had probably planned a quick campaign to sweep in and take the weakened city, but Sayf's arrival put paid to this strategy. The time lag between the appearance of the Byzantine forces and the commencement of the battle can only be explained by the fact that the Byzantines were setting up a more conventional siege, with the extra time being utilised for setting up camp, digging trenches, waiting for reinforcements, and treating with the town to surrender. This sort of exercise would have required a large number of troops and planning, and should therefore be seen as a planned siege of Adata rather than just retaliation against Sayf's attempts to repair its fortifications. The army was simply unlucky that it found Sayf in Adata before it was able to make an attempt to capture the city. The battle that broke out was therefore a planned battle and not an exigent encounter between the two sides. It lasted from daybreak till mid afternoon and the Byzantine forces were roundly defeated. More prominent captives were taken, including Bardas's son-in-law, Theodore, and an unnamed grandson. Nikephoros Phokas allegedly escaped capture by hiding in underground water conduits.³³² After forcing the Byzantines into retreat, Sayf remained in Adata until the fortifications were completed on 13 Rajab (12 November). The

³³¹ Ibid., pp. 331-334.

³³² Yahyā ibn Sa'īd, pp. 771-4.

defeat at Adata was the last Byzantine defeat before Bardas Phokas was removed from the post of *domestikos tōn skolōn*.

The defeat outside Adata marked the second year in a row in which humiliating defeats had been visited on the armies under the Phokades. Not only had they resulted in kidnapping and loss of aristocratic life, this was the first time in nearly three decades that Byzantine forces were not able to maintain pressure on their chosen targets, which were being re-fortified. The first reported event in 955 was the embassy sent to Aleppo by Constantine. Two different histories report this event, the thirteenth-century history of Ibn Zāfir, written in Cairo, and the slightly later thirteenth century history of Ibn Shaddād, principally of Aleppo and then of Egypt.³³³ It is quite possible that the latter copied the account of the former and added his own interpretation of the outcome of the embassy (it was fruitless), as he mentions cavalry forces of the frontier marches by name in a similar manner to Ibn Zāfir, but it is more likely that the information actually came from a lesser known commentary on Mutanabbī's poems that was different from the much utilised one of Wāhidī (d.1075). Ibn Zāfir goes so far as quoting from a poem, which he asserted was recited on the occasion of the reception, hence hinting that the information on the embassy was indeed extracted from a commentary that was considered authoritative in the early thirteenth century.³³⁴ In his posthumously published commentary, Nāsif al-Yāziǧī (d. 1871) provides the date for the actual reception as 17 Muharram 344 (13 May 955), no doubt culled from yet another commentary on Mutanabbī. The embassy was perhaps sent as a repeat request for a prisoner exchange as, after the defeat at Adata in the previous year, Sayf had managed to capture several more prisoners of high rank, which was no doubt a source of embarrassment, and more importantly, a blow to the empire's machinery of government in the frontier provinces. Keen to

³³³ Ibn Shaddād, pp. 125-7.

³³⁴ Mutanabbī, pp. 334-7.

portray Sayf as a man of action, Mutanabbī's poem states that instead of responding in words, Sayf responded with 'the horse, the flexible lance and the sabre', that is to say, the embassy was unsuccessful.³³⁵

Most of the usual recorders of Sayf's campaigns are silent about his campaigning in the year 955. It would seem that the more conventional encounter with Byzantine armies near Adata might have come at a price in terms of both manpower and funds and any ambitions for a spring raid or fortification campaign had to be put on hold. There might have been an expedition planned for autumn 955, but this had to be put on hold as the Byzantine army under Bardas Phokas besieged Adata once more. Ibn Zāfir insinuated that the siege had already been underway for some time before Sayf got wind of it in Aleppo, as the enemy held the routes and blocked the news from travelling to Sayf's capital.³³⁶ The commentator al-'Ukbarī contended that several messengers from Adata were waylaid before the news finally arrived, causing Sayf to set off either at the end of August or the beginning of September for the citadel's defence.³³⁷ Both Yahyā ibn Sa'īd and Ibn Zāfir mention that the *domestikos* had besieged Adata and breached some of its ramparts and Mutanabbī goes on further to say that the Byzantines had already set up 'war machines'.³³⁸ The siege, therefore, must have been underway for some time before Sayf arrived. Both Yahyā ibn Sa'īd and Ibn Zāfir mention that the *domestikos* withdrew when Sayf's arrival was imminent and did not engage him in battle.

The siege of Adata was undertaken with two possible outcomes in mind, the first being that news of the siege could be kept from Sayf long enough for the fortifications to be destroyed before his next campaign, and the second being that even if Sayf retaliated earlier than expected, the siege

³³⁵ Ibid. p. 334.

³³⁶ Ibn Zāfir, p. 125.

³³⁷ Mutanabbī, pp. 337-8.

³³⁸ Ibid., p. 339.

would divert his attention from his own planned campaign and reconstruction would keep him out of Byzantine territory for a while longer. Direct confrontation had to be avoided at any cost, and hence the siege was abandoned before a battle could take place. However, the fact that there was no significant campaign in Byzantine territories in this season was a tactical victory for the recuperating Byzantine side. This third phase of fighting on the eastern frontier must have unsettled the empire's presumption that annual campaigns, with the aim to chip away at target emirates, could be undertaken without any serious opposition. Sayf al-Dawla had been able to conduct raids and to defend the cities of the *thughūr* consistently, and his presence at the helm of a dependable defensive force probably went some way in uniting the frontier regions in common cause against the Byzantines. This in itself was an achievement not realised since the heyday of 'Abbasid hegemony at the end of the eighth century.

Phase four (956-959): the Byzantine recovery

The fourth and final phase in the offensive in the east saw the rapid decline of Sayf's effectiveness on the border, as the Byzantine armies began to be deployed on multiple fronts from the Diyār Bakr to Cilicia. The previous years had seen modest successes in utilising the plain of Anzitene as a launch pad for attacks against targets to the south of the Murat Su. The building up of commands in the region – the creation of the theme of Mesopotamia in ca. 901 and the creation of at least five smaller themes by 951/2 – can be seen as a statement of intent by the empire to divert the resources used for the capture of Theodosiupolis southwards, with the intention of putting pressure on Ergani and thereby opening routes of attack into Diyār Bakr and the Jazīra proper.³³⁹ Gains over Germanikeia and Adata had proved to have been much more

³³⁹ Oikonomides (1976), pp.287-8.

difficult to sustain, and the campaigns in the subsequent years not only targeted these cities, but also targeted the cities in the Cilician Plain which provided Sayf with men and arms.

956 was a particularly busy year in the east and at least four separate campaigns are mentioned; two each initiated by Sayf al-Dawla and Byzantium – the most daring of which was Sayf's campaign in Anzitene. If it had not been for an anonymous commentary on one of Mutanabbī's poems, it would have seemed that Sayf's campaign in the district of Anzitene in this year was unprovoked.³⁴⁰ It speaks of the arrival of news that Yānis, the son of '*domestic*' Tzimiskes, was making incursions into Diyār Bakr, which prompted Sayf to travel eastward. This is no doubt John Tzimiskes himself, the future emperor. Yahyā ibn Saʿīd, Ibn Zāfir and al-Makīn all relate the details of the same summer campaign, but the anonymous commentary provides almost a day by day account and can be identified as a compilation of official records.³⁴¹ Despite discrepancies in the names and official positions of Byzantine commandants, this anonymous commentary is also unique in allowing us to calculate the speed with which frontier armies travelled and the routes taken by them. Departing from Aleppo on 14 Muharram (28 April), Sayf reached Byzantine territory on 26 Muharram (10 May). The commentary tells us that the Byzantine army had mustered in the pass, ready to attack Amida, but were chased back by Sayf, who then, while encamped, sent two detachments on the trail of the Byzantine army up to Hisn Ziyād (Charpete). These returned without loss and advised Sayf to continue to Ashkūniyya, which Vasiliev identified with Arshakeni near the point where the Arsanas (Murat Su) meets the Çemişkezek Sū.³⁴² This was definitely more than Tzimiskes had planned for when he had tried to lure Sayf to the Mesopotamia and he fled with his troops while Sayf laid waste Tell Bitriq and Usfuwan and

³⁴⁰ Mutanabbī, pp. 340-2.

³⁴¹ Yahyā ibn Saʿīd, pp. 771-4; Ibn Zāfir, pp. 127-8; Makīn, pp. 190-1; Howard-Johnston (1983).

³⁴² Vasiliev (1968), p. 357.

tried to take Charpete, which was defended by a garrison. Then he received news that Byzantines had tried to block his way back and rushed to return.

When he reached the Darb Bāqasāya (near Bingöl Dağ; possibly the same as Procopius's Illyrisos Pass), the Byzantine forces had occupied the higher terrain. On 24 May, battle was enjoined during which both sides suffered heavy losses, and Sayf returned to Amida by the end of 25 May.³⁴³ Amongst the troops mentioned in the text is the 'zīmar' from Keltzine in Chaldia, no doubt a variation of the Armenian term *zoravar* meaning general or the one who leads troops to battle.³⁴⁴ Keltzini was a prominent site for the resettlement of refugee Armenians, and we know of the dispute over the house of Barbaros in which Krikorikios (Gregory), son of Ashot Kouropalatēs demanded an estate in Keltzini for his family to flee to in case of a Muslim incursion.³⁴⁵ From our text, it would seem that not only were Armenians well settled in this area, some of their indigenous titles also filtered through to the extent that military despatches picked them up.

While Sayf was engaged in the Diyār Bakr, another segment of the Byzantine army under Leo Phokas raided as far south as Dulūk, just south of Germanikeia. Our sources focus on the capture and transport to Constantinople of Abū'l 'Ashā'ir Husain, cousin of Sayf al-Dawla in this engagement, which provided Constantine VII the opportunity to organise a unique triumph. Michael McCormick was the first to identify the ceremony describing the ritual of *calcatio collis* in *De cer.* as being an account of the actual ceremony carried out with Abū'l 'Ashā'ir.³⁴⁶ In the course of the triumph, the emperor first processed with the senatorial order and members of the

³⁴³ The anonymous commentary puts the figure at four thousand men in total on both sides.

³⁴⁴ DO Seals, vol. 4, p. 143.

³⁴⁵ *DAI*, 43.89-108, pp. 192-195.

³⁴⁶ *De cer.* II.19, pp. 607; McCormick (1990), p. 161.

personnel of the chamber to St. Sophia for a thanksgiving service for the 'victory festival'.³⁴⁷ Then the emperor and the patriarch processed separately to the shrine to the Virgin at the base of the porphyry column at the Forum of Constantine, where the patriarch offered prayers. At the forum, Constantine surveyed the captured soldiers arranged in lines alongside their captured weapons and standards. After more hymns, a group consisting of the *logothetēs tou dromou*, the *domestikōn tōn scholōn* and the *stratēgoi* and *tourmarchai*, who had participated in the campaign, led Abū'l 'Ashā'ir to the emperor's feet. What happened next is verified by the *Synopsis Historiōn*, which says that the emperor placed his foot on the neck of the captive.³⁴⁸ The rest of the ceremony involved numerous hymns and acclamations before the emperor removed his *loros* and returned to the palace on horseback.

This ceremony was a clever combination of Roman and Late Antique ritual of humiliation and elements of Christian liturgy, combining a Roman triumph with a religious thanksgiving. The *logothetēs tou dromou* is mentioned before the military generals, in stark contrast to Late Antique triumphs where generals led their captives through the city and presented them to the emperor. His presence at the head of the ceremonial group that led Abū'l 'Ashā'ir surely indicates that there was another unnamed contingent watching the ceremony, the large number of foreign traders, diplomats and foreign troops enlisted in the imperial army. This ceremony was a signal to them of both, the empire's might on the one hand, but also of subtler concepts like its living (or deliberately revived) Roman traditions and the divine favour it enjoyed from a Christian God and a host of saints. This is perhaps why the ceremony was held in the marketplace and not in the Hippodrome. Much has been made of the religious aspects of this triumph, with its emphasis on a public liturgical procession, but the most memorable part of the ceremonial was certainly the

³⁴⁷ Ibid. p.161

³⁴⁸ Skylitzes, pp. 241.

Roman ritual of *calcatio collis*. The absence of a triumphal entry and events in the Hippodrome are not remarked upon at all.³⁴⁹

The summer of 956 saw further campaigns on the eastern front that are related by Ibn al-Athīr and Kamāl al-Dīn, who give conflicting dates for the campaign launched by Sayf al-Dawla.³⁵⁰ Kamāl al-Dīn seems to be correct as, if the campaign against Charsianon and Sarikha was in Jumāda II (10 September – 8 October), it would coincide with the Byzantine attack on Tarsos in the same month. Sayf's campaign made a rich haul of captives including a member of the Balantes family and a *patrikios* from Macedonia. While this raid was being carried out, a naval attack under Basil Hexamilites, *stratēgos* of the Kibyrrhaiotai, was launched against Tarsos, resulting in the death of approximately one thousand eight hundred people and the destruction of the hinterland. Tarsos had been quiet on the naval front since 938, but emboldened under Sayf's leadership, had made an unremarkable attack on Byzantine territory in 950 and men of Tarsos are often mentioned in the sources among Sayf's forces. This premeditated Byzantine offensive, undertaken after the navy was no longer actively engaged in the west, was launched in order to attack Sayf on an additional front and perhaps destabilise his alliance with the Cilician emirate. The attack figures in the Chronicle of Elias of Nisibis from the first half of the eleventh century, and, in *Theo. Cont.*, we find that the leaders captured were sent to the Hippodrome, where Constantine held a triumph.³⁵¹ This triumph was held in the usual place, the Hippodrome, and not the Forum, as neither the emir himself nor a prominent member of Sayf's family had been captured. Furthermore, a naval campaign was much more likely to have been coordinated from Constantinople, rather than from the frontier, and its victory could more easily be ascribed to the emperor, rather than to a powerful frontier *stratēgos*.

³⁴⁹ Riedel (2010), pp. 181-2.

³⁵⁰ Ibn al-Athīr, VIII, p. 508; Kamāl al-Dīn, pp. 378-9.

³⁵¹ Elias of Nisibis, p. 109; *Theo. Cont.*, p. 453.

As a result of the attack on Tarsos, Sayf rushed to Adana where Ibn al-Athīr tells us he gave the Emir of Tarsos a robe of honour and gifts.³⁵² The emir's presence in Adana testifies to the fact that he had fled from Tarsos during the attack and Sayf's arrival there was probably to provide assistance to the Tarsiots and assess the situation. The attack on Tarsos clearly threatened Sayf's role as power-broker in the Cilician frontier and his movements indicate that he was disconcerted in the extreme. While he was away, a successful attack was then made by a detachment of Byzantine forces, most certainly operating from Anzitene, which attacked Mayyāfārikīn and burnt and pillaged its environs.

Our information for the year 956 is difficult to analyse. For the same year we have two large-scale raids by Sayf, which carried on unhindered, three successful targeted attacks by Byzantine forces and two triumphs in Constantinople (not to mention the grand ceremonial for the hand of John the Baptist smuggled across to Constantinople from Antioch).³⁵³ Jonathan Shepard has argued that Constantine used these occasions to 'conjure up an aura of success', at a time when Sayf was still having his way on raids.³⁵⁴ However, after the abysmal performance of Byzantine forces against Sayf since 950, the goals of Byzantine policy in this region were definitely shifting and showing positive results. Sayf was never able to mount raids into Byzantine territory in the same way again and the empire was successful in partially demilitarising key fortified towns south of the anti-Taurus. These towns provided Sayf cover for his campaigns and men to fight them with, and were also situated at strategic locations.

³⁵² Ibn al-Athīr, VIII, p. 517.

³⁵³ Skylitzes, 245; Kalavrezou (1997), pp. 67-78.

³⁵⁴ Shepard (2001), p. 38.

The year 957 saw the final capture and destruction of Adata, which almost slipped through the sources without receiving mention, but was of utmost significance. Yahyā ibn Saʿīd tells us that, in Rabī I (2 June – 1 July), the *domestikos* took Adata by capitulation, and exiled the population to Aleppo, before destroying the fortress. There is no mention of any counteroffensive, or indeed any campaign, by Sayf al-Dawla in this year. The fortress capitulated, was evacuated and destroyed without a murmur. This success has been viewed as the fruition of the tactical reforms instituted after the replacement of Bardas Phokas by Nikephoros.³⁵⁵ Be that as it may, the absence of any retaliation from Sayf must send us in search of more answers.

For the same year, Kamāl al-Dīn tells us that the Byzantines had conspired with certain *ghilmān* and bribed them to hand Sayf over to them when he next went on campaign. He was, however, tipped off by a *ghulam* named Ibn Kaygalag and, in Jumāda I (31 July – 29 August), massacred hundred and eighty of his *ghilmān* and maimed and imprisoned two hundred others. He also had four hundred prisoners of war killed in retaliation.³⁵⁶ This might simply be an excuse conjured up by Kamāl's source for Sayf's inability to act against Byzantine forces in this year. However, there are two other factors, which might have had a role to play in this. The first factor might have been the attack on Tarsos the year before, and the diversion of available manpower to reconstruction. As we have seen before, troops from Tarsos provided the core of many of Sayf's expeditions.

Another distraction for Sayf might have been the problems faced by his brother, Nāsr al-Dawla, in Mosul, with the resumption of the conflict with the Būyid *amīr al-umarāʾ*, Muizz al-Dawla, from the year 957. Sayf's role in the conflict is not clear at this early point, but Nāsr al-Dawla had taken

³⁵⁵ Whittow (1996), pp. 325-6

³⁵⁶ Kamāl al-Dīn, p. 379.

advantage of the rebellion of the Daylamite Ruzbihan in the Ahwāz to launch a bid for Baghdad in 957. Two of his sons went, with the Hamdānid cavalry, to attempt to take Baghdad but were sent back by Subuktagin, the chief military officer of the Būyids. By June 958, most of the troops under the command of Nāsr al-Dawla were in open revolt. While all of this was occurring in the Hamdānid emirate of Mosul, it is unsurprising that some of the unrest travelled to Sayf's own troops and officials. After July 958, Sayf was himself embroiled in the conflict with the Būyids, when Nasr fled into his territory, leading behind him the troops of the Būyids to whom most of Nāsr's former allies capitulated.³⁵⁷ The Byzantine army chose an opportune time to attack Adata, and surely shared credit for its success with the internal conflicts of the Hamdānids.

If Sayf's absence from the field was astonishing in 957, it was even more surprising in 958, after the jolt he had received with the fall of Adata. For the second year in a row, we hear of no campaigns led by him into Byzantine territory. The Byzantine forces, however, seem to have achieved near miraculous form. First, in Rab'ī I (23 May – 21 June), John Tzimiskes arrived in Diyār Bakr, passing through Amida, Arzan, and Mayyāfāriqin before besieging the fortress of al-Yamāni. That the troops are said to have passed through all of these strongholds can be taken to mean that they were able to travel via them unopposed rather than undetected. Instead of personally leading the defence of his territory, Sayf sent a lieutenant, Najā al-Kāsakī, with a sizable cavalry force. Al-Kāsakī's troops were completely routed, and the sources say that five thousand of them were killed while another three thousand were taken prisoner. The numbers here might be inflated as Yahyā later tells us that one thousand and seven hundred of the captives were taken to Constantinople and paraded on horses after the completion of the campaigns against Samosata and Ra'bān as well.³⁵⁸ Needless to say, this must have been a powerful display

³⁵⁷ Canard (1953), pp. 522- 7.

³⁵⁸ Yahyā ibn Sa'īd, p. 777.

of strength for the inhabitants of and visitors to the city and an assurance that the Eternal Empire was not only well protected, but also on the rampage. The record of a triumph in Greek sources follows the capture of Samosata later in the year by John Tzimiskes and Basil Lekapenos.³⁵⁹ The taking of Samosata on the Euphrates was another strategic masterstroke as it opened the way to Edessa, which was on the campaign agenda in the following year. This time, the city was permanently occupied.

From Samosata, the Byzantine forces next marched on Raʿbān, further south, and besieged it. This time Sayf came out to give battle but was defeated and prisoners were taken.³⁶⁰ The sources are silent about what happened to Raʿbān after Sayf retreated and we do not know if the fortress was captured. The Raʿbān affair demonstrates the great strategic importance of the capture of Samosata. Now that Sayf was beleaguered with his own domestic problems, the capture of this forward base on the Euphrates, menacing the Hamdānid heartland while at the same time within reach of the Byzantine forts in Anzitene and Melitene, could ‘deliver a knock-out blow’ to Aleppo itself.³⁶¹ Had Sayf been in any position to raid Samosata and push the Byzantine troops back, it would have been untenable for the empire to hold this base so far south of the anti-Taurus.

The reasons for this reversal in Sayf’s fortune are not forthcoming in the works of the Arabic historians. There is, however, an indication of the changing balance of power in a commentary on one of Abū Firās’s poems by a certain Ibn Khālawayh.³⁶² The commentary alleges that, having had no success with concluding a peace treaty with Sayf al-Dawla due to his impossible conditions, the Greeks concluded peace treaties with the ‘master of the west’, the Bulgarians, the

³⁵⁹ *Theo. Cont.*, p. 462.

³⁶⁰ Yayhā ibn Saʿīd, pp. 777-9; Kamāl al-Dīn, pp. 379-80.

³⁶¹ Shepard (2001), pp.39-40.

³⁶² Abū Firās, pp. 368-369.

Rus, the Turks, and the Franks and asked for support from them.³⁶³ Russians, Bulgarians, Magyars, and Khazars had been fighting in the Byzantine army throughout the reign of Constantine VII, but their presence on the battlefield was noted with greater frequency since 954. This was not the result of a wide-ranging political alliance, as the commentary alleges, but of the more effective deployment of mercenary heavy cavalry in the east.³⁶⁴

The real reason for Sayf's failures was the conflict which began the year before between Nāsr al-Dawla and Mu'izz al-Dawla. Nāsr was forced to flee from Mosul in Rabī' II (June – July) after a revolt of his regular troops, his Turks, and Daylamite supporters. The next month, Mu'izz al-Dawla set off for Mosul with his general Subuktagin and took possession of Nāsr's palace. Nāsr fled to Nisibis (Arabic: Nisībin) and then to Mayyāfāriqin, losing along the way, the support of the majority of his remaining troops, who defected to Mu'izz al-Dawla. Having entered Sayf's territory, he headed towards Aleppo and reached it on 3 D'hulajjā (16 January) 959. It is unlikely that the Būyid forces would have pursued Nāsr into territory controlled by Sayf, or even very far from Mosul, but he probably arrived in Aleppo to muster support for a campaign to win back his emirate. Nāsr was the senior Hamdānid, who had once been the *amīr al-umarā* in Baghdad, and his arrival in his territory must have made Sayf less willing to muster troops for raids or even to travel far from the Aleppo, in case his brother might turn usurper.

The last year of Constantine's reign, and indeed his life, was marked by more Byzantine victories in the east. Another naval campaign was launched against Tarsos, which resulted in the taking of captives and booty.³⁶⁵ On land there were probably two separate campaigns, one which confronted Muhammad, son of Nāsr al-Dawla, in the vicinity of Aleppo, either before or after a

³⁶³ Vasiliev (1968), p. 364.

³⁶⁴ *Taktika* of Nikhephoros Ouranos, 56-57, 60-3, pp. 94-5, 98-109, 112-147.

³⁶⁵ Ibn al Athīr, VIII, p. 527.

raid on Qūrus, and another which raided into the Jazīrā and reached Edessa and Harrān. The first land campaign was successful in capturing the son of Sayf's brother, Nasr al-Dawla either as he set out on campaign or as he set out to confront the Byzantine forces who sacked Qurūs, an important fortified town approximately halfway between Aleppo and Germanikeia.³⁶⁶ The capture of Sayf's nephew was perhaps greeted with similar pomp in Constantinople as the capture, three years earlier, of his cousin Abū'l 'Ashā'ir, although no record of any celebration survives. This is unsurprising as, in this last year of Constantine's reign, the Greek sources turn towards his personal activities before his death. *Theo. Cont.* records, in great detail, the emperor's pilgrimage to Olympos and the severity of the illness that would go on to kill him, while Skylitzes repeated this information with one interesting difference.³⁶⁷ He mentioned that Constantine had pretended to go to Olympos 'to arm himself with the prayers of the fathers' before heading off on campaign in Syria.³⁶⁸ The emperor did send harangues to the frontier to motivate the troops, but from the evidence that we have, it is clear that they were circulars sent to the field from Constantinople and not personally delivered by the emperor.³⁶⁹ The thought of a seriously ill Constantine going out on campaign in Syria is clearly ludicrous, but the notice might have been based on a survey of troops that the emperor might have participated in at an *aplekton* where troops were gathered before the commencement of a campaign. However, none of our sources refer to the emperor going far beyond the capital at any time apart from the pilgrimage to Olympos.

The second campaign in the Jazīrā, which reached Harrān and succeeded in sacking Edessa, is remarkable if only for the fact that it was allowed to continue unimpeded until it reached its destination. Halfway between Mayyāfāriqīn and Aleppo, Harrān was on the route connecting the

³⁶⁶ Dhahabī, p. 224; Yahyā ibn Sa'īd, p. 777.

³⁶⁷ *Theo. Cont.*, pp. 463-466.

³⁶⁸ Skylitzes, p. 208.

³⁶⁹ Ahrweiler (1967), pp. 397-9; Vári (1908), pp. 78-84; on the dating, see McGeer (2003), pp. 112-3, 116-7, 121-3.

two most important centres of Sayf's control. As we have seen, Mayyāfāriqīn itself was attacked both in 956 and 958 by the Byzantine army, and was perhaps both out of Sayf's control and also too severely damaged to carry out any defensive duties. It is from Mayyāfāriqīn that we get the strongest call for the continuation of the *jihād* around the year 959, which was clearly the battlecry of a beleaguered city.³⁷⁰ The success of the attacks on Tarsos, Qūrus and Harrān brought the battlefield approximately a hundred kilometres forward of the Hamdānid frontier.

Sayf, however, could do very little until some agreement was reached between his brother and the Būyid *amīr al-umarā'* in Baghdad. It was only after this that he could even contemplate reuniting the disparate chieftains of the frontier under his banner. Due to his efforts, peace was concluded between the Hamdānids and Mu'izz al-Dawla and Nāsr al-Dawla arrived back in Mosul on 15 June 959.³⁷¹ This peace was an added complication for Sayf. As the main Hamdānid party in the negotiations, he was allowed to govern Mosul, the Diyār Rabī'a and Rahba for a payment of 2.9 million dirhams, a million of which had to be given in advance before Nāsr could return. It has been asserted that Sayf was now free to return to his objectives on the frontier, but the events of the following years are a testament to the fact that this was not the case.³⁷² He was never able to muster the forces required to reclaim his campaigning successes. The Byzantine offensive on the eastern frontier seemed unstoppable for the next few years. On the basis of gains made in the last years of the reign of Constantine VII, the empire's forces were able to take back Crete in 961 and Anazarbos, Germanikeia, and Duluk in 962. Aleppo itself was sacked in 962 and, by August 965, the emirate of Tarsos had capitulated. Nikephoros Phokas was conspicuous by his absence in the victorious campaigns of 958/9. It is likely that he was involved in planning the successful Cretan campaign of 960-1.

³⁷⁰ Ibn Nubātā, pp. 292-4.

³⁷¹ Canard (1953), pp. 525-27.

³⁷² Vasiliev (1968), p. 364.

Conclusion

The picture which emerges from the campaigns on the eastern frontier in the personal reign of Constantine VII is a complex one. Unlike his predecessor, Constantine faced an eastern frontier that was united for the first time since the near complete collapse of 'Abbāsid influence in the border regions, albeit without recourse to reinforcements from a distant organising centre. Apart from Sayf's forays around Charpete in 939 and Chaldia in 940, Byzantium before the establishment of the Emirate of Aleppo had been able to execute a cautious, but fairly straightforward campaign in the east, taking the form of repeated attacks against identified targets until they were forced to capitulate. Diplomatic overtures were also made to the Christian princes of Armenia, in order to isolate the Muslim emirates in the Armenian Highlands, which were increasingly isolated and without any hope of help from the Caliphate. Campaigns in the east were planned in advance, and the empire was content to bide its time between offensives, as was the case after the capture of Melitene in 934.

Byzantine ambitions grew after the Rus attack of 941, and the three years between 942 and 944 saw daring expeditions against Aleppo, Edessa, and Germanikeia. These were brought to a halt after Constantine's accession, as the new regime preferred to spend the years of quiet on the border taking stock, shifting the diplomatic and strategic focus, designing campaigns to conquer Crete and Theodosiupolis, and enhancing the navy in the central and eastern Mediterranean. Crete was targeted, thus reviving an imperial project initiated by Leo VI, while the conquest of Theodosiupolis had been under discussion with the Iberians since the reign of Romanos I. The military under the Phokades also had time to regroup and reconsider its frontier strategy, with

Adata and Germanikeia identified as key frontier cities, which were marked for neutralisation and then capture.

The Byzantine army set out to achieve the objectives which had been set. It captured Theodosiupolis, but the attempt on Crete was unsuccessful. The delay in launching the campaign in the Syrian *thughūr* had unforeseen consequences, as Sayf al-Dawla turned towards the Byzantine frontier in 950, and was able to divert attention and military resources from the Byzantine strategic policy in the east. The Byzantine response to the opening up of multiple fronts in the east was to intensify the militarisation of the frontier themes. The troops raised conveniently close to the theatre of war helped to maintain the strength of Byzantine field army. Without administrative geographies like those of Ibn Khurradādhbih or Qudāmā ibn Ja‘fār for our period, we need to rely on partial and indirect sources. Our only sources for numbers in the military are the Cretan inventories and the vastly increased numbers of military posts in the *Escorial Taktikon* from the reign of Nikephoros Phokas.³⁷³ We do know that, early in the period, Constantine tried to defend the institution of the *stratiōtes*, the village-based soldier, in at least three themes, Anatolikon, Opsikion, and Thrakesion.³⁷⁴ This was in itself a sign of his commitment to raising troops of all sorts. His land legislation was aimed at keeping taxable lands out from the clutches of the *dynatoi*, who were also accused of exempting the sellers from military service.³⁷⁵ At least in the first five years of active campaigning (950 – 954), sizeable field armies were deployed. That used for the doomed campaign at Adata in 954 might not have been unique.³⁷⁶ Newly incorporated territories were immediately organised into small themes, consisting of a seat of a *stratēgos* in the largest fortified settlement, which perhaps should be viewed primarily as recruiting organisations. Annexed territory was divided between the themes

³⁷³ *Escorial Taktikon*, pp. 262-73.

³⁷⁴ *Theo. Cont.*, pp. 443-4.

³⁷⁵ Novel E in McGeer (2000), pp. 68-76. Svoronos (1994), pp. 104-26.

³⁷⁶ McGeer (1988), pp. 136-8; McGeer (1992), pp. 219-229.

of Charpezikion, Chozanon, Asmosaton, Theodosiupolis, Derzene, and, later, Adata and Samosata. They were known as Armenian themes because of the high number of Armenians recruited, both cavalry and infantry.³⁷⁷

There were also two distinct theatres of operation; Cilicia and northern Syria under the command of the Phokades, and Armenia and the Diyār Bakr under the Kourkouas/ Tzimiskes clan. Traditional field armies were augmented by the greater use of heavy cavalry. The two rival magnate families and their clients took charge of them. There was a new emphasis on infantry for security in open country and on heavy cavalry. Foreign mercenaries also crop up with greater frequency in the texts. The very nature of actual engagements along the frontier was also changing. With the Caliphate effectively cut off from the frontier, the ritualised annual raiding expeditions, uniting the men from all over the Muslim world for *jihād* against Byzantium had ceased until Sayf picked up the gauntlet. Annual funds for these raiding expeditions had been provided by the Caliphs since the beginning of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate, and the names of the generals who led the raids were recorded in Islamic histories until the early 920s.³⁷⁸ Sayf al-Dawla wanted to be seen as the new leader of this long frontier tradition, but with the breakup of the Caliphate, there was no central source for the funding of the jihad. Ibn Hawqal would have us believe that there were still hostels in Tarsos where assorted fighters assembled to carry out these raids in the 960s, but the records of the raiding activity seem to indicate that these were the vestigial remnants of a much vaster frontier system.³⁷⁹ There are only three known offensive raids for the purposes of gathering booty carried out by Sayf in the 950s, in 950, 951, and 956. These were hardly enough to restore the frontier economy based on raiding and capture of Byzantine subjects and their property. The detailed calculations for the distribution of booty made at the

³⁷⁷ Oikonomides (1976), pp. 343, 345.

³⁷⁸ Kudāmā, 194-5.

³⁷⁹ Ibn Hawqal, pp. 183-4.

beginning of the tenth century must have rung hollow for Sayf, who was burdened with paying for what was essentially a defensive army led by *ghilmān* from his taxation revenues and tributes from local leaders who submitted to him. He was much more likely to be found rebuilding fortifications and resisting Byzantine attacks on fortified frontier towns than leading the lightning-fast raids commemorated by Mutanabbī.

The Byzantine army was therefore successful in preventing Sayf from re-establishing a system of frontier warfare financed by the spoils of war. The Byzantines also noted the lack of depth in Sayf's military command – every successful engagement was led by him in person – and campaigns from the 952 onwards tended to be launched on multiple fronts, in order to further divide his resources and disrupt his chain of command. Ultimately, Sayf's power crumbled quite spectacularly due to factors not directly influenced by the Byzantine army. Any suggestion that the change in military tactics and formations brought about this dramatic change in the empire's rate of success against the Hamdānids is untenable if account is taken of the evidence about the collapse of the Nasr al-Dawla's emirate in Mosul and the repercussions this had at Aleppo.³⁸⁰ The brittle nature of Sayf's power, centred wholly on his ability to produce results in campaigns against Byzantium, and the legend of his military might, was immediately exposed when his brother took refuge with him, causing panic amongst his own *ghilmān* as well as amongst tributary states. Unable to muster enough troops to defend himself against Byzantium and unwilling to leave Aleppo in the hands of his brother for long periods, the end of Sayf's glorious career was inevitable. Where Byzantium's increasingly flexible strategy in the east came into its own was in the response to this collapse. Clearly, the strategy was now to attack further into Muslim territory and to shift the battle lines forward. Adata and Samosata were captured and, by 959, the battle front had shifted about a hundred kilometres south of the mountains in both Syria and the Jazīrā.

³⁸⁰ Whittow (1996), pp. 323-6.

What is more, the Byzantine war machine and the imperial government proved adept at making political capital out of success on the frontier. Victories were relayed to and replayed in Constantinople with parades of prisoners and the ritual humiliation of captives by the Emperor. Just as Constantine closely controlled all victory celebrations, he also made personal interventions in field operations, through imperial harangues sent as circulars to the troops. The harangue was an important morale-boosting exercise, usually utilised by the military general, but in his attempt to stamp his authority on the battlefield, the emperor sent his own harangues to the troops. In *De velitatione*, the author instructs generals to stir up the assembled forces before beginning the campaign through ‘eloquent language’ and ‘honeyed words’, which would ‘urge them on to bravery and boldness’.³⁸¹ We have two examples of harangues sent by Constantine to the field, one from the early 950s and the other from the last few years of his reign.³⁸² As few specifics are mentioned in the harangues, it is difficult to date them with much certainty. These harangues outline the imperial propaganda directed at its own troops, primed for battle with the forces of Sayf al-Dawla, and, in this regard, are of particular significance to our understanding of Byzantium’s foreign policy. The main idea behind the harangues was appropriation of military might by the emperor, but there has also been a suggestion that there might have been a genuine religious enthusiasm for the war.³⁸³

In the earlier harangue, soldiers are exhorted not to be intimidated by Sayf’s ruses and manoeuvres as they are fighting in the name of Christianity and the Holy Cross. The emperor assures them that Christ himself will fortify and protect them, and that, guarded by the Cross, they have won victories in the past against the elite soldiers of Hamdan. Hamdan would

³⁸¹ *De vel.*, 23, pp. 230-1.

³⁸² Ahrweiler (1967), 394-404; McGeer (2003), 111-35.

³⁸³ Riedel (2010), pp. 185-197.

ultimately be defeated because his army lacked the ultimate weapon of faith in Christ. The later harangue is more unambiguous about the religious arsenal, which would ensure victory alongside the traditional weapons and tactics. Churches and monasteries in the capital and saintly men living in mountains, caves and grottos were all enlisted to pray for victory.

However easily done, it would be unwise to accept these exhortatory words as evidence that the military engagements in the east were 'holy' wars fought for the glory of Christ.³⁸⁴ The evidence from the actual campaigns is enough to demonstrate that they were cautious and conservative until Hamdānid internal politics cleared the way for more daring attacks. Though both harangues speak of the ultimate victory of the Byzantines through the intervention of Christ, Constantine is quick to reassure the men that everything was not left to God alone. The earlier harangue assures the troops that only Constantine's best servants (i.e. military commanders) represented him in the field and also promises everyone from the *stratēgoi* and officers of the *tagmata* that they would be rewarded with larger themes or positions as *tourmarchs*, *kleisourarchs* or *topoteretes* in return for furnishing victories. He also promises rewards to ordinary soldiers, though these are left deliberately vague. From the content of the harangues, Constantine seems to have been addressing a defensive force, on the lookout for Sayf's next foray into Byzantine territory. It would seem that the harangues were not directed at offensive forces, which often left the scene when Sayf's forces arrived. They were aimed at defensive forces, whose duty it was to slow the pace of incursions, to cut down stragglers and baggage trains, and to attempt ambushes when the raiders were leaving the Byzantine frontier.

The religious overtones must be seen in the light of the public reputation of the enemy.

Constantine refers to fears that the troops might have had about the invincibility of Hamdān and

³⁸⁴ Dennis, G. T. (2001), pp. 32-9.

the Tarsiots. In the second harangue, he juxtaposes the defenders of Christianity with those who await 'the help of Beliar, which is to say, Muhammad'. The troops on the frontier must have come into contact with the *ghāzīs* in Sayf's raiding parties and observed that they followed a religious duty to raid the Christian lands and also to destroy the churches in the areas raided.³⁸⁵ Based upon Sayf's elusiveness and consistency in winning most of the outright confrontations before 958, it is not difficult to imagine that some Byzantine soldiers might have feared that God was on his side. Religious rhetoric had accompanied the Byzantine eastern offensives since the time of Herakleios, but it had no bearing on the targets of the campaigns or the strategies employed by the military under Constantine VII. Its utilisation was in part convention and in part the countering of Islamic propaganda which had, for so long, been corroborated by actual victories. No spiritual rewards like the remission of sins or recognition of the fallen as martyrs were dispensed by the church, which was the only authority competent to do so. Indeed, when Nikephoros II proposed that soldiers lost in battle be acknowledged as martyrs, it was vetoed by the Patriarch.

A discussion of relics and religious objects must form the final component of the analysis of the eastern campaigns. Early in 956 or late 957, a relic of the right arm of St. John the Baptist arrived in Constantinople after having been smuggled across from Antioch.³⁸⁶ Unlike the arrival of the Mandyliion from Edessa, this event was not premised on the humbling of the Caliphate or the signing of a peace treaty, both of which would have been significant foreign policy triumphs. Antioch was not a centre from which raiding parties were despatched. Nonetheless, in the speech commemorating the first anniversary of the arrival of the relic, Theodore Daphnopates does not fail to mention that it was the intercession of St. John that was responsible for the 'trophies and

³⁸⁵ Mutanabbī, pp. 312-38.

³⁸⁶ Skylitzes, p.245.

victories' of Constantine over his enemies.³⁸⁷ The arrival of the relic was important because St. John 'is the intercessor to the One through whom emperors rule and the provider and bestower of that heavenly gift, the power to rule, to the emperors'.³⁸⁸ It was irresistible for the panegyrist to associate this previously forgotten relic with the empire's fortunes on the battlefield.

Lastly, a well-preserved ivory triptych dated to the last years of the reign of Constantine VII provides us with an iconographical representation of the imperial ideology.³⁸⁹ It depicts several lesser-known martyrs and saints amongst the customary ones. What is intriguing from our point of view, are the inscriptions.

'Three bishops and a martyr with them,
Mediate in view of one (purpose) to submit the earth to the crown.'³⁹⁰

Further:

'An emperor had the four martyrs sculpted,
With them he puts to flight the enemies by storm...'³⁹¹

And finally:

'Release Constantine from illness,
And I will subject to him all powers'³⁹²

It has been suggested that this triptych was a donation from Constantine to a monastery in return for prayers for his health. It was not intended for public use, nor was it intended for as a gift to a military officer. Why was an object, intended for an ecclesiastical setting, invested with such militaristic iconography and why was the prayer of recovery predicated on bringing all the powers

³⁸⁷ Kalavrezou (1997), pp.79-90.

³⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 78

³⁸⁹ Oikonomides (1995), pp.63-86.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 71.

³⁹¹ Ibid., p. 73.

³⁹² Ibid., p. 75.

under imperial control? The only possible solution to this quandary is that iconography and epigraphy of this sort was enjoying widespread popularity at this time, as a complement to the heightened intervention along the eastern frontier. More importantly, not once are the Muslims singled out as the only enemies of the state, and the overall imagery is as Roman as it is Christian. This is the iconography of victory, which reflected Byzantine gains in the east in the last years of Constantine's reign.

For the duration of the personal reign of Constantine VII, there appears to have been a balance in the sharing of control between the imperial administration headed by the emperor and the frontier magnates. Those with the local expertise in Cappadocia and the Armenian borderlands (the Phokades in the first and the Kourkouas/ Tzimiskes family in the latter) were left in charge of designing and delivering the campaign strategies in their individual sectors. The imperial centre asserted itself in the organisation of naval campaigns (Crete and the campaign against Tarsos in 956) and also in frontier campaigns once victory seemed assured (Basil Lekapenos' campaign against Samosata in 958). Within Constantinople, innovative ceremonial was devised to ensure that most of the glory accrued to the emperor and not to victorious generals. On the field itself, the emperor asserted himself through apposite battlefield harangues, replete with the detail and emotion of frontier life, to show that he was their ultimate commander. The balance would soon tip in favour of the generals after the spectacular victories on land and sea were directly associated with them, and enable the situation in 963, when Nikephoros II Phokas was acclaimed emperor by his men on the battlefield.³⁹³

³⁹³ *De cer.* 1.96, pp. 433-440.

Chapter 3. The Other Caliphates: Umayyad Spain and Fātimid North Africa

By the time Constantine VII ascended the throne as Emperor in his own right, two rival Islamic caliphates were flourishing in the Central and Western Mediterranean. The ‘Abbāsīd control over the Islamic Maghreb had been farmed out to dynastic emirs from the eighth century onwards, and the Aghlabids, whom the Fātimids supplanted, had been ruling Ifrīqiya as dynastic rulers since 800 A.D., the emirate passing down along dynastic lines without any interference in appointments from Baghdad. The Maghreb, as a geographical notion in the tenth century, extended from the western borders of Egypt to the Atlantic coast of North Africa, and also included al-Andalus, Sicily, and the other Islamic islands of the western Mediterranean. Ifrīqiya under the Fātimids corresponded roughly to present-day Tunisia, with direct control limited primarily to the Mediterranean coastline.

The treatment of the central and western Mediterranean, and Byzantine interests and strategies within this region, is all but absent in Byzantine sources and receives fairly superficial coverage in the primary sources which emanated from the two caliphates. This is to be expected as Constantinopolitan historical sources had little interest in actions so far afield and, as we have seen in the previous chapter, provided a discontinuous account of engagements in even so important an arena as the Near Eastern frontier. The sources in Arabic, which spring to our aid in fleshing out encounters between the Byzantines and the Muslims in the Near East, also fall short of providing any background to the few face to face encounters between Byzantium and the Mediterranean caliphates on the battlefield and in diplomacy that occurred in the period of our enquiry. This chapter will demonstrate that the indifference of the sources to Constantine VII’s policy in the Central Mediterranean must not be taken at face value, and that there was a

concerted policy at play, which, due to distance and the lack of dramatic results, fell below the radar of the sources. Islamic Spain and North Africa, and their relations with Byzantium, are relatively poorly understood, and the aim of this chapter will be first to outline the political and economic underpinnings of both states in our time period, before turning towards ways in which relations between Constantinople, Cordoba, and al-Mahdiyya were framed and carried out. Defensive military arrangements in Byzantine Italy, which had been in place since the loss of Sicily to the Aghlabids in the course of the ninth century, were fairly conservative in the years leading up to Constantine's reign. This chapter will show that changing circumstances in the early years of the personal reign of Constantine VII, and the express desire of the ruling regime in Constantinople to bolster its position in Italy (which will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 6) led to a widening of diplomatic contacts and intelligence gathering.

3.1 The Background

Of the two caliphates discussed in this chapter, the first to style itself as one was the Fātimid Caliphate in Ifrīqiya. The origins of the Fātimid state were in the Ismā'īli movement of the 870s, revived by Hamdān Qarmāt in Kufa. The movement was a millenarian 'Alid one, based on the primacy of the *ahl al-bayt* or family of the Prophet, and the belief in the return of Ismā'īl, the son of the sixth Shī'a Imām, in the form of the Qā'im (he who arises) or Mahdī (rightly guided one). Needless to say, the movement was vehemently anti-'Abbāsīd and sought to create the conditions necessary for the Mahdī to appear and take his place as the legitimate Commander of the Faithful. Based on a system of sending missionaries or *dā'i*, the movement quickly spread to Rayy, Fars, Khurasān and Transoxiana. Bahrain fell to one of the Qaramitā in 886/7 and by 893 all the territory between Bahrain and Oman was held by them. In 893 as well, a *dā'i* named Abū 'Abd Allāh was sent from Kufa to Ifrīqiya, to preach amongst the Berbers. He spent eighteen years with the Kutāmā Berbers, who controlled the area along the Mediterranean coastline of present-

day Algeria, converting them to his cause. The Ismāʿīli movement was in no way a homogenous one, and in 899, a leader called Sāʿīd ibn Huseyn in Salamiyya claimed the Imamate of the Ismāʿīlis. His claim was not accepted by most of the Ismāʿīlis in the region, who can be classified as the Qarāmita henceforth, and he fled to Ifrīqiya, where the *dāʿi* Abū ʿAbd Allāh accepted his claim or *dāʿwā*. With the help of the Kutāmā Berbers, Abū ʿAbd Allāh was able to topple the Aghlabid dynasty based at Qayrawan. Sāʿīd ibn Huseyn made his triumphant entry into the Raqqāda, the administrative centre of the Aghlabids and was proclaimed the new ruler of Aghlabid North Africa and Sicily on 4 January 910. He was henceforth called al-Mahdī bi-llāh. The fact that Sāʿīd ibn Huseyn established his *imāmat* in Ifrīqiya, though his background was in present-day Iraq, and the prize he strove for during much of his reign was Egypt, illustrates that this region was very much the frontier of the ʿAbbāsīd realm and was left to its own devices as far as internal security was concerned.

The Umayyad Caliphate in al-Andalus was based on a state of far longer standing, but one that had overcome a series of confrontations with the other Islamic and Christian groupings in al-Andalus. The Umayyads of Spain were the main Islamic power in Spain from 756 to 1031, but the official claim to the title of caliph was only made in 929, when, on 16 January 929, the *kebutba* was read in the name of ʿAbd ar-Rahmān III; his claim based on God's recent favour towards his regime.³⁹⁴ He also styled himself as al-Qāʾim bi-amr Allāh (literally, Steadfast Ruler by God's Command), when the same title was taken on by the second Fātimīd caliph in 934. This has been seen as an attempt to 'rival the Fātimīds in their claims to divine proximity and charismatic power'.³⁹⁵ However, the rise of the Fātimīds was perhaps seen more as the ultimate sign of the ʿAbbāsīd Caliphate's inability to protect the Sunnī *umma* in North Africa from the heretical

³⁹⁴ Wasserstein (1993), pp. 11-12.

³⁹⁵ Fierro (2005), p. 56.

Ismā'īlī regime. The event immediately preceding the adoption of the title was the defeat of the Hafsūnids in Bobastro, who had been in open rebellion against the emirs of Cordoba since 880.

Upon 'Abd ar-Rahmān's adoption of the title of Caliph the new caliph started minting gold *dinārs* as well as the silver *dirhams* in Cordoba; gold coins having been minted only in the name of caliphs since the establishment of the Umayyad Caliphate in Syria in the seventh century.³⁹⁶

Before the Fātimid usurpation of the Aghlabid domains in North Africa, Aghlabid issued coins – in the name of the 'Abbāsīd Caliph - circulated freely in al-Andalus, but the Fātimid issues were unacceptable for their heterodox legends and claims.³⁹⁷ Due to increasing mercantile rivalry with the Fātimids, securing trade routes with access to Trans-Saharan gold, Berber soldiers, and African slaves, as well as termini for Andalusian exports became more important than ever in 'Abd ar-Rahmān's reign. The central and western Maghreb became the arena of intense competition between the Fātimids and Umayyads, with both sides trying to hold on to the support of confederations of Berber tribes – the Fātimids relying on the Sanhāja confederation (with prime posts reserved for the Kutāmā tribesmen) and the Umayyads on the Zanāta and Miknāsā tribesmen.

To understand the importance of Berber alliances, it is essential to examine the economy of the Maghreb in the tenth century. When Ibn Hawqal travelled through the Maghreb in the mid tenth century, he encountered a vast array of different Berber groups. Those on the border between Ifrīqiya and Egypt seem to have lived within cities. Further east, in Surt, the Berbers lived mainly outside the city, but had some sort of representative settlement in the heart of the city, in which resided their chief. The city-dwellers were accused of causing brawls. In Tripoli, the Berbers again

³⁹⁶ Henceforth, Ibn Hayyān, pp. 185-6.

³⁹⁷ Fierro (2005), pp. 58-9.

lived outside but goods manufactured by Ibādī dominated areas like Djebel Nafūsa were brought there, en route to the Byzantine Empire and the West. The Ibādīs were members of a fundamentalist Sunni sect, a part of the larger Khārijite movement, which flourished in the ‘Wild West’ of the Maghreb. In the next town, Gabès, the settled Berbers were praised for their well cultivated and productive lands, but the nomads were accused of Ibādī heresy. Ibn Hawqal tells us that tribes loyal to the Fātimids like those of the Sanhāja confederacy were used to suppress the nomads. Beyond Tunis, the coastal city of Bōne (Cap Bon) was an exporter of iron, but the city was run independently with the help of a permanent Berber contingent. Outside Umayyad Ceuta, Berbers were said not to have ‘lived’ but to have been ‘installed’ to defend the city. By Tangiers, the Berbers were shown as being ‘addicted’ to commerce. For the interiors, Ibn Hawqal categorically says that the route between Qayrawān and Sijilmāsa, that went via Sūs, Fes, Tahert, Constantine, and then through Kutāma lands, was safe, while the route through Sahara itself, which went via Gafsa, Hafta, and Djebel Nafūsa was very dangerous. The first route was along the north of the Aures and Saharan Atlas, which possibly corresponded with the region under most direct Fātimid influence, while the second route, though an established trade route, was in the realm governed by the Berbers themselves, predominantly Khārijite Ibādīs. Ibn Hawqal says as much by warning the traveller against the Zanāta and Mazāta tribesmen who were still Khārijites.³⁹⁸

Although the discord between the ports (under Fātimid control) and the Saharan trading routes (under Ibādī Berber control) might seem like a detriment to trade, this was not necessarily the case. Ifriqiya was both a market for and an exporter of Saharan goods, even though all three major routes, Tripoli-Zawīla-Kūwār, Qayrawān –Wargla –Tādmakka, and Tlemcen-Sijilmāsa-Awdaghost, were run by Kharijites, many of whom even lived in Qayrawān. The last route was

³⁹⁸ Ibn Hawqal, pp. 60-99.

the supplier of much of the gold that the Fātimids needed to fuel their Caliphate, while the second was a major source of all grades of African slaves, who were often trained in Ifrīqiya for domestic or military roles before being sold on. Qādī an-Nu‘mān (famed Fātimid judge, jurist, and historian; d. 974) emphasised the fact that Andalusian traders were allowed free access to Ifrīqiya’s markets and Ibn Hawqal attested to this openness by mentioning that Byzantine ships came to Tripoli, while Spanish ones came to Tabarqa, Tunis, and al-Mahdiyya.³⁹⁹ Ibn Hawqal goes on to mention that all the exports of the Maghreb, which included female mulattos, black slaves, European slaves, silk, linen, leather, amber, iron, lead, and mercury, among others, were sought after in ‘Abbāsīd areas and beyond.⁴⁰⁰ The Cairo Geniza archives for the following century show that, apart from these, gold, oil, tar, wax, saffron and almonds were also exportable commodities.⁴⁰¹ While some things like textiles, oil, etc., were produced in the Fātimid controlled areas, the majority of the products meant for export came through the Saharan routes. Even after the Fātimids had left Ifrīqiya and the politics of the Maghreb had dissolved into chaos by the end of the tenth century, Tunisian merchants continued to dominate the Mediterranean AND India trade, and relocated to Egypt and Palestine when conditions at home were unfavourable.⁴⁰²

Although the North Saharan Berbers were hostile to the Fātimid creed and opposed to infringements into their territories from the north, they were nonetheless reliant on the ports of Tunisia and Eastern Algeria to export their wares and on the urban Fātimid elites to purchase their luxury items. The Fātimids and their followers also refrained from too vigorously encroaching on the Khārijite territories, as any disruption of this vital trade would cause discontent in their cities and eat away at the revenues accruing to the state from trade. This trade was also essential to the city-dwellers and Arabicised country folk as the return trade in flax,

³⁹⁹ Henceforth, *Majālis*, p. 347; Ibn Hawqal, pp. 74,77.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibn Hawqal, p. 97.

⁴⁰¹ Goitein (1966), pp. 320-22.

⁴⁰² For more on the Trans-Saharan trade, see Brett and Fentress (1996), pp. 85-97; Kennedy (1996), pp. 96-7.

finished textiles, spices, perfume, medicinal and dyeing plants, sugar, and jewellery was essential for them to maintain the lifestyle of members of the wider settled Islamic world.

With the Umayyads and Fātimids caught in a tussle for access to lucrative trade in Trans-Saharan goods and in Mediterranean shipping, Byzantium was fairly quick to understand the changing situation in the North Africa and the western extremity of the Mediterranean. There are two important facets to the background of Byzantine relations with both the Fātimids and the Umayyads on the eve of Constantine VII's personal reign. There are the historic relations between Byzantium and the Islamic Caliphates of the Mediterranean, and then there are the immediate circumstances in the Mediterranean prior to January 945. The historic relations can be analysed through a small number of Greek, Latin and Arabic sources. The 'western dossier' of the *De Administrando Imperio* begins in chapter 26 with the genealogy of King Hugh of Provence, continues eastwards with Southern Italy and Venice then on to a description of the Balkans as viewed from the Adriatic and Dalmatian coasts, which ends in chapter 36.⁴⁰³ However, the western focus begins slightly earlier, in chapters 23 to 25, in which Constantine arranges extracts about the early history of Spain from the histories of Stephanus of Byzantium and Theophanes Confessor. In chapter 26, Constantine rounds off an extract from Theophanes about the Vandal conquest of Spain with notices on the changes which had taken place in the Islamic world since the extracts from Theophanes' history had been written. About the western Caliphates, he writes that there were three commanders of the faithful (*amērmoumēneis – amīr al-mu'minīn*) 'in the whole of Syria', that is, in the realm of the Arabs. The first of these was based in Baghdad and was of the family of Muhammad; the second was based in Africa, and was of the family of 'Alī and Fātimā, daughter of Muhammad (from whom the Fātimids derived their name); and the third was in Spain, and was from the family of Mu'āwiya (the founder of the Umayyad dynasty of caliphs in

⁴⁰³ *DAI*, 25, pp. 106-7; Howard-Johnston (2000), pp. 301-36, 341; *DAI*, 36, p. 165-9.

Syria in 661).⁴⁰⁴ Constantine's understanding of the fundamental theories of descent of the different competing caliphates in the tenth century is a far cry from the muddled elucidation of the changes in Khurasān and Yemen at the end of Chapter 25.⁴⁰⁵ This was not only because the Mediterranean Sea was less of a barrier to intelligence gathering than the landmass of Iran and Arabia, but also because the Byzantine Empire had been in much closer contact with both the Umayyad and the Fātimid Caliphates in the first half of the tenth century than with Iran or the Arabian Peninsula, and in the case of the Umayyads, these contacts had been established in the second quarter of the ninth century.

Historical relations with the Umayyad Emirate of Cordoba can be traced back to the year 839/40, when the Byzantine emperor Theophilos sent an embassy to the 'Abd ar-Rahmān II to ask for help in ousting the Andalusian rebels led by Abū Hafṣ al-Ballūti, who had occupied Crete in the mid 820s. The embassy reminded the emir of their shared hostility towards the 'Abbāsids, but help was politely withheld. The Emirate of Cordoba was in no position to launch such far flung campaigns in hostile waters, especially in order to come to the aid of a Christian empire. Despite his refusal to offer aid, 'Abd ar-Rahmān II seems to have been flattered to be included in the remit of Byzantine diplomacy and sent a return embassy which included the poet Yahyā al-Ghazzāl.⁴⁰⁶ If there were further embassies between Constantinople and Cordoba before the 940s, they have fallen away from the record and were possibly not to any great effect.

In the first half of the tenth century, renewed dealings between the Byzantines and the Umayyads appear in the historical record, but this time the sources serve to obscure them while simultaneously bringing them to light. In c.903, the Umayyads completed the conquest of the

⁴⁰⁴ *DAI*, 25, pp. 106-7.

⁴⁰⁵ *DAI*, 25, pp. 108-109.

⁴⁰⁶ Lévi-Provençal (1944), p. 253.

Balearics, which was to have a far-reaching impact on their coastal strategy, especially in the case of Majorca.⁴⁰⁷ In a recent article on the Islamic settlement of Fraxinetum, Philippe Sénac demonstrated how Majorca defended the Andalusian coastline between the northern port of Tortosa and that of Almeria in the south.⁴⁰⁸ By undertaking a comparison of the treatment of Fraxinetum in Latin historical sources and in Islamic geographies and historical sources, Sénac also demonstrated that, while the Latins wanted to downplay the significance of Fraxinetum as a permanent Islamic settlement and a part of the Umayyad realms, both the Arabic geographies that describe its agriculture and waterways and Ibn Hayyān's account of a treaty between Hugh of Provence and Abd ar-Rahman III which was sent to the *qā'id* or general of Fraxinetum prove that, however independent its origins might have been, Fraxinetum was very much a dependency of Umayyad Spain.⁴⁰⁹ The fact that Otto I sent John of Gorze to protest to Abd ar-Rahman III about the Islamic raiding activity emanating from Fraxinetum is perhaps proof enough that Otto considered Abd ar-Rahman to be the real power behind the outpost.

Before the reign of Constantine VII, it was Fraxinetum that moved Byzantium into direct contact with the Umayyads. The raiding base's position in the Gulf of the Lion was a serious irritant for Hugh of Provence, who, as King of Italy, was Byzantium's chief ally in the reign of Romanos I. Hugh of Provence's key role in Byzantium's Italian policy will be examined in a later chapter, but it must be mentioned here that Romanos first supported Hugh against Fraxinetum in 931.⁴¹⁰ The *Annals* of Flodoard of Rheims tell us that the Greeks attacked the Saracens of Fraxinetum by sea, while Hugh's troops attacked by land, defeating the defenders of Fraxinetum and causing peace to reign for two years.⁴¹¹ This defeat marked the beginning of an accelerated Umayyad interest in

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 200.

⁴⁰⁸ Sénac (2001), pp. 113-126. A similar view has also been espoused by Ballan (2010), pp. 69-70.

⁴⁰⁹ *Antapodosis*, I.2-4, pp. 5-7; Flodoard, pp. 379, 389; Ibn Hayyān V, pp. 454-5.

⁴¹⁰ See Chapter 6, pp. 252-4.

⁴¹¹ Flodoard, p. 379.

the north-eastern coast of the Iberian Peninsula and the Gulf of the Lion. Using Majorca as a victualing stage, ships from Almeria and Tortosa, many kitted out with Greek fire, attacked the territories of Barcelona and Provence, burning the port of Nice in July 935.⁴¹² A peace treaty was negotiated by Hugh on behalf of the traders from his realm in 940 and was agreed to by Abd ar-Rahman III, who proceeded to send the document to the commander of Fraxinetum, the commanders of the Balearics, and those of the coastal towns of al-Andalus.⁴¹³ In the summer of 942, traders from Amalfi and a Sardinian ambassador came to Cordoba to negotiate safe passage for trading purposes.⁴¹⁴ It is possible that this close mercantile cooperation between favoured clients of Byzantium and Cordoba caused Romanos I to ally with Hugh of Provence to launch another attack against the Umayyads. The deal was sealed with a marital alliance, with Hugh's daughter Bertha marrying the future Romanos II in 944. The target of the proposed attack is unknown, but it is known that Hugh sent a phalanx of Hungarian raiders to Spain around the same time in late summer 942 as a fleet sent by Romanos was put at his service.⁴¹⁵ Due to more pressing problems in Italy with Berengar II's attempt at seizing control of the Kingdom of Italy, Hugh chose to come make a pact with the Umayyads, which has traditionally been dated to 942, but was most probably in 943, after the last of the Umayyad raids against Agde and Marseilles. After 943 there is no record of an Umayyad maritime attack against a Christian coast – all their resources were directed against the Fātimids.

Relations between the Byzantines and the Fātimids in the first half of the tenth century are somewhat more complex, as the arenas of interaction were both the battlefields in Sicily and Byzantine Southern Italy as well as the court at al-Mahdiyya and al-Mansūriyya. The Fātimid conquest of the Aghlabid domains in North Africa was very soon followed by attempts to bring

⁴¹² Ibn Hayyān, V, pp. 366-7.

⁴¹³ Ibn Hayyān, V, pp. 454-5.

⁴¹⁴ Ibn Hayyān, V, pp. 478, 485.

⁴¹⁵ *Antapodosis*, V.9, p. 128; Ibn Hayyān, V, p. 481.

Aghlabid Sicily under its control as well. Even though Sicily itself was difficult to bring into line and flared up into repeated rebellions, the Fātimids, under al-Mahdī (909-934) took the responsibility of *jihād* against the Italian mainland, and the opportunity for booty and prestige this provided, very seriously.⁴¹⁶ Raiding parties were invariably despatched from North Africa and not from Sicily. The *jihād* against the unbelievers, an integral attribute of the Commander of the Faithful, was duly carried out in Byzantine territories in Sicily and Southern Italy. Successive campaigns in 918, 922 (when S. Agata was destroyed) and the sustained campaigns under the eunuch Sābir between 927 and 930 brought booty and, finally, a tribute agreement from the Byzantines in 931/2.⁴¹⁷ Apart from providing a source of gold payments and the first diplomatic acknowledgement of the Fātimid regime by Byzantium, the Fātimid navies were also freed to combat the Umayyads, who took Ceuta in 931.⁴¹⁸ In Italy, the truce deflected Fātimid attentions further north and in 934, a fleet of forty ships headed for the Tyrrhenian Sea. Genoa was plundered and burnt down, while the coasts of Corsica and Sardinia were ravaged.

The reign of al-Mahdī's successor, al-Qā'im (934-946) nearly proved to be the undoing of the Fātimid project, both in Sicily and in North Africa. The transition from al-Mahdī to al-Qā'im and the concentration of the forces on quelling internal disturbances had an adverse impact on the Fātimid rule in Sicily. By the spring of 937 Girgenti was in open rebellion and when forces arrived from Ifrīqiya to suppress the rebels, an eight-month siege of the town ensued. By 938 Mazara and a number of inland strongholds were also in open rebellion and historians claim that the rebels were sent food by ship from the Byzantines in Southern Italy.⁴¹⁹ The Fātimids retaliated with draconian rule under Halīl ibn Īsa, under whose regime several Aghlabid Arabs

⁴¹⁶ Metcalfe (2009), pp. 47-8.

⁴¹⁷ Henceforth, Idrīs, IV, p. 151.

⁴¹⁸ Metcalfe (2009), pp. 49.

⁴¹⁹ Henceforth, Idhārī, pp. 209-15; Ibn al-Athīr, VIII, pp.285, 337-9.

fled to Byzantine territory, while native Sicilians were forced to settle in forts along the Byzantine frontier and many local land registers were destroyed.⁴²⁰

Al-Qā'im had no opportunity to retaliate against the Byzantines, let alone pursue his father's goal of a triumphant entry into Egypt and then Iraq. He was wholly unsuccessful in stemming the growing influence of the Khārijite preacher Abū Yazīd, who had been openly preaching amongst the Zanāta tribesmen of what is now Morocco and Western Algeria. In February 944, Abū Yazīd appeared in front of Baghaya with his band of Berber horsemen. By early autumn 944, Tunis was captured and Qayrawan taken a month later. He encamped in front of the Fātimid capital of al-Mahdiyya from the winter of 944 to the summer of 945. The Fātimid defence held the rebels at bay, but it was the new Imam, al-Mansūr, who succeeded his father in May 946, who was successful in pushing back and finally defeating Abū Yazīd. The fight back began in Sousse, which was recaptured by sea on 26 May 946, and which provided an alternative maritime source of supplies to the Fātimid forces. This was quickly followed by Qayrawan on 28 May, but Abū Yazīd continued to camp outside Qayrawan until August. Al-Mansūr was able to dislodge Abū Yazīd's forces and compelled the preacher and his son to flee, with Fātimid troops in pursuit. On 15 August 947, he was finally captured and killed and it was only on 19 August that al-Mansūr proclaimed himself Imam and Caliph. The news of al-Qā'im's death had been kept secret for four days to aid the effort against the rebels.⁴²¹

Despite being at the helm of a Khārijite campaign, Abū Yazīd had accepted the sovereignty of the Umayyad Caliph in Cordoba and sources relate that a squadron had left Almeria with weapons and money in summer 946, but had returned upon hearing of Abū Yazīd's defeat

⁴²⁰ See Chapter 6, p. 254.

⁴²¹ Idrīs, p. 230; *Majālis*, p. 27.

outside Qayrawan.⁴²² Abd ar-Rahmān III had taken advantage of this rebellion to collect one thousand and thirteen pillars from the ruins of Carthage and a church near Sfax for the construction of Madīnat az-Zahrā, suggesting that these areas were under Abū Yazīd's control.⁴²³ As for the Byzantines, since 941/2, they had stopped paying the 'truce money' (*māl al-hudna*), that served as compensation to the *jihādīs* for the loss of income and the troubles in Ifrīqiya had meant that the Fātimids were unable to enforce the deal.

3.2 The Reign of Constantine VII

Within the first three years of Constantine VII's reign, the exigencies that had guided his father-in-law's foreign policy with regard to the Islamic Caliphates of the Mediterranean had completely changed. Hugh of Provence had been replaced by Berengar II in Italy and had retreated to Provence by 945.⁴²⁴ The Umayyads had also definitively turned their sights towards Fātimid North Africa and were no longer interested in any maritime intervention against Christian coasts. In April 947, the governor of Sicily was attacked by rebels and asked for reinforcements. After establishing his capital in al-Mansūriyya on the outskirts of Qayrawan in January 948, al-Mansūr summoned al-Hasan ibn 'Alī al Kalbī from Tunis to be sent to Palermo as the new governor. He had been a successful commander in the Fātimid army during the campaign against Abū Yazīd and, upon his arrival, he was very effective in suppressing rebellions in Mazara and Palermo. The *stratēgos* of Calabria was also present in al-Mansūriyya at the time of the appointment, possibly to renew the truce that had fallen into abeyance. According to reports, after al-Hasan's arrival in Sicily, the Byzantines sent a monk with three years of tribute.⁴²⁵

⁴²² Ibn Idhārī, pp. 228-30.

⁴²³ Henceforth, Makkarī, I, p. 237.

⁴²⁴ *Antapodosis*, V.21, pp. 135-6.

⁴²⁵ Ibn al-Athīr, VIII, p. 471-4.

Another external situation that had greatly changed by the beginning of Constantine's reign was the constricting of Ikhshīdīd power in Syria and the Levant.⁴²⁶ From about 877, Egypt and Syria had been jointly governed from Egypt by quasi-independent governors, starting with the Tūlūnids. After the demise of that dynasty in 905, Egypt was officially governed under Baghdad for the next thirty years, but was wracked by a series of uprisings and disorders, the main cause of which was the extraction of its wealth by Baghdad, resulting in the perennial difficulty in paying for the large force built up by the Tūlūnids. Wary of the loss of control over the territory to a former governor, Baghdad did not vest too much power in the hands of future governors. Governorships were not allowed to pass from father to son. Egypt was also kept militarily weak, allowing the newly established Fātimids to make serious attempts at conquest in 913-15 and 919-21. The 'Abbāsids had to send their strongman Mū'nis to hold the Fātimids at bay.⁴²⁷

The last years of 'Abbāsīd Caliph al-Muqtadir's reign (908-932) saw serious disturbances in Iraq, which allowed for the rise of another autonomous dynasty in Egypt, that of the Muhammad ibn Tughj, who had worked under the Tūlūnids in his youth. He had already been governor of Palestine and Damascus (928 and 931 respectively). When he was named governor of Egypt in 935, he was charged with suppressing internal rebellion as well as staving off the Fātimid offensive just outside Alexandria on 31 March 936. He was successful in securing Egypt and in keeping order in the province, but like Ahmad ibn Tūlūn, was keen on extending his power into Palestine and Syria. He was able to conquer Syria as far as Aleppo in 936/7, but Baghdad wanted someone else in charge of Northern Syria. This led to the only time when Muhammad ibn Tughj threatened to break with the 'Abbāsids and marry his daughter to the Fātimid caliph al-Qā'im and have the *khutba* read in the latter's name.⁴²⁸ The caliph was in no position to intervene in events

⁴²⁶ See Chapter 2, pp. 85-6.

⁴²⁷ Idrīs, V, pp. 128-132.

⁴²⁸ Maghribī, pp. 175-77; Dachraoui (1981), p.212.

on the ground, but did confer the title of al-Ikhshīd on Muhammad ibn Tughj, a title originating in Farghana, from where the latter's ancestors originated. He was able to regain Northern Syria for two short years from 942 to 944, but lost it again to the Hamdānids. An arrangement was reached whereby the Ikhshīd was able to retain control of Damascus and Palestine and would pay the Hamdānids an annual tribute.⁴²⁹

The claim on Syria was revived after his death by Muhammad ibn Tughj's commander Abu'l-Misk Kafūr in 946, but the revolt in Middle Egypt of the local governor Ghabūn made him turn back in 948. Abu'l-Misk Kafūr continued to rule in all but name till 966, and only took on the title of Ikhshīd when the heirs of Muhammad ibn Tughj had died. Fātimid agents in Egypt were said to have remarked, 'the black stone (Kafūr) stands between us and thee (the Fātimid Caliph)'.⁴³⁰ It was a remarkable feat that Kafūr was able to stay in power in Egypt despite recurring famines and consequent civil unrest in 949, 952, 955, and 963-68 as well as a fire in Fustat in 954 and a major earthquake in 956. Moreover he was able to resist the Fātimid propagandists who were widespread in Egypt as well as the incursions and rebellions supported by the Fātimids all through the 950s. What Kafūr lacked was the ambition to either stake a claim to the caliphate or to expand his territories, both of which were guiding principles of the Fātimid state to the west.

With the long shadow of Egypt thus mitigated, Constantine VII was able to pursue a more forward policy in the Mediterranean, one which meant forging more meaningful contacts with the more distant Islamic states and reviving a dream of the empire that had not been considered since the reign of his father, Leo VI, namely, the conquest of Crete. Egypt under Abu'l-Misk

⁴²⁹ See Chapter 2, p. 86.

⁴³⁰ Ahmad b. 'Alī al-Maqrīzī, p. 147.

Kafūr had grown inward looking and had retrenched to a very conservative foreign policy primarily based on self-preservation. Control in Baghdad had been decisively won by the Būyids when Ahmad ibn Būya entered the city on 11 January 946, bringing a distinctly Iranian consciousness to Baghdad. Egypt was now entirely isolated in a neighbourhood of Shī ʿī states, with the Hamdānids, the Būyids and the Fatīmids flanking it. The fight over Syria also kept the Hamdānids occupied along the *thughūr*, with calm reigning on Byzantium's southern frontier until peace was concluded between Sayf al-Dawla and the Ikhshīd Unūjūr in October/November 947. This initial breathing space of approximately three years, during which Byzantium's Islamic adversaries were busy fighting each other, was utilised by Constantine VII, on the one hand to launch a wide-ranging diplomatic initiative and on the other, to prepare for the Cretan campaign of 949.⁴³¹

Ibn Idhārī (the thirteenth-century writer of a history of Islamic Spain and North Africa) mentions an embassy to Cordoba from Constantinople in 945/6, which is corroborated by a notice in the *De ceremoniis* that states that, for the reception of an embassy *from* Cordoba, the decorations in the Anendradion of the Magnaura Palace were different to the ones recently used for the embassy from the Emir of Tarsos.⁴³² The reception of the embassy from Tarsos is securely dated to 31 May 946. The embassy *to* Cordoba must have been sent in early 945 for the return embassy to have arrived sometime in 946. The reason that the comment survives in the *De ceremoniis* is probably that decisions about which brocades and silks were to be displayed for the Umayyad embassy would have been made around the same time as the reception for the embassy from Tarsos. The Umayyad legates had probably already arrived and were being kept in a 'holding area', while both their message and their motives were scrutinised, before an audience with the

⁴³¹ See Chapter 2, pp. 88-93.

⁴³² Idhārī, p.229; *De cer.* II.15, pp. 570-594.

emperor was granted. This waiting period was entirely customary in both the Byzantine and Islamic courts.⁴³³

It is probably this first embassy that is described in some detail in the account of Ibn Idhārī, later redacted by al-Makkarī. The account of the reception for the embassy is nearly a mirror image of the receptions described in the *De Cerimoniis*. Soldiers were provided ‘arms for the occasion’, no doubt referring to the handing out of the ceremonial uniforms and equipment to the soldiers.⁴³⁴ The royal apartments were also especially decked out with the ‘richest curtains and draperies, and spread with the most costly carpets’, mirroring the care taken by the Byzantine court in decorating the imperial palace on the occasion of embassies.⁴³⁵ Al-Makkarī stresses that, at the receptions, all the court officials were drawn out, ‘keeping their proper places in the utmost order’, which was much the same concern in the Byzantine court; the proper order according to precedence being the subject matter of numerous treatises from the ninth and tenth centuries all the way into the fourteenth. The legation was kept isolated prior to the reception in a country house called Munya Nāsr, where ‘no one, whether noble or plebeian, was allowed to visit them or hold any communication with them’.⁴³⁶ This was also the protocol in Constantinople where emissaries were held in purpose-built hostels, where, as Liudprand says of his accommodation in his second embassy to Constantinople, they were kept under virtual house arrest with armed guards preventing the emissaries from going out and stopping anyone from the outside who might want to meet them.⁴³⁷

⁴³³ *Legatio*, p. 187; Makkarī, I, pp. 367-71.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 137.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 138.

⁴³⁶ Makkarī, I, p. 367.

⁴³⁷ *Legatio*, pp. 187-8.

The next significant part of the description of the reception is the way in which the letters from Constantine were singled out for attention. The source redacted by al-Makkarī was mainly fascinated by the physical appearance of the letters. There were allegedly two letters, in some way joined together, both written on blue parchment and both written in Greek. The first letter addressed the substantive reasons for the embassy, while the latter was a list of the presents sent to the Caliph by Constantine. The first letter was written in gold while the second was written in silver. The text gives tells us that the weight of the attached chrysobull was four *mithkals*, which was the equivalent of a four solidus gold bull, the highest possible weight for a gold seal and only reported to have been attached to letter to the Caliph in Baghdad and the Emir of Egypt⁴³⁸ The actual seal had the image of Christ on one side and on the other it had an image of Constantine VII and Romanos II. The letters were enclosed in an enamelled case with the image of Constantine on it and the case itself was enclosed in a brocaded coffer. The text also provides the salutation in at the beginning of the letter which read, ‘Constantine and Romanos, whose faith is in Christ, the two Augusti and emperors of the Romans to the possessor of considerable merits, of noble and illustrious origin `Abd ar-Rahmān, the Caliph, the ruler of the Arabs of Spain. May God extend your life!’. As the embassies to Baghdad had done in the previous decades, the Byzantines carried with them a list of precious gifts sent by the emperor. While gifts sent by Romanos I, Constantine’s predecessor, to the ‘Abbāsīd Caliph ar-Radi in 938 included many luxury items, Constantine is credited with having sent the unusual gifts of manuscripts of the *Materia Medica* of Dioscorides and the *Historiarum Adversum Paganos* of Orosius to Abd ar-Rahman III.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁸ Cutler, (1996), p. 53; *De cer.*, II.48, pp. 686-92.

⁴³⁹ Brett (2002), Appendix, pp. xxiii-iv.

The manuscripts were followed two years later with the monk Nicolaus, who was sent by Byzantium to translate Dioscorides into Arabic. Apart for the manuscripts, Constantine is also credited with sending 140 columns for Madinat al-Zahra and recent research into the capitals at Madinat al-Zahra has revealed that the drill work is either the work of Byzantine artisans or Muslims trained by Byzantine masters.⁴⁴⁰ While these are mentioned as gifts from the emperor, Ibn Hayyān also speaks of two fountains that came from Constantinople with Ahmed al-Yunani and Rabi the bishop.⁴⁴¹ It is unclear whether they were purchased by the Spanish themselves or sent by Constantine, but they were wondrous enough to warrant a detailed mention.

Whilst the extent of Byzantine contacts with the Umayyads in Arabic texts is limited to descriptions of ceremonial and artistic production, the inventory for the Cretan campaign of 949 reveals a further nugget of information, which tells us of the despatch of ‘three *ousiai* (an *ousia* is a ship’s complement of 108-110 men) on a mission to Spain’ with the eunuch Stephen.⁴⁴² This was perhaps the embassy of 949/50 mentioned by al-Makkarī based on Ibn Idhārī, during which the aforementioned pillars might have been delivered to Cordoba. A part of this embassy probably went north-west from Spain to the court of Otto I under the eunuch Salomon and left for Constantinople along with the Liudprand and some Umayyad legates on 25 August 949.⁴⁴³ The years 948/9 were also crucial for relations between Byzantium and the Fātimids, and everything indicates that the Empire was taking a close interest in developments in Sicily and North Africa. The *stratēgos* of Calabria was to be found in al-Mansūriyya in January 948, when al-Hasan al-Kalbī was appointed governor of Sicily. The same source goes on to mention that, after al-Hasan al-Kalbī reached Sicily, Byzantium sent across a monk with three years’ tribute money.⁴⁴⁴ This monk

⁴⁴⁰ Ruggles (1992), p. 247.

⁴⁴¹ Makkarī, vol. I, p. 227.

⁴⁴² *De cer.*, II.45, p. 664.

⁴⁴³ *Antapodosis*, VI.4, pp. 97-8.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibn al-Athīr, VIII, p. 471-4.

was probably part of the team despatched to Africa under John the *asekretis* with ‘3 chelandia pamphyla and 4 dromons, each of 220 men’, which was mentioned in the Cretan inventory, and which probably had both a diplomatic as well as surveillant purpose. The provisioning and despatching of the Cretan expedition has already been discussed in considerable detail.⁴⁴⁵ To the preparations for the campaign, we must add Byzantine efforts at building a friendship with the Umayyads and ensuring peace with the Fātimids at this crucial time.

After the failure of the attempt to retake Crete in 949, Byzantine contacts with the Umayyads intensified, leading to an experiment in unprecedented direct military coordination. The Umayyads had put considerable store in the success of Abū Yazīd’s rebellion against the Fātimids, which was finally extinguished in 947. The resurgent caliphate of al-Mansūr (946-53) in Ifrīqiya must have been worrying for both Constantine as well as ‘Abd ar-Rahmān III, who had been used to a Fātimid Caliphate which had struggled to command the loyalty of its subjects in both North Africa and Sicily. While al-Mansūr had been busy fighting Abū Yazīd, ‘Abd ar-Rahmān III had been supporting an insurrection in Tāhert (present day Tiaret) by the Miknāsa prince, Hamid ibn Yasal. This town was an important point on the Trans-Saharan trade route between Sijilmassa and Ifrīqiya, and al-Mansūr was able to return to it and reclaim it for the Fātimids.⁴⁴⁶ ‘Abd ar-Rahmān’s ambitions were grand, but it was very difficult to oust the Fātimids from their seat in Ifrīqiya, which was protected by a string of strongly fortified coastal redoubts. Any overland operation was made impossible due to the vast stretches of mountainous terrain between Morocco and coastal Tunisia, and fleets were stationed at all coastal towns loyal to the Fātimids, which could come to the regime’s aid if a city was besieged by sea. ‘Abd ar-Rahmān

⁴⁴⁵ See Chapter 2, pp. 88-93.

⁴⁴⁶ *Majālis*, p. 290.

therefore curtailed his ambitions to addressing only the securing of both sides of the Straits of Gibraltar.

It is quite clear that Constantine VII was not expending this amount of diplomatic energy on the Umayyads with the sole aim of cultural exchange. Neither was it a short-term measure concerned only with ensuring the smooth functioning of the Cretan campaign. With regard to the situation with the Fātimids in Sicily and North Africa, a pattern of cooperation emerged between the activities of the Umayyads and the Byzantines in the first half of the 950s. It has been suggested that the Byzantine offensive against Sicily in 951/2 was undertaken in coordination with the Umayyad campaign in North Africa, the latter culminating in the capture of Tangiers in 951.⁴⁴⁷ Our sources tell us that the Byzantines refused to return deserters from the Fātimid armies or send tribute payments. The agreement which had been reached in 948, and for which three years of tribute were sent in 949, was not renewed by Byzantium, in the hope that the engagement with the Umayyads off Tangiers would distract the Fātimid fleet for long enough for a fleet to be sent to Calabria. The *patrikiōs* Malakenos was sent to assist the *stratēgos* of the region, a certain Paschalios. A fleet was also despatched under Makroioannes, a person who is unattested in any other source.⁴⁴⁸ Fātimid sources see this attack on Sicily as a serious ‘planned invasion’, and it was certainly important enough for al-Mansūr and his son, the future al-Mu‘izz, to go personally to Tunis to oversee the preparation of the fleet.⁴⁴⁹ This expedition was seen as such a threat that seven thousand cavalry and three thousand five hundred infantry forces were sent by al-Mansūr in response, a huge number when considering that the number of cavalry forces sent for the conquest of Crete was approximately six thousand. It is no wonder that the Byzantine attack was timed to match the Umayyad attack on Tangiers – this was a very serious campaign

⁴⁴⁷ Sénac (1985), pp.51-2; Halm (1996), pp. 333-5; Brett (2007), pp. 239-40.

⁴⁴⁸ Skylitzes, pp. 266-7.

⁴⁴⁹ Idrīs, V, pp.16-19; *Kitāb al-Uyūn*, p. 225.

with perhaps as many resources allocated to it as the celebrated Cretan campaign. Unfortunately for Byzantium, the Fātimids got wind of the deployment a year before the planned date of the attack and concentrated all their efforts on repulsing it – strengthening the argument that the Byzantines and the Umayyads acted in concert. The force under the eunuch Faraj was ferried across to Byzantine territory by al-Hasan. The Fātimid forces were initially satisfied with sacking Byzantine towns and extracting payments, but al-Mansūr wanted to send out a stronger message and instructed Faraj to push further into Calabria.

After having received the reinforcements under Faraj on 2 July, al-Hasan united them under his command with his troops and crossed over from Messina to Reggio, only to find it had already been evacuated (perhaps upon the news of the arrival of the Fātimid fleet across the strait). He then pushed on to Gerace, besieged it, and then retreated after being given a tribute and hostages. Ibn al-Athīr tells us that al-Hasan then went in pursuit of the Byzantine forces, who retreated to Bari, leaving Calabria altogether.⁴⁵⁰ Instead of pursuing them further, the Sicilian troops besieged Cassano and extracted a tribute and hostages from it before heading back to winter in Messina. The presence of the Arabs was keenly felt in Calabria as the *Vita* of St. Sabas the Younger mentions that the inhabitants sought refuge in the mountains and in the caves.⁴⁵¹

By 9 Dhū'lhiġja (7 May) 952, al-Hasan and his troops appeared in front of Gerace again and this time there was a battle between his forces and the Byzantines, who had probably come replenished and with reinforcements from their headquarters in Bari. Our sources tell us that either Malakenos was killed, or that the *stratēgoi*, the leaders of the campaign, were captured alive.⁴⁵² The fact that the history of Ioannes Skylitzes picks up the outcome of this engagement,

⁴⁵⁰ Ibn al-Athīr, VIII, p. 473-4.

⁴⁵¹ Vasiliev (1968), pp. 367-368.

⁴⁵² *Chronicle of Cambridge*, p. 44; Skylitzes, pp. 266-7.

pre-occupied as it was by news reported and discussed in Constantinople, is a clear indication that the Byzantines had sent forces to effect a major push into Sicily. As it happened, the leaking of Byzantine plans meant that Byzantine forces fought their campaign in Calabria and were not even able to set foot across the straits of Messina. Al-Hasan went on to attack Petracucca and also attacked the church of St. Michael at Gargano, thereby entering Lombard territory.⁴⁵³ The Fātimid strategy was to not only attack Byzantium in both of its Italian territories, Calabria and Apulia, but also to send a signal to Capua-Benevento in the north that the Byzantines were unable to offer a defence against the might of the armies of Islam.

Sometime later in this year, Byzantium sent John Pilates as an envoy to al-Mansūriyya to negotiate peace and conclude a treaty. The anonymous Fātimid work, *Kitāb al-Uyūn*, mentions that the envoy came laden with gifts and was overwhelmed by the 'grandeur of Islam and the might of the sovereign'.⁴⁵⁴ The exact terms of this particular treaty are uncertain, but it heralded peace for the next three years and no doubt included an element of tribute paying. What was more humiliating for the Byzantines was the construction by al-Hasan of a mosque in Reggio, for the sole use of Muslims, who could use it as a place of prayer, while Christians were barred from it. Any attempt to destroy the mosque would incur the wrath of the Fātimids against the churches in Sicily and Ifrīqiya.⁴⁵⁵ There was another Byzantine embassy to al-Mansūriyya in 953, which was also the year of al-Mansūr's death.⁴⁵⁶ This embassy was almost certainly charged with bringing the tribute upon which the peace was contingent.

The first Byzantine offensive in the Central Mediterranean in the reign of Constantine VII had not only failed in its attempt to gain purchase on the island of Sicily, it had also been a colossal

⁴⁵³ *Annales Beneventani*, p. 175.

⁴⁵⁴ *Kitāb al-Uyūn*, p.224.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibn al-Athīr, VIII, p. 474.

⁴⁵⁶ *Kitāb al-Uyūn*, p. 224.

failure in which the Fātimids had not only prevented any fighting on Sicilian land or in Sicilian waters, but had also demonstrated their potential to attack not only Byzantine Calabria and Apulia, but also the Lombard territories of Benevento, which had hitherto been sheltered from any direct assault by the presence of the Byzantine military establishment in Southern Italy. The attempts to share intelligence with the Umayyads and to launch a formal attack at the time that the latter were trying to claim a foothold on the North African coast came to nought. The grave miscalculation was the failure to realise that the Fātimids had a pragmatic approach to the control of territory beyond their core string of ports extending along the coast of North Africa towards the Straits of Gibraltar and knew that they had little support among the Berber tribes in the west and little hope of defending ports beyond the Straits of Gibraltar by naval force alone. Tangiers was an easy prize for the Umayyads and the Fātimids concentrated whole-heartedly upon defending what they viewed as their core territory – the Tunisian coastline, Sicily, and the Mediterranean passage between the two. The usual Byzantine strategy employed with Islamic rulers, of suing for a time-bound peace backed by the payment of tribute, was put into motion very soon after the defeat and easily accepted by the Fātimids, for whom mounting the counter-offensive in 951/2 had been an expensive affair involving the construction of new ships and the despatching of a leading commander, in the person of Faraj, for an engagement which lasted over a year.

With such a large deployment of troops ending in another humiliating failure, the Byzantine end of the Byzantino-Umayyad alliance became more tentative. When ‘Abd ar-Rahmān III prepared for war with the Fātimids in the spring of 956, there was possibly talk of another allied action against the Fātimids. The incident which sparked everything off occurred in the summer of 955, when an Andalusian ship from Alexandria came across a courier boat from Palermo to al-Mahdiyya. The Andalusian ship took the courier boat’s rudder and stole dispatches meant for al-

Mu'izz, for fear that it would alert lurking privateers. Despite the hospitality shown to them when they reached the shores of Ifrīqiya, ships on the open seas were fair game for Fātimid privateers. When news of this reached al-Mahdiyya, Mu'izz ordered al-Hasan to pursue the ship from Sicily. As it had already reached Almeria, al-Hasan then proceeded to burn all ships at anchor there and plunder the arsenal and the city. In retaliation, Abd ar-Rahmān dispatched seventy ships under admiral Ghālib in spring 956, which sacked ports and villages on the North African coast from Sahel to Tabarqa. Before the retaliatory strike, Qādī an-Nu 'mān tells us an Andalusian embassy was sent to Byzantium, but we also know that Constantinople immediately sent an embassy to al-Mu'izz, suing for a renewal of the peace that had been agreed in 952. According to the Fātimid jurist, the caliph had turned down this offer of peace, contrary to the advice of his courtiers, on the basis that it God had enjoined them to fight against the Byzantines.⁴⁵⁷

If the Byzantines had been solicited to provide a distraction and keep the Sicilian forces occupied while the Umayyads attacked Fātimid ports, al-Mu'izz certainly suspected this and sent reinforcements to Palermo under 'Ammār, the brother of al-Hasan and also placed troops at all ports along the coast to Andalusia. The rejection of a truce in 955 must have been a catalyst for the mounting of another, larger, Byzantine offensive off the coast of Southern Italy, which was beginning to make its presence felt just as the Umayyads began their campaign.⁴⁵⁸ There is however, a tantalising piece of evidence in the account of the embassy of 958, that a truce, brokered by the same anonymous Byzantine envoy, who went to Ifrīkiya in 958, had been broken by the Byzantine side at some point in the past.⁴⁵⁹ It is possible that, after being rejected in 955, the Byzantines were successful in brokering a truce in 956, which was then broken by the Byzantine side when they saw an opportunity to act once the Fātimids were once again embroiled

⁴⁵⁷ *Majālis*, p. 166.

⁴⁵⁸ More details on this campaign can be found in Chapter 6, pp. 268-9.

⁴⁵⁹ *Majālis* p. 368.

in a war with the Umayyads. The envoy in 958 pleaded that the peace was broken against Constantinople's wishes, by independent actors who had later been punished. The Byzantine campaign began in 956 with the aim of expelling the Fātimids from Reggio and Basil, the *prōtokarabos*, led a Byzantine squadron to Reggio to destroy al-Mansūr's mosque.⁴⁶⁰ It is possible, if the account of the 958 embassy is to be believed, that this Basil jumped the gun, and acted before news of the truce reached, or of his own accord. Twelve Fātimid ships were then seized by Basil before heading to Mazara to wait for the ships bringing reinforcements from Ifrīqiya. In spring 957, al-Hasan's fleet was thrown back to the Sicilian coast before being destroyed by the Byzantines near Mazara. In the next year Marianos Argyros met a Fātimid fleet off the coast of Palermo, but the African ships were destroyed by a storm on 24 September 958.⁴⁶¹ This had been the most ambitious Byzantine campaign in Italy since the 870s, lasting three years and involving high-ranking officials, despatched from the centre to coordinate the campaign on the ground. Not once did the fighting move into Byzantine territory – in fact, none of the fighting took place on land at all and was restricted to the waters off Sicily. The Islamic establishment in Sicily had always been centred along the north and west of the island. The eastern seaboard, along which the key Roman and Byzantine settlements like Syracuse and Taormina had provided easy access from the Eastern Mediterranean, had faded into insignificance, as the northern and western cities of Palermo, Mazara, and Agrigento had been the first to be thoroughly colonised. Palermo was the administrative and military capital and the most densely populated city on the island, while Mazara, further west, was the island's key port. Both of these principal cities of Islamic Sicily had been menaced, and possibly blockaded by the Byzantines, in the campaign of 956-8.

Reinforcements from the mainland, which had been no successful overland in Calabria and

⁴⁶⁰ There is some ambiguity about whether this is a formal title or simply means the captain of a ship. It is only attested in three tenth-century sources and appears in none of the lists of Byzantine ranks and titles. *Taktika*, 19.8, pp. 506-7; *Theo. Cont.*, p. 400; *Vita S. Nilii Iunioris*, 105 B.

⁴⁶¹ On the career of Marianos Argyros in the West, see Chapter 6, pp. 268-9.

Apulia in the previous confrontation, had been no match for Byzantine naval power on the open seas.

An embassy from the Byzantines was received in al-Mahdiyya in 958, which had allegedly requested a ‘perpetual truce’.⁴⁶² The Byzantine naval victory led to a military stalemate – the Byzantines could not overpower the Islamic forces over land, if they chose to enter Southern Italy via Calabria, but the Fātimids could equally not countenance a repeat of the dangerous situation whereby their chief Sicilian cities were menaced by the Byzantine navy. Neither side had the available manpower to definitively overpower the other. The Byzantines might have desired to conquer Sicily in the long term, but before that, the defensive capabilities of the Calabrian coastline would have had to be enhanced to withstand the generations of warfare which the conquest of Sicily had entailed in the ninth century and would no doubt entail in the middle of the tenth century, when the Fātimids were still entrenched in North Africa.⁴⁶³ For the Fātimids, any territorial expansion into Southern Italy, apart from a defensive one across the Straits of Messina, was an expensive proposition and would be a distraction from their avowed aim of capturing Egypt and ruling the waterways of the Central Mediterranean. As mentioned above, even the closely guarded settlements in Tunisia were more or less left to their own devices in the later tenth-century, after the prize of Egypt had been won.

The negotiations for peace in 958 were a Byzantine masterstroke in allowing the Fātimids to save face after having dismissed outright the idea of coming to any settlement with the Christians in 955. According to the *Majālis*, the five-year truce was concluded with several humiliating terms for the Byzantines, including not only the resumption of annual payments of tribute, but also the

⁴⁶² *Kitāb al-Uyūn*, p. 225.

⁴⁶³ See Chapter 6, p. 270.

release of prisoners from the Eastern frontier, who were handed over to al-Mu‘izz.⁴⁶⁴ One can only imagine the bafflement of the prisoners who found themselves thus delivered to Ifrīqiya. For the Fātimids it was an opportunity to exercise the prerogative of caliphs to negotiate the release of prisoners of war and to gather intelligence about the Near East and the Syrian frontier from the former prisoners. The engagement off the coast of Sicily had coincided with the Byzantine Empire’s growing successes on its eastern frontier, with Sayf al-Dawla utterly pre-occupied with the conflict between his brother Nāsir al-Dawla and the Būyid Mu‘izz al-Dawla. Victories were accruing to the Byzantines almost effortlessly, beginning with Hadāth in 957 and Samosata in 958, and ending with Tarsos, Qurūs, and Harrān in 959.⁴⁶⁵ If humiliation was what the Byzantines were meant to have suffered due to the terms of the treaty, it was not a feeling shared by the Empire as it took the breathing space offered by peace with the Fātimids to strengthen fortifications in Calabria and to revisit other long-held aims in the Mediterranean. Just before his death, it was time for Constantine to revive the campaign that he had envisioned at the beginning of his reign, the conquest of Crete.

Conclusion

We have seen how Byzantine relations with the Umayyads and Fātimids in the reign of Constantine VII were conducted in multiple ways. The motives for contact need to be examined in further detail to ascertain the strategic and ideological imperatives that drove Byzantium. These strategies can be divided into short and long-term objectives. The first short term reason for seeking friendship with the Umayyads was the downfall of Hugh of Provence and the elevation of Berengar II to the Kingdom of Italy with the help of Otto I.⁴⁶⁶ Hugh had been a steadfast ally of Byzantium and had kept both the Magyars and the Ottonians out of Byzantine Italy, while also

⁴⁶⁴ *Majālis*, p. 370.

⁴⁶⁵ See Chapter 2, pp. 113-8.

⁴⁶⁶ See Chapters 4 and 6, pp. 181-3, 265, 271.

not interfering with the Byzantine interests in the maritime city states of Italy.⁴⁶⁷ Byzantium viewed the rise of Ottonian Francia with growing alarm, and was pragmatic about making friendly overtures towards an Islamic State which followed an actively hostile policy towards the Ottonians. As demonstrated above, the Umayyads already controlled the eastern seaboard of the Iberian Peninsula and the North African coastline to the south of the Straits of Gibraltar. Secondly, the Byzantines also knew that the Umayyads and the Fātimids were bitter rivals in the central and western Maghreb, and that friendly relations with the latter would have been impossible to contemplate as long as Sicily was under Fātimid rule.

It has been asserted that the main reason for friendly relations between Byzantium and the Umayyads was Constantine's programme for the recovery of Crete.⁴⁶⁸ With Egypt increasingly pre-occupied with internal strife, the Cretan campaign was revived by Constantine in the very first years of his reign, but unlike in the time of Theophilos, when the rebels in Crete could still be identified as Andalusian, by the beginning of the tenth century, the rebels were closely associated with the Syria, as the sack of Thessaloniki by Leo of Tripoli demonstrated in 904.⁴⁶⁹ The Cretan campaign, however, did utilise a large proportion of the Byzantine imperial fleet – with only ten *ousiai* (approximately eleven hundred men) guarding Calabria, Dyrrachion, and Dalmatia out of the one hundred and fifty *ousiai* at the disposal of the state. This was a very thinly spread out defence for Byzantine Southern Italy. Furthermore, the campaign had probably been planned when the Sicilian government was in disarray due to rebellions, but when the campaign was actually executed, al-Hasan al-Kalbī had already restored order in Sicily. Therefore, Byzantium's diplomatic relations with the Umayyads began in 946/7, when Sicily was still weak, but with the arrival of Hasan al-Kalbī, a veteran supporter of the Fātimid caliphs who had

⁴⁶⁷ See Chapter 6, pp. 257-9.

⁴⁶⁸ Sénac (1985), p. 51.

⁴⁶⁹ John Kaminiates, pp. 20, 24.

experience commanding a fleet as governor of Tunis, in 948/9, it became necessary to also sue for peace with him, hence the payment of peace money for three years in 949.⁴⁷⁰ The purpose of the three ships sent on a mission to the Umayyads in 949 under the eunuch Stephen might have had been primarily diplomatic, perhaps in order to carry the one hundred and forty columns which we know Constantine sent for the decoration of Madīnat az-Zahrā'. It is also possible that they were sent to the Western Mediterranean to fend off any attempt by the Fātimids to attack Byzantine Italy while the Empire's ships were engaged in Crete.

If Crete was not the primary reason for the start of the Byzantine engagement with the Umayyads, it was almost certainly one of the main reasons behind the cooling off of the military relationship circa 957-9. The victories on the Empire's eastern frontier meant that the threat of reinforcements from Syria coming to the aid of the Cretans was becoming highly unlikely. The experience of 949 had shown that a large besieging force was required with enough supplies for a siege long enough to bring about either surrender or military victory. It is also from Qādī an-Nu'mān that we know that the five-year truce was repudiated when a ship full of Cretan notables arrived in al-Mahdiyya after the Byzantine fleet arrived in Khandaq in the summer of 960. We are told that once the caliph was assured that the Cretans would recognise him as their leader, he tried to organise a joint campaign of the Fātimid and Egyptian fleets, which was scheduled to set off from the port of Ptolemais on 20 May 961⁴⁷¹. Before they could set off, news came that the island had been lost in March 961.

Byzantium's strategic interests were not the only ones that guided its alliance with the Spanish Umayyads. This relationship has to be seen in light of Constantine's interest in spreading

⁴⁷⁰ See above, p. 142.

⁴⁷¹ *Majālis*, pp. 442-6.

Byzantine cultural influence through the very unusual gifts which were sent to the ‘Abd ar-Rahmān’s court. The objects to be singled out for particular mention are the manuscripts of Dioscorides and Orosius and the decorative elements for the Madīnat az-Zahrā’. In extant inventories of presents sent by the Byzantine court to the ‘Abbāsīd court or to the Fātimīd court, there is no mention of manuscripts.⁴⁷² Although manuscripts were not recorded as gifts from the Byzantine world, there was a sharp spike in demand for ancient Greek texts, especially scientific and philosophical ones, in the ‘Abbāsīd realm from as early as the mid eighth century, which led to the professionalisation of ateliers skilled in the copying and translating of Greek manuscripts⁴⁷³. With the gifts of the botanical treatise of Dioscorides and the universal history of Orosius, Byzantium was fulfilling the Umayyad desire to emulate the contemporary attributes of caliphs in the East. The sending of a Latin manuscript is particularly strange, but can be seen as an attempt by Constantine to remind the court of ‘Abd ar-Rahmān III of the Roman antecedents of his imperium. Despite its anti-pagan and pro-Christian stance, Orosius’s *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII* is essentially also a historical geography of the Romans and an account of the amelioration of the fortunes of the Romans once paganism was denounced, both of which would chime in with Constantine’s attempt to outline both his ancestry and his orthodoxy – and debunk the claims of Otto and the Franks before him. The sending of pillars and decorative elements for the new capital of Madīnat az-Zahrā’ and the sending of mosaicists to decorate the Great Mosque in Cordoba in the reign of al-Hakam II in 962 was Byzantium’s attempt to provide the Umayyads with symbols of their past in Syria, which were no longer accessible as there were no official contacts with the ‘Abbāsīd realms.⁴⁷⁴ The continued cultural contacts between the Umayyads and the Byzantines in the reign of Romanos II could also indicate that the strategic partnership was still valued by both sides. The Umayyads were without either the inclination or the means to

⁴⁷² See the gifts sent by Romanos I to Caliph ar-Rādī in Ibn al-Zubayr, pp. 99-102.

⁴⁷³ Gutas (1998), pp. 75-106.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibn Idhārī, II, p. 237.

cause harm to Byzantine interests in Italy, so the fact that they were an Islamic power did not stand in the way of friendly relations. The relations themselves are testimony to the pragmatism at the heart of the imperial ideology in the reign of Constantine VII, a feature that would be eroded under the triumphalist Christianity of Nikephoros II Phokas.

Finally, an attempt must be made to understand all three states in light of their interests in access to the Mediterranean for trade and communications. Both al-Andalus and the Ifrīqiya depended entirely on the Mediterranean trade as the conduit of their economies. With the accession of ‘Abd ar-Rahmān III and the slow consolidation of Umayyad control over the territories of southern Spain in the 920s and 930s, an attempt was made to increase the number of ports on the eastern coast of the Iberian Peninsula and to accelerate shipbuilding – all the agreements made with the Kingdom of Italy, Amalfi and Sardinia revolved around safe passage for maritime trade. Conflict between the Umayyads and the Fātimids stemmed mainly from competition over the Trans-Saharan trade routes – the Umayyads were, on the whole, satisfied with securing the Straits of Gibraltar with Tangiers and Ceuta. Neither the Fātimids nor the Umayyads could ever completely control access to the precious commodities and slaves emanating from the Trans-Saharan routes, this had to be negotiated through the Berber federations who controlled each zone. Despite ‘Abd ar-Rahmān’s protestations against the heretical beliefs of the Fātimids, he did not try to export the mainstream Malikī Sunnī beliefs prevalent in al-Andalus to the Berbers, who had strong Khārijite elements amongst them. The Fātimid foreign policy after the defeat of Abū Yazīd was also almost entirely carried out on the sea, with the only overland campaign being that of the general Jawhar, which attacked Fez and Sijilmasa in 958, though no attempt was made to install a Fātimid governor in either place.⁴⁷⁵ The territories of the Western Maghreb were so vast that it would have required more than the manpower at the disposal of either caliph to

⁴⁷⁵ *Majālis*, pp. 385-6, 458.

hold any significant territory outright. Both regimes developed a similar imagery of seafaring, with ships being likened to camels in the work of Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi, a poet at the Umayyad court, or to horses in the work of Ibn Hāni, al-Mu‘izz’s favoured court poet.⁴⁷⁶ The ease of travelling to Sicily by ship from the Fātimid fleet’s base in Tunis also meant that a large fleet did not have to be stationed off the island itself, where it could have fallen into the hands of rebels or been destroyed by the enemy.

Byzantine policy under Constantine VII also turned towards the Mediterranean, with the revival of both the campaigns to take Crete back from the Arabs who had held it for over a century and to secure Byzantine Southern Italy from attacks from Sicily and the North. With the ultimate capture of Crete just after Constantine’s death, Byzantium was able to have uninterrupted access to the north-eastern half of the Mediterranean, from Asia Minor to Greece and the Peloponnesus, the Dalmatian coastline and the access to the Adriatic Sea, and finally to the ports of Apulia, namely to the entire extent of its administered territories. The vigorous Byzantine diplomatic engagements with the Umayyads and the Fātimids in the reign of Constantine VII allowed the Empire to carry out this policy of Mediterranean unification, which would go on to be adopted whole-heartedly by Nikephoros II Phokas, both in his role as chief military advisor to Romanos II and as Byzantine Emperor.

⁴⁷⁶ Alghani (2007), pp. 124-5.

Chapter 4. The Ottonians: a Rival Empire in the West

The heartland of the Ottonian *Reich*, based on the Saxon realm east of the River Elbe and north of the River Main was largely unfamiliar to Constantinople. The rise of the Saxon clan of the Liudolfings as the rulers of East Francia under Henry I in 918 went unnoticed in Byzantium. That this was not just a lacuna in Byzantine sources, as is confirmed by the absolute lack of any mention of a relationship between any Frankish kingdom north of the Alps and Byzantium between the embassies to Arnulf the Corinthian and Louis III between 899 and 901, and the embassy to the court of Otto I in 945. This first embassy to a Saxon court is mentioned in all the major eleventh century annals of the East Frankish world, with two of them, the *Annales Quedlinburgenses* and the *Annales Hildesheimenses*, implying the embassy in 945 was the ‘first’ Byzantine embassy, with that sent in 949 being clearly designated the ‘second’ embassy.⁴⁷⁷ Why was there this sudden interest in the Saxons at the beginning of Constantine VII’s personal reign? The answer to this question can undoubtedly be found in Saxon ambitions beyond the Frankish realms north of the Alps and in their policy towards the Magyars. However, in order to examine this new relationship established by Constantine, it is essential to examine what was the basis of Saxon power and also its aims and limitations.

Ever since the Carolingian advance into Italy in the mid eighth century, the Frankish world had been drawn into the Byzantine field of vision. The limited presence of the Byzantines in Southern Italy and the establishment of several Slavic, Turkic, and Germanic peoples between Byzantium and the Carolingian heartland ensured that the contact between the Byzantines and the Franks

⁴⁷⁷ AQ/AH, p. 56.

was largely confined to the disputed arena of Italy, where the Franks had retained control from the Alps in the north to the frontiers of the Lombard principalities of Capua-Benevento and Salerno in the south. Frankish control over territories in Italy was in no way hegemonic or seamless, it was largely based on the cooperation of the different local dynasties which retained effective day-to-day control from the Papal States to Tuscany and Spoleto. The ruling formations of Italy will be discussed in greater detail later, but it is essential to stress the importance of Frankish rulers in the Kingdom of Italy to Byzantine foreign policy in the early tenth century. As mentioned above, the last known embassies to Frankish courts to the north of the Alps were to the courts of Arnulf of Carinthia and Louis III, the kings of East and West Francia respectively, when they both laid claim to the Kingdom of Italy.⁴⁷⁸

The inability of the kings of either East or West Francia to hold the Kingdom of Italy, while safeguarding their reign in the core territories, led to a situation in which local Frankish potentates ruled independently, starting with Berengar I, Margrave of Friuli. Between 925 and 945, the Byzantine Empire's most favoured Frankish client was Hugh, Duke of Provence and King of Italy. His deposition by Berengar II, Margrave of Ivrea, with the backing of Otto I, forms the context within which Byzantium looked anew at the transalpine Frankish realm and, in particular, resumed regular contact with the most influential and ambitious Frankish and Christian power to the north – the Ottonians. Relations between Byzantium and the Ottonian court in the personal reign of Constantine VII are difficult to piece together from the extant sources, but the lack of information masks an acceleration of contacts before the two powers came face to face in Italy in the 960s. This aspect of Byzantine foreign policy in the 940s and 950s is little understood, and answers must be sought in the historical record of the period, in understanding the political organisation and external ambitions of the Ottonians, and in mapping

⁴⁷⁸ *Annales Fuldenses*, pp. 412-3.

the overlapping spheres of interest between Byzantium and the East Francia. This chapter will examine these core questions before attempting a reconstruction of Byzantine-Ottonian relations in years of Constantine VII's personal reign and offering an analysis of the scope and character of the diplomatic contacts between the two powers.

4.1 Problems of Historiography

Despite difficulties of interpretation, the principal events in the reign of Otto I are well documented by a variety of historical sources. The events deemed noteworthy however, were largely confined to conflicts, internal or on the eastern and western frontiers, and the means by which they were resolved by Otto or his supporters. According to the compilers of annals and the writers of histories, the greatest attributes of Otto I as king, and then emperor, were his ability to demand obedience from regional potentates within his realm and tribute-paying clients beyond, his vigorous and successful defence of the kingdom against Slavs, Danes, and Hungarians, and, increasingly, his dedication to spreading the Christian faith to the tribes of the east through the establishment of missionary ecclesiastical foundations along the frontier and through missions to pagan Slavic leaders. Expeditions towards the River Oder or into Italy were, for the most part, treated as interventions for the protection of the faith (Italy) or for the safeguarding of the frontiers of Saxony and the core duchies of East Francia. Relations with Byzantium did not fit neatly into any of these categories of special interest and were largely ignored.

Annals, with limited authorial intervention, are the first port of call when reconstructing the relations with the Byzantines and provide brief notices of embassies. These texts burst onto the scene in Saxony in the second half of the tenth century. Derived from Easter tables, the annalist chronicles of the west did not grow out of an effort to create universal, ancient, biblical, or

patristic history.⁴⁷⁹ The Saxon annals drew upon the more commonly found historical material for the early and high Middle Ages: annals, necrologies, and hagiography. The annalistic tradition continued into later centuries with the mid eleventh century *Annales Quedlinburgenses* and the mid twelfth century *Annales Hildesheimensis* being of primary importance for information about our period. As already discussed, they relied for their information on digests of the deeds of emperors and important kinsmen, which reached the prominent German monasteries as a matter of course – either through court circulars or through the accounts of the bishops and abbots who attended the imperial court on festival days, councils, and elections. The annals themselves were derived from the kings' lists and date lists that were maintained by all the leading monasteries. This is particularly apparent in annals that go back far before the period of writing. In both the Quedlinburg annals (that goes back to Creation) and the Hildesheim annals, entries for a number of years consist purely of the deaths of members of prominent families. The inclusion of two Byzantine embassies to the court of Otto I, in 945 and 949, and not those after, might indicate these first embassies were novel enough, and were flattering enough to Ottonian ambitions, that official news of their arrival reached monasteries across Saxony. The absence of notices for the 950s must not be construed as evidence for the end of contacts. Other historical sources confirm that there were later embassies, and even negotiations for a marital alliance between the two courts, though these are confined to sparse notices that do not provide much further context.

To the sparse notices in monastic annals might be added the more detailed coverage of Saxon rule in a series of discursive histories. These were written after the dynasty had established both, its primacy within its own immediate family and clan as well as its ability to deal effectively and decisively with its most formidable external enemies, the Magyars. Here we find greater authorial

⁴⁷⁹Hay (1977), p. 38.

intervention, with fleshed out narratives and an imperative to understand and explain events. Written around 958, Liudprand of Cremona's *Antapodosis* or 'Recompense', the coverage of which ends in 950, is the earliest available history that deals comprehensively with the rise and deeds of both Henry I and Otto I. The second history, the *Res Gestae Saxonicae* of the Saxon monk Widukind, of the monastery of Corvey, was written circa 967/8, well after Otto I's second *adventus* into Italy and his imperial coronation by John XII in February 962. The last major work to focus on the reigns of Henry I and Otto I was the *Chronicon* of Thietmar, Bishop of Merseburg, which was written from 1012, in the reign of the last of the Ottonians, Henry II. All three wrote from positions of authority; Liudprand and Thietmar were bishops, while Widukind was a monk in the very powerful Saxon abbey of Corvey. His work was dedicated to Matilda, the daughter of Otto I and the only powerful Liudolfing north of the Italian Alps at the time of writing. Thietmar and Widukind were firmly entrenched in the ecclesiastical system that provided the legitimisers of Saxon rule. Liudprand, a career bureaucrat hailing from Pavia, was a relative newcomer to the Ottonian fold and his writing reflects this.

These fuller historical sources provide the necessary material for understanding Ottonian rule in the period. They analyse as well as describe key events, and give the reader an insight into the mentalities of lay and ecclesiastic elite. However, Byzantium remains beyond the horizon of their coverage. The only author we could expect to have covered relations with Constantinople would have been Liudprand. Liudprand of Cremona wrote all three of his extant works while he was attached to the court of Otto I, commencing with the *Antapodosis* in 958, followed by the *Liber de rebus Gestis Ottonis* after 963 and then the *Relatio de Legatione Constantinopolitana* a short while before his death in 972. It was while working for Berengar that he was sent to Constantinople in 949. Although Otto I had supported Berengar II as his agent in the Lombard territories, the latter's election to the kingship in November 950 changed the political landscape. Through a marriage

between Lothair II's widow Adelheid and his son and co-king Adalbert, Berengar had hoped to connect his family more strongly to the royal line of Lombardy, but Adelheid escaped first to Canossa and went on to marry Otto himself. At some point during this time Liudprand went over to Otto and provided his services to the Saxon king, for which he was rewarded with the position of Bishop of Cremona in 961. The reason we know so much about Liudprand is that he tells us about his career and early life himself in *Antapodosis*, the purpose of which, he tells us is to 'reveal, declare and stigmatise' Berengar II and his wife Willa.⁴⁸⁰ The work, however, is a history of 'Europe' beginning 892-93, and the scene is set in the fifth chapter of the first book with a listing of the rulers/overlords of Byzantium, Bulgaria, Western and Eastern Francia, Moravia and Italy and the name of the presiding Pope. This sort of listing is reminiscent of the rubric that heads the notices in Theophanes and hints at the sort of source material he might have been using when this section was being composed.⁴⁸¹ It was definitely not based on information from witnesses, as claimed by the author.⁴⁸²

Books I to III are clearly based on earlier sources, as the coverage is so broad. In these books, Liudprand combines three distinct historical narratives of major component parts of the Christian world; those of Lombard Italy from the death of Charles the Bald, of the Macedonian rulers of Byzantium from the accession of Basil I (utilising a *psogos* of the dynasty as well as legends and hearsay), papal history from the papacy of Formosus, and the history of Western Francia. The Hungarian interventions (both raids and mercenary activity) in both Saxony and Italy feature heavily in Book II as do the Aghlābid Arab attacks on Italy and the end of Berengar I's reign. Book III deals with the circumstances that led to the coming to power of Hugh of

⁴⁸⁰ *Antapodosis*, III.1, p. 68.

⁴⁸¹ *Antapodosis*, I.5, pp. 7-8.

⁴⁸² *Antapodosis*, IV.1, p. 97.

Arles, the rise of Romanos I Lekapenos to power, and the Byzantine conflict with Symeon of Bulgaria.

From Book IV onwards, Liudprand could draw on his own personal knowledge, but while this might be the case for chapters 1 to 14, chapters 15 to 35 comprise a straightforward history of Otto I's reign, beginning with a chapter on Henry I's death and the children he left behind.⁴⁸³ Chapter 16 contains an eulogy of Henry I, which also acts as a paean to Otto I, and then commences with a history of Otto's reign, which ends with the marriage of Otto's son Liudolf to the daughter of Hermann, Duke of Swabia.⁴⁸⁴ The practice of beginning the history of the ruler's deeds with a poem can also be seen in the *Chronicon* of Thietmar of Merseberg. This book deals mainly with internal threats to the reign, especially from his brother, Henry, Duke of Bavaria. Thus Liudprand was either practicing his hand at the prevalent form of Saxon history writing, or was rehashing a pre-existing source to fit into his book of histories.

In Book V, Liudprand returns to his avowed aim for the *Antapodosis*, documenting the rise of Berengar II as the de facto King of Italy. The only information that does not deal with Hugh of Arles and Berengar II, is about the downfall of Romanos I, followed by that of his sons, Stephen and Constantine, which he possibly received from Bishop Sigefred, Hugh's envoy who was present in Constantinople at the time. Book VI consists purely as an account of Liudprand's embassy to Constantinople on behalf of Berengar in 949 and is entirely separate from the previous narrative. Despite his avowed aim of exposing the tyranny of Berengar, the history stops well short of his ultimate downfall at Otto's hands, a subject perhaps too sensitive to discuss even in his *Historia Ottonis*.

⁴⁸³ *Antapodosis*, IV.15, pp. 105-6.

⁴⁸⁴ *Antapodosis*, IV.16, pp. 106-7.

Liudprand's personal *antapodosis*, outlined at the beginning of Book III, forms only a small part of his work of the same name. This is a composite work and a curious history of different kings and princes. Much has been made of the fact that Fraxinetum was the first subject discussed in the work and about how this ties in with the anti-Andalus feelings expressed in both the life of John of Gorze and Hroswitha of Gandersheim's poem *Pelagius*.⁴⁸⁵ However, while many themes are reflected in the *Antapodosis*, its main utility lies in the fact that it is not a well organised whole, but rather, it captures some of the prevailing issues of his time – the attacks on the Christian West from the Arabs and the Hungarians, the conflict for power in Italy, and the rise of Ottonian Saxony. The Byzantine information is more difficult to reconcile with the themes in the book. It can be seen as an attempt by Liudprand to stand out amongst the historians of the Ottonian Reich, by emphasising his experience of Byzantium and his understanding of its palace politics and imperial rituals. The fact that he was sent to Constantinople again in 969, this time as Otto I's ambassador, shows that his knowledge was valued. The *Antapodosis* was copied and used in Lotharingia, Bavaria, and Austria, but not in Italy, where its staunchly pro-Ottonian view might not have been wholly acceptable.

The other two of Liudprand's works, the *Historia Ottonis* and the *Legatio* show a shift in the axis of Liudprand's life, from Italy to Saxony, and also a shift in attitudes. The former is an apologia for Otto I's intervention in Rome against Pope John XII and tries to provide justification for his actions. This time, the rogue Pope is portrayed as sending envoys to Byzantium and the Magyars to form a league against Otto. Liudprand justifies the deposition of John XII's successor Benedict V in favour of Otto's candidate Leo VII. The theme of the untrustworthy Byzantines is, of course, brought to fruition in the *Legatio*, where the splendours of palace ceremonial are

⁴⁸⁵Leyser (1994), pp. 125-142.

roundly mocked, and everyone from Emperor Nikephoros II to the local Greek bishops at Leukas are deemed inhospitable and untrustworthy. From the sophisticated courts of Italy and Constantinople, to the peripatetic, evolving court of the Saxons, Liudprand had made a personal journey that was manifest in his works. It is therefore a shame that the only Frankish historian to have a conception of Christian Europe, which extended to Byzantium, was silent on nearly two decades of relations between his first embassy in 949, and the second in 968.

While much is known about Liudprand, through his own words, considerably less is known about Widukind, monk of the powerful abbey at Corvey. He was born around 925, entered the abbey of Corvey around 940, his *Res Gestae Saxonicae* ends in 967/8 and he died soon after 973. The work, dedicated to Abbess Mathilda of Quedlinburg (who had assumed the post in 966) is divided into three books. The first deals with the origins of the Saxons, the early relations with the Franks, the early history of the Liudolfing lineage and the rise to power of Henry I. The second book deals with the reign of Otto I, till the death of his first wife Edith in 946. The Third book continues the story until the death of the rebel count Wichmann the Younger, though B and C versions of the work continue till the death of Otto. The dedicatee, Mathilda, was Otto's daughter and the only Liudolfing left to the north of the Alps at the time that the work was written.

Though little is known of Widukind himself, considerably more is known of Corvey Abbey through imperial and royal mandates and *diplomata* from the second quarter of the ninth century. Its importance in the ever changing political landscape of the ninth century was as a large, landholding religious foundation on the borders between East and West Francia, and as a bulwark between the rest of Francia and the Viking raiders. It enjoyed exemption from military service except for a period of particularly bad raids in 887, when the noble vassals were called up

by Charles III. In Widukind's own lifetime, this exemption was reinstated by Otto I in 940, when the abbot was also granted a *burgbann* or rights over the dependants of both its own vassals and other nobles and could compel them to repair his fortress and take shelter there.⁴⁸⁶

Thus, Widukind's *gesta* was written in the rich and well-connected abbey of Corvey and took for its subject matter, the history of the Saxons. It is an inside account that takes us into the heart of Saxon politics. The *Res Gestae* of Widukind of Corvey is primarily a book about war and its use as an instrument of maintaining power by the Ottonian rulers. Battles with Slavs, Danes and Moravians are outlined, but the best description is that of the Battle of Lech in 954/55.⁴⁸⁷ This is the only detailed account of the movements of the Ottonian army in battle and will be dealt with in greater detail below. Widukind of Corvey's work was no doubt used as a basis for future works like the *Chronicon* of Thietmar of Merseberg, but it was also different from other works like the *Gesta Ottonis* of Hroswitha of Gandersheim, that portrayed Otto as elected by God and compares his reign to that of David. Widukind is interested in far more secular affairs. It has rightly been said that the basic unit of society for Widukind is the high ranking individual.⁴⁸⁸ He was not interested in institutions, governance or local affairs. His focus was on the deeds of the powerful Saxon vassals and their actions against the 'barbarians' and Arabs. He was not interested in matters of the court (apart from the description of Otto I's election), diplomacy, or relations with non-belligose outsiders. The only details we find about embassies to Otto's court are in the generic description of Roman, Byzantine and Arab legations to congratulate him on his victory against the Hungarians.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁶ Leyser (1981), p. 82-3.

⁴⁸⁷ Widukind, III.44, 46, pp. 123-5, 126-8.

⁴⁸⁸ Sverre Bagge (2002), pp. 93-94

⁴⁸⁹ Widukind, III.56, p. 135.

While Liudprand and Widukind were writing about Otto I, the second of the Saxon line, Thietmar was writing about the emperor who would prove to be the last of the Saxon dynasty. Thietmar was the third son of Siegfried, Count of Walbeck and was born on 25 July 975, in the heart of Saxony. His family was very well connected with the emperors and Otto III intervened personally to secure his mother Cunegunde's rights against her brother-in-law Liuthar.⁴⁹⁰ His brother, Henry, accompanied Henry II on campaign in 1004. Thietmar was thus not only a part of the Saxon intelligentsia, but also a high ranking member of the nobility, who studied in three of the most important sites of Saxon power.

His *Chronicon* can easily be divided into two, the first part being the history of the Saxons and the second being a *res gestae* of the life of the contemporary Emperor Henry II. The first four books pertain to the reigns of the first four Saxon rulers (Henry I, Otto I, Otto II and Otto III), while the last four to the reign of Henry II. For the purposes of this study, only Book II, which deals with the history of the reign of Otto I, will be looked at in some detail. Book I and Book II are also largely derived from Widukind of Corvey's account, but there are some significant differences in their approach and point of view.

In the prologue to Book II, Thietmar lists Otto I's virtues and, in doing so, separates himself from Widukind.⁴⁹¹ It is with 'divine aid' that Otto defeated the many men who opposed his rule. According to Thietmar, Otto was the greatest patron of the church since Charlemagne, and his greatest achievements were the defeat of Berengar II and his coronation in Rome. Thietmar also characterised him as a 'friend of peace' who 'greatly suppressed warfare' and 'pacified' the western enemies. These were not virtues lauded by Widukind, for whom leadership in battle was

⁴⁹⁰ Thietmar, IV.17, pp. 150-2.

⁴⁹¹ Thietmar, II. Prologue, pp. 36-8.

a hallmark of the Saxon kings. However, without much in the way of a secular civil and military administration, Otto certainly had to *make peace* with those who had rebelled against him like Henry, Duke of Bavaria, and his son Liudolf. Peace was to become a growing theme in Western Frankia with the Peace of God movements beginning in the late tenth century, and it is possible that there are echoes of this in this prologue. After the prologue, Thietmar's concerns rarely rest upon the internal plots against Otto, which form such a large proportion of Widukind's narrative. There is a short passage on all the adversities that Otto faced from the Slavs, the Hungarians and his half-brother Thankmar.⁴⁹² The rebellion of Henry, Duke of Bavaria, and Liudolf, as well as the Battle of Lech and the Wichmann revolt are swiftly dealt with in chapters six to ten and twelve. These incidents combined formed over two-thirds of Widukind's narrative.

While he was at Magdeburg, he must have had access to the records or a history of the bishopric. We have no fewer than four references to the endowment of Madgeburg and the appointment of archbishops.⁴⁹³ He was also interested in the discharge of kingly power. He mentions that Otto was making his way through Franconia, 'fulfilling his office as ruler' when he heard of Liudolf's rebellion.⁴⁹⁴ In his account of the days leading up to the death of Otto I, he provides a detailed itinerary of the emperor's movements from Palm Sunday to Pentecost in 973. He was in Magdeburg for Palm Sunday (16 March), in Quedlinburg for Easter (23 March, when he was attended by a host of foreign legations), in Merseburg for the Feast of the Ascension (1 May) and then on to Memleben the Tuesday before Pentecost, where he died on 5 May. The royal itinerary was therefore set between the sees most closely linked to the Saxon family and the ruler and his court travelled to the most prominent of them during the major feasts. If this was meant to demonstrate the association between the royal family and the church in Saxon Germany,

⁴⁹² Thietmar, II. 2, pp. 38-40.

⁴⁹³ Thietmar, II. 3, 16, 17, 18, 22, pp. 40-2, 56-60, 64.

⁴⁹⁴ Thietmar, II. 6, pp. 44-6.

Thietmar does not seem to have thought that the political authorities had the right to intervene in matters concerning the Papacy. He criticised Otto I for deposing Benedict V as the Pope ‘may be judged by none but God’⁴⁹⁵, an incident that must have been controversial enough when it occurred to necessitate Liudprand’s defence of Otto. Not leaving it at that, Thietmar went on to blame the deposition for the ‘savage death that pursued the emperor’s army’ as well as the collapse of the church of Halberstadt in 965. It is difficult to know whether this admonition of the interference of political authority in sacral matters was derived from texts from the tenth century or whether it served as a gentle reminder Henry II, who was heavily involved in Italian politics. Thietmar’s *Chronicon*, therefore, written as it was long after the end of Otto I’s rule, was able to scrutinise his actions more closely than either Liudprand or Widukind, who were both writing during or immediately after the reign. By the second decade of the eleventh century, attributes of Germanic rulership in East Francia had changed fundamentally. The king/ emperor was no longer the leading nobleman trying to exert his influence over other legitimate nobles, but a leader of the Christian world, governing subjects in Italy and the east who were not part of the East Frankish social or political world.

In addition to annals and histories, there are some *diplomata* issued in the name of Otto I, which help us trace the movements of the court, changes to titulature, and the mechanisms of administration, all vital for understanding the Ottonian *reich*. In particular, diversions from usual itineraries and variations in royal titles are two of the most reliable ways of mapping operational concerns over a defined period of time. Although no foreign letters can be found amongst the

⁴⁹⁵ Thietmar, II. 28, pp. 72-4.

diplomata, concerned as they were with the granting and confirmation of land and revenue rights, they become singularly important in establishing what Otto was doing in Italy 951/2.⁴⁹⁶

To the corpus of information about the Otto's realm, one can add the geography/travelogue of Ibrāhīm ibn Ya'qūb, who travelled from Umayyad Spain to Prague and Krakow, stopping at Mainz and Magdeburg (among others) along the way.⁴⁹⁷ This is one of the few narrative sources, which provides startling insights into trading connections between East Francia and the, mainly Islamic, trade-routes from Spain and North Africa to Egypt and the Indies as well as more northern routes which led Ibn Ya'qūb to recognise a Samanid dirham in the marketplace in Mainz. There may have been hundreds of them there. Ibn Ya'qūb provides market information about Mainz, indicating that there was an established clientele for imported goods. Taken together with the information that we have about Liudprand's travelling companion in 949 – a certain Liutefred, a merchant from Mainz and envoy on behalf of Otto I – it would seem that Franks who engaged in trade, most likely in high value items, had access to the court and the king himself. Ibn Ya'qūb's own mission in Central and Eastern Europe is unclear, but it is possible that he was a trader in high value goods, an official Umayyad envoy, or both, as he is known to have witnessed some aspects of Otto's court ceremonial in Magdeburg and had the opportunity to speak to some Bulgarian envoys, and Otto himself (if the remark is to be believed), while he was in attendance.⁴⁹⁸ Of equal significance is the fact that Ibn Ya'qūb had been able to travel to Slav territories from Schleswig, to Prague, and Krakow, and furnished an account of the settlements, peoples, and customs he found there, thus offering a view into the eastern frontier of Otto's realm, with which the king was preoccupied for the entirety of his reign.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁶ Müller-Mertens (1980), pp. 265-83 charts routes and distances in handy tables.

⁴⁹⁷ *EP*: 'Ibrāhīm b. Ya'kūb'; Hereafter, Ibn Ya'qūb.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibn Ya'qūb, p. 404.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibn Ya'qūb, pp. 154-84, 388, 404.

Byzantine Sources

Byzantine sources add little to our knowledge of relations between the two realms during the reign of Constantine VII. The *De Administrando Imperio*, mentions Otto by name, as the ‘*megalōi rhēgi Phrangias*’, in the chapter dealing with different Croat groupings in Dalmatia.⁵⁰⁰ The *DAI* also explains the imperial position on the Franks, who were seen as worthy of marriage with members of the imperial family.⁵⁰¹ Elsewhere, he is mentioned as the ‘emperor of the Franks’ by Skylitzes, but he is only mentioned personally in the context of the victory over the Hungarians at Lechfeld in 955 and of the deposition of Pope John XII in 964.⁵⁰² It is unsurprising that Skylitzes called Otto the ‘emperor of the Franks’, as he was writing long after Otto’s coronation in Rome in 962, but it might be of some interest that Otto, or his successors, are only mentioned in the section dealing with Constantine’s sole reign, albeit erroneously in the case of the deposition of John XII. Neither event was considered particularly remarkable by Skylitzes, but does betray the fact that news of Otto’s activities against the Hungarians and in Italy was worthy enough to be recorded at the time and registered. If it were not, we cannot account for it to have been recalled by a historian after the Norman conquest of Byzantine Italy. Another set of references to the Germanic world can be found in protocols for letters written to Frankish rulers; one to the King of Saxony, the King of Bavaria (Bavarians are referred to as ‘the Nemitziōi’), the King of Gaul, and the King of Germania, and the other to the King of Francia.⁵⁰³ The identification of the recipients will be attempted later in this chapter, but the most important fact is that each recipient was addressed as the ‘spiritual brother’ of the Byzantine emperors, a designation not used for anyone but the Franks. This statement of lateral kinship is modified somewhat by the inequality of status between emperors and mere kings, but it is in line with Constantine’s views in the *DAI* about the special status of the Franks.

⁵⁰⁰ *DAI*, 30. 73-4, p. 142.

⁵⁰¹ *DAI*, 13, 26, pp. 70-3, 108-13.

⁵⁰² Skylitzes, pp. 239, 247.

⁵⁰³ *De cer.*, II.48, pp. 689, 691.

4.2 *The Ottonian System and the Basis of Power*

When Henry I, Duke of Saxony, was elected in May 919 by a group of Franconian and Saxon magnates as their king, it is difficult to pinpoint with any precision over what he found himself to hold dominion. His predecessor, Conrad I erstwhile Duke of Franconia, had also been declared *rex*, but never took on either the title of *rex Romanorum* or *rex Teutonicorum*, but was seen as a successor to the last Carolingian *rex Francorum orientalium*, Louis The Child. Conrad's succession was by no means universally acknowledged by the territories which made up East Francia (both West Francia and Lorraine rejected his succession), but had the backing of Swabia, Saxony and Bavaria. By the time Henry I was proclaimed *rex* at Fritzlar, Bavarian support could no longer be counted upon. It was not until 922 that Henry could extract the submission of Arnulf, Duke of Bavaria, though the latter continued to 'exercise control over justice, call out armies, maintain peace and govern the church', issuing charters in his own name, which closely resembled royal charters.⁵⁰⁴ Liudprand tells us that, upon Conrad's death, Arnulf had been urged by the Bavarians and Eastern Franks to become king and had only accepted Henry I as his overlord in return for 'all the bishoprics in Bavaria'.⁵⁰⁵ What Liudprand described as a gift from Henry I was probably just a confirmation of rights already held by Arnulf. Until his death in 937, Arnulf followed his own foreign policy with the Bohemians and the Magyars and, in 934, invaded the Kingdom of Italy to secure the crown for his son Eberhard.⁵⁰⁶ He was unsuccessful in this as King Hugh defeated the forces of the Bavarians and their allies, the Count and the Bishop of Verona, at the fortress of Gossolengo, near Piacenza.

⁵⁰⁴ Wolfram (1999), p. 302.

⁵⁰⁵ *Antapodosis*, II.20-3, pp. 44-6.

⁵⁰⁶ *Annales ex Annalibus Irvravsibus Antiquis*, p. 743; *Antapodosis* III.49-51, p. 94.

The virtual independence of Arnulf of Bavaria demonstrates that the kingship of the Eastern Franks was fragmentary and based on *amicitia* between the different regional rulers and the king. By the mid 920s, the East Frankish realm comprised five duchies; Saxony, Bavaria, Swabia, Lotharingia, and Franconia, all ruled by regional nobility in a quasi-independent way. Apart from the exchange of gifts, the king received no regular tribute or tax from his vassals, the only external source of regular income mentioned being tributes from the Slav tribes between the Elbe and the Oder. Armed service was demanded of vassals when required, but the campaigns against the Elbe Slavs and Bohemians were always attributed solely to the Saxons.⁵⁰⁷ The area the Saxons had the greatest sway over can be mapped by looking at their movements through charters conferring or confirming rights to religious orders. The three core regions frequently visited were Lower Saxony, Thuringia with the area around Aachen, and Swabia between the Rhine and the Main. The Saxon kings had to be itinerant, as it was customary for the king to resolve disputes and issue charters in situ and not at a central court.⁵⁰⁸

When Otto I ascended the throne, he abandoned the image of *primus inter pares*, which his father had cultivated and had only rarely enforced through a show of strength. He chose to be anointed in Aachen, following the Carolingian tradition, in a ceremony which Widukind suggests was attended by the dukes of Bavaria, Swabia, Franconia, and Lotharingia.⁵⁰⁹ Widukind goes a step further to suggest that the dukes actually officiated at the ceremony, thereby projecting a sense of outright consensus. This belied the fact that Otto's accession was immediately challenged from all quarters, with his half-brother Thankmar joining forces with Eberhard of Bavaria, Eberhard of Franconia, and the Saxon nobleman Wichmann the Elder. Three of these magnates had grievances against Otto – Eberhard of Franconia had been fined for attacking a Saxon castle,

⁵⁰⁷ Widukind, I.35-6, pp. 48-54. Althoff (2000).

⁵⁰⁸ Leyser (1981) pp. 750-3; Bernhardt (1993), pp. 45-69.

⁵⁰⁹ Widukind, II.2, pp. 66-7.

Thankmar had been overlooked for the prestigious position of Count of Merseberg, and Wichmann the Elder had coveted a section of the Elbe marches that Otto had given to Wichmann's brother.⁵¹⁰ After crushing this rebellion in 938, Otto immediately had to turn to one instigated by his younger brother Henry and the dukes of both Lotharingia and Franconia, conspiring to dethrone him. This rebellion was quelled in 939.⁵¹¹

With the increased prestige gained from success in defeating two rebellions in this early part of his reign, Otto had his first opportunity to enhance his standing through the way he dealt with the rebels and their clans. Eberhard of Franconia was killed during the rebellion and Otto chose not to appoint another Duke of Franconia, but rather, to annex it to his own directly administered territory, thus bringing the key Carolingian ecclesiastical centres and palaces in the Middle Rhine under his control.⁵¹² Where rebel leaders survived or had strong followings, Otto had to proceed with greater deference to traditional seigniorial rights. In Bavaria, he was able to replace Eberhard with his uncle, Berthold, and clawed back the right to appoint bishops in Bavaria, which his father had never been able to enforce with Arnulf. In an age in which bishops not only had access to the riches of the church, but also maintained their own *milites* for its protection, this was no insignificant feat.⁵¹³ Otto's brother Henry, despite his part in the rebellion, walked away with the Duchy of Lotharingia after Gislebert, the rebellious duke, had drowned while trying to escape after the rebellion collapsed.⁵¹⁴ Henry rebelled once again, with a plot to kill Otto in Quedlinburg on Easter 941. He failed, was imprisoned for some time in Ingleheim, but was then appointed Duke of Bavaria in 948, when Berthold died.⁵¹⁵ His claim to Bavaria arose out of his marriage to Judith, daughter of Arnulf, and Otto used this to insinuate

⁵¹⁰ Widukind II.8, p.72.

⁵¹¹ Widukind II.24, p.87.

⁵¹² Ekkehard IV, 11, p. 36. Bernhardt (1993), p. 20.

⁵¹³ *Vita Sancti Uodalrici*, pp. 401-2.

⁵¹⁴ *Antapodosis*, IV.30, pp. 119-20.

⁵¹⁵ Widukind, II.36, p. 95.

his family member at the helm of affairs in the most distant and most powerful duchy in East Francia. Bavaria was a big enough prize for Henry to remain loyal to Otto for the rest of his life, using his position to arrange the marriage between Otto and Adelheid, widow of Hugh of Italy in 951 and also to put down the rebellion of Liudolf of Swabia, Otto's eldest son, and Conrad of Lotharingia, Otto's son-in-law, which took place between 951 and 954.

Otto I was therefore bound by the rules of the society over which he governed, wherein his power was limited to sometimes selecting who, from a narrow field of claimants, would be *dux* of Bavaria or Lotharingia. Leniency with rebels was the direct result of the paradoxical situation that Otto found himself in; to maintain his position, he had to defeat rebellions, but without the acquiescence of the rebels, who had deep seigneurial roots in the regions, his overlordship would have no legitimacy.⁵¹⁶ As the duke would rely on the ranks of local nobility for his own power, he had to be acceptable to them as much as to the king. Otto continued to use the ambiguous *divina favente clementia rex* ('king by God's benevolence') as his father had before him and, occasionally, *invictissimi regis* ('invincible king') in his signature until his coronation as Emperor in Rome in 962.⁵¹⁷ The king's own Saxon vassals were kept loyal through appointments along the Elbe marches, where Otto often backed the appointments with gifts of land.⁵¹⁸ War with the Elbe Slavs was usually offensive, led by the Saxons, and started over issues of tribute payment.⁵¹⁹ Although these vassals were responsible for the security of that frontier, they were remunerated for their services and were visited by the Ottonian court. These areas were the first to be converted into bishoprics after Otto's elevation to the position of Emperor, with Magdeburg

⁵¹⁶ Reuter (2006), p. 133.

⁵¹⁷ *Diplomatum regum et imperatorum germaniae I*, pp. 89-322.

⁵¹⁸ Gerd Althoff (1999), pp. 285-8.

⁵¹⁹ Widukind on the Redarii, I.36, pp. 51-2.

elevated to an archbishopric in 962, followed by the elevation of Meissen, Zeitz, Merseburg, Havelberg, and Brandenburg to its bishoprics in 967.⁵²⁰

Saxony had never been sufficiently Frank-icised when it was incorporated into the Carolingian realms in the eighth and ninth centuries, with no real development of Carolingian government institutions.⁵²¹ Land grants to nobles were usually in lands where the recipients already held office. With the lack of institutional mechanisms of control which characterised the Carolingians before and the Germanic rulership of the twelfth and thirteen centuries, Otto had to assert his authority through different means.⁵²² This mainly took the form of control over appointments where possible, and the gradual appointment of direct family members in key offices once they fell vacant, through judicious marital alliances. This isn't to say that the Ottonians were completely lacking in administrative capability. It has recently been argued that the constant military expeditions as well as the confiscations and requisitions of properties would have not been possible without the keeping of detailed records and some level of day-to-day administrative capability, but the ability to use administrative know-how to deepen political control in duchies was absent.⁵²³ The supremacy of the king was imposed through constant face-to-face reaffirmations of power through itinerant kingship and the cultivation of the image of a sacral ruler.⁵²⁴ As the king could not be present at all places at once, control over ecclesiastical appointments became a way in which the king could be represented by holy men in his absence.⁵²⁵ The memory of the ruler was imposed through the construction of a series of royal churches, palaces, and monasteries. We shall see that Otto regularly used the summoning of synods and appointments to key ecclesiastical positions as a means to extend his political power.

⁵²⁰ See Reuter (2006), pp. 141-6; Bernhardt (1993), pp.4-9.

⁵²¹ Reuter (1991), pp. 45-51, 65-9; Althoff (1999), pp. 267-8; Reuter (2006), pp. 268-83.

⁵²² Keller (1989), pp. 26-31.

⁵²³ Bachrach (2009), pp. 392-7.

⁵²⁴ Mayr-Harting (2007), pp. 1-6.

⁵²⁵ Mayr Harting (2007), pp. 6-11.

The fact that the historical record of this period gives a very top-down view, solely interested as it is in the deeds of powerful kings, dukes, and churchmen, means that we have very little, if any information, about the way power was consolidated, or in which men of arms were recruited and trained to protect the interests of the local potentates. Accounts of the Battle of Lechfeld in 955 provide an interesting case study, which demonstrates the mechanisms through which Ottonian power was exerted and its severe limitations. The Hungarian host, which was defeated at the River Lech, had penetrated sub-Danubian Bavaria up to the River Iller and was possibly returning as it set about to besiege and then overrun Augsburg. The city and its ramparts held out against the Hungarians for two days under the command of Bishop Ulrich and his loyal *milites*, until word came from Regensburg that Otto was arriving at the head of an army. Ulrich, a first-cousin of Burchard III, Duke of Swabia, was in charge of the defence of Augsburg and maintained and headed an armed retinue which was loyal to him.⁵²⁶ When Otto arrived in the environs of Augsburg, he led the smallest host out of the eight mustered, as Saxon troops had been engaged in a battle with the Elbe Slavs at the same time. The majority of the troops – the first, second, and third legions – consisted of local Bavarians, led by a plenipotentiary of Otto's brother, Duke Henry, who was terminally ill at the time. The second largest contingent was led by Duke Burchard III of Swabia, who commanded two legions, the sixth and the seventh. The fourth legion consisted of cavalry led by Conrad of Lotharingia and the final, the eighth, comprised forces led by Boleslav, Duke of Bohemia. Widukind takes great care to name all the leaders and mentions that they fought under their regional banners. Ultimate victory is of course attributed to Otto, who carried the Holy Lance into battle and was personally guided by Archangel Michael, but the stress on the combined show of force from all the duchies signalled to the reader that Otto had brought an end to internal dissent against his rule. Crucially, it also

⁵²⁶ *Vita Sancti Uodalrici*, p. 401.

demonstrates that the loyalties of each legion were to its local leader, and not to Otto, and that a decisive victory against the Hungarians was only possible with the cooperation of the dukes.⁵²⁷

Another interesting facet of the reporting of the Battle of Lechfeld is the prominence given to Conrad of Lotharingia in all of the accounts. Conrad, who had been in open and bitter rebellion against Otto until 954, was shown to have been completely rehabilitated by the Battle of Lechfeld, so much so that Widukind tells us that his arrival was the catalyst in mobilising the assembled forces from the other duchies to engage in conventional battle with the Hungarians.⁵²⁸ He is credited with having saved the eighth legion from a rear attack by the Hungarians, and his death from a stray arrow on the battlefield is recounted in five of the seven accounts of the battle.⁵²⁹ That Widukind, who dedicated his work to Mathilda, Abbess of Quedlinburg and Otto I's daughter, thought nothing of eulogising Conrad, one-time foe of Otto I, in his history is indicative of the intrinsic respect for clan structures and noble families in the East Frankish world, which was far more entrenched than demands for obedience to the king. Immediately after the battle, Otto conferred the title of Count of Augsburg on the son of Dietpald, the brother of Ulrich who had been slain on the battlefield, and also gave the bishop 'all that he desired' as compensation for his support against the Hungarians.⁵³⁰ The Ottonian system was no doubt based on the projection of grand rule from above, but tradition and customary rights remained at the heart of it – those who opposed the king when they felt that he had not given them their due were swiftly accepted back into the fold in both real life and in the historical narrative.

⁵²⁷ Widukind, III.44, p. 126.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., III.46, pp. 127-8.

⁵²⁹ Flodoard, p. 403; *AQ*, p. 58; *Adalberti Continuatio Reginonis*, p. 168; *Vita Uodalrici*, p. 402; Widukind, III. 44, p. 126.

⁵³⁰ *Vita Uoldarici*, p. 402.

4.3 Ottonian foreign policy in the Kingdom of Italy

Once Otto I had quelled the first two rounds of major rebellions against him in 941, his attention turned to matters in West Francia and Italy. The constant concern of Otto's foreign policy, however, was the Elbe Frontier, but this was as much an internal concern of Saxon marcher lords as it was a matter of foreign policy for the king. The Elbe frontier was managed through two large border marches, which were organised into a network of *burgwards* or fortified centres supported by dependent villages, and often manned by mounted Slavs.⁵³¹ The main priority was the imposition of tributary relations on tribes between the Elbe and the Oder, through a series of destructive wars. The king, however, largely left the management of this frontier to his appointees, most important of whom were the Billung clan, and rarely ventured further east than the royal estates at Magdeburg, as is clear from records of royal itineraries.⁵³² Interventions in Bohemia, Hungary, Poland, and beyond only drew greater royal attention in the 960s, when diplomatic and missionary activities intensified as a result of Otto's successes at Lechfeld in 955 and his coronation in Rome in 962.

The Elbe frontier was a purely Saxon domain, but the realm in which Otto sought the help of the duchies to expand his influence was that of the Kingdom of Italy. It is most certainly his interventions in Italy from the early 940s that first alerted Byzantium to the new political configuration north of the Alps, an issue which will be dealt with in a later part of this chapter. It is impossible to determine whether the Italian question had figured in Saxon policy prior to 941. The first we know of it was when Berengar of Ivrea was brought to the court of Otto I by Hermann, Duke of Swabia in 941 or 942. Liudprand is our only narrative source for this period and he relates how Berengar fled from Italy after Hugh discovered the former's plot to

⁵³¹ Bernhardt (1993), pp. 37-45.

⁵³² Muller-Mertens (1980), pp. 270-9.

overthrow him. Berengar left Ivrea, crossed the Alps through the pass of St Bernard and sought refuge with Hermann, who proceeded to take him to Otto. Hugh then urged Otto to hand Berengar over, which Otto refused to do.⁵³³ Hugh then tried to find other allies, first cementing his relationship with Byzantium with a marriage alliance and then entering an alliance with the caliph in Cordoba in 943. This latter saw the rise of the disturbances from the Muslims based at Fraxinetum, who frequently attacked those travelling through the pass of St Bernard into Italy. Their attacks were serious enough for Otto I to send John of Gorze to Cordoba in 953 to negotiate an end to the peril for travellers.⁵³⁴

Liudprand tells us that, when Berengar returned to Italy in 945, he was able to win over the most important nobles of Northern Italy – Milo, Count of Verona followed by Wido, Bishop of Modena and Arderic, Archbishop of Milan. Having converted the biggest centres in the northern Po valley and the bishopric of Frankish Italy at Modena, Berengar had arranged his allies against Hugh from the North and East, leaving Hugh with no choice but to quit Pavia though his son Lothair remained the nominal ruler while was still alive.⁵³⁵ Otto too, waited until the death of Lothair in 950, before he intervened any further in Italy. With Berengar II poised to become the *rex Italicorum*, Otto was faced with a client assuming a title in direct competition with his own. In keeping with the Frankish tradition of establishing clear lines of inheritance for any title, Otto invaded Italy with Swabian assistance, and married Lothair's widow Adelheid. His exact journey isn't known as Liudprand falls silent after 950, but Otto was issuing *diplomata* in Wallhausen, south of the river Main in Swabia on 28 July 951, and was already signing documents in Pavia by 23 September 951.⁵³⁶ The first Italian *diploma*, granting farmlands to the Archbishop of Vercelli, was signed in the following weeks, and, by 9 October, Otto had confirmed the possessions of the

⁵³³ *Antapodosis*, V.10-12, pp. 128-9.

⁵³⁴ *Vita Iohannis Gorziensis*, pp. 370-1.

⁵³⁵ *Antapodosis*, V.26-8, pp. 138-41.

⁵³⁶ *Diplomatum regum et imperatorum germaniae I*, pp. 214-15.

archbishopric of Verona.⁵³⁷ From a *diploma* of the next day confirming the lands of the monastery of St Ambrose in Milan, Otto had assumed the title of *rex Francorum et Langobardum*, which changed in the *diploma* of October 15 to *rex Francorum et Italicorum*.⁵³⁸ This last title is only repeated until January of 952, after which *diplomata* were issued in the name of the *divina favente clementia rex* again until Otto started his return to Saxony. Otto had probably hoped to have been received in Rome and have his titles confirmed, but his legation to Rome failed to gain papal approval, and matters in the north had already started causing him concern.⁵³⁹

While the Italian campaign provided a distant expedition, which bound the core and the fringes of the Ottonian realm, it was once again the individual interests of the regions that drew Otto back from Saxony. While Otto had been able to plant his direct family members at the helm of all the East Frankish regions, this brought with itself its own problems of familial jealousy and infighting. The intervention in Italy and marriage to Adelheid posed a new threat to Saxon succession. Furthermore, Otto's foray into Italy also led to the increased prominence of Henry, Duke of Bavaria, who had prepared the ground for Otto's arrival and was rewarded with the marches of Friuli and Verona for his efforts. The Italian campaign proved to be premature, as Otto had not accounted for the disquiet his new marriage would cause to his son and heir, Liudolf, Duke of Swabia. Although the sources date the start of Liudolf's rebellion to a point after the birth of a son to Adelheid in 953, by this time it was a full blown affair with a rebel alliance which included Conrad, Duke of Lotharingia. Otto faced the serious possibility of losing the submission of territories to the West of the Rhine, and the Italian project was abandoned until the rebellion was decisively defeated in 954, and Otto received a tremendous boost to his prestige at Lechfeld in 955.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., pp. 216-217

⁵³⁸ Ibid., pp. 219-21.

⁵³⁹ Flodoard, p. 401.

4.4 *The Ottonian response to the Hungarian threat*

If Italy was a prestige project for Otto I, keeping Hungarian raiders out of his territory was of vital importance to his position as an effective ruler in the heartland of his realm. The pattern of Hungarian contact with the Franks was set in the beginning of the tenth century, and was one in which successive rulers and potential rulers of German and Italian states/principalities made alliances with the Hungarians, not only to prevent being the targets of raids, but also to utilise their devastating raids to unsettle rivals. The first major Frankish alliance they made was with Arnulf, Duke of Bavaria. He had roundly defeated them at the River Inn in 913, but sought refuge with them when he opposed Conrad I a year later.⁵⁴⁰ This alliance was honoured and Bavaria was left alone when attacks were carried out via Swabia to Fulda in 915 and to Regensburg and Basel a year later. When Arnulf returned to Bavaria upon Conrad I's death in 918, he did so with Hungarian support.

The Hungarian candidate for the succession in East Francia was Arnulf of Bavaria and attacks on the Saxons started immediately upon Henry I's election at Fritzlar in 919. That this was due to the change of regime is hinted at by Liudprand, who tells us that the Hungarians wanted to ensure that Henry I would continue with payments to them to keep the peace. He tells us that their strategy was to attack Saxony directly before troops could be mustered from Lotharingia, Swabia or Bavaria.⁵⁴¹ Widukind tells us only of the raid in 924 or 926 when a prominent Hungarian 'prince' was captured near the town of Werla in Southern Saxony. He tells us that the Hungarians offered vast amounts of gold and silver as a ransom, but that Henry returned the captive in return for a nine year peace. That Widukind tells us that the captive was returned 'cum

⁵⁴⁰ *Antapodosis*, II.19, p. 43.

⁵⁴¹ *Antapodosis*, II.24, p. 46.

muneribus' informs us that the peace was backed by payments.⁵⁴² The peace with Saxony lasted till 933 (if one takes 924 to be the correct date of the pact, 933 would be the end of the period negotiated). We know of only one series of attacks on German territories during this time, which was an attack on Swabia and Alsace in 926, but this might have been connected to the overthrow of Berengar I of Italy by Rudolf of Burgundy, aided by the latter's father-in-law Burchard II of Swabia. The Swabian involvement in Italian affairs, which resulted in Burchard's murder in Milan in 926, made the territory ripe for an opportunistic raid.

The well-reported raid of 933 resulted in a the retreat of the Hungarians at Riade in front of Henry's forces, perhaps the fruit of nine years of building fortifications and the arming and training of milites by Henry. A decision had been made at the Synod of Erfurt in 932 to cease the payments to the Hungarians. Flodoard tells us that a host of Saxon and Bavarian troops under Henry I attacked and dispersed the raiders, while Widukind tells us, in slightly more lofty terms, the same story sans the Bavarians.⁵⁴³ Riade made its way into all the official Saxon chronicles of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries in a much shortened form, mentioning only that a Hungarian raid in the year was defeated by Henry.⁵⁴⁴ Liudprand does not mention the raid at all. For Widukind, the expulsion of the Hungarians forms the most glorious possible ending to the reign of Henry I and sets the stage for Otto's accession.⁵⁴⁵ The Hungarians did not attack Saxony again until 936, embarking instead on a raid into Byzantium in 934 followed by one into Upper Burgundy in 935.

⁵⁴² Widukind, I.32, p. 45.

⁵⁴³ Flodoard, p. 381.

⁵⁴⁴ *AH/AQ*, p. 54.

⁵⁴⁵ Reuter (1991), pp. 142-3.

The accession of Otto I brought on renewed attacks from the Hungarians, in keeping with their usual reaction to regime change.⁵⁴⁶ However, after the defeat of the raid of 938 on the Lower Elbe, the Hungarian raids into Saxony ceased altogether.⁵⁴⁷ In the following decade, the Hungarians faced a considerable challenge from Otto's vassals in Bavaria, being routed at Wels in 943 and then actually attacked in their own territories by Otto's brother Henry in 950, after being effectively pushed back in previous raids between 948 and 950. For Otto's father, Henry I, the coordination of the defence against the Hungarians, the strengthening of fortifications in much of East Francia, and the settlement of peace reinforced his position as the leader of the German princes. Henry of Bavaria's active pursuit of glory in battle against the Hungarians is well noted in the *Gesta Ottonis* of Hroswitha of Gandersheim, who recorded how Henry's forces seized booty, women, and the children of nobles from the Hungarians in a seeming reversal of roles. Otto's intervention in Italy in 951 brought even more territory into Henry's hands as the marches of Verona and Aquilea were attached to his Bavarian territories. This cut the Hungarian raiders off from the Italian hinterland and from West Francia.

Henry's increasing role in suppressing threats from Central Europe was evident in 950, when he attacked Bohemia and forced Boleslav I to submit to Otto's authority. The Hungarians had counted on safe passage through Bohemia in order to raid Saxony and Thuringia. In 951, on their way back from raiding Aquitaine with Berengar II's help, they were attacked and defeated twice by Bavarian armies, who were present in Italy as a prelude to Otto's invasion of Italy. For the Hungarians, these reversals seemed to have evaporated for a moment from 953, when Liudolf Duke of Swabia and Conrad Duke of Lotharingia rebelled against Otto. A host of Hungarians were able to slip through Bavaria while Otto was thus engaged and to rendezvous with Liudolf

⁵⁴⁶ Widukind, II.5, p. 71; *AQ*, p. 500.

⁵⁴⁷ Widukind, II.14, pp. 78-9.

and Conrad, who is the only known German to have thrown a public banquet for the Hungarians, before dispersing on a vast raid.⁵⁴⁸ When they returned in 955 to besiege Augsburg, they did not know that the rebellion had been patched over, and they faced an attack at the River Lech by Otto's Saxons, Conrad's Lotharingians, Liudolf's Swabians, Bavarians and two hosts of Bohemians.

The final defeat of the Hungarians and the end of their raids in the west came with the devastating defeat at the Battle of Lechfeld on August 955. They had crossed the Lech, a tributary of the Danube near Augsburg and had laid siege to the town on 8 August. It is interesting that a contemporary account mentions that they used siege engines, an indication that, on the increasingly fortified Frankish landscape, the Hungarians had adapted their methods of attack to include siege warfare.⁵⁴⁹ Once they were warned of Otto's imminent arrival with a host of allies, they made ready to flee. The battle of 10 August saw a relatively well prepared Frankish army facing a Hungarian party that was large but had been weakened by the siege of Augsburg. Widukind reports that they were defeated because several dismounted to gather what booty they could before retreating. It has been suggested that they were seeking to use their old trick of appearing to retreat and then releasing a barrage of arrows while on fast moving horses.⁵⁵⁰ This failed because they were now on tired horses, were separated from each other by the different 'legions' of forces under Otto's allies and vassals, and were unable to act in a coordinated way. The capture of an important prince Lel and of Bulscu, perhaps the leader of the expedition, ended the campaign for the Hungarians. The two men were taken prisoner and then executed at Regensburg along with other captives. By getting rid of the leaders themselves, Otto undermined the Hungarians' social structure and chain of command, an action that paid off with the

⁵⁴⁸ Widukind, III.30, pp. 117-8.

⁵⁴⁹ *Vita Uodalrici*, p. 401.

⁵⁵⁰ Leyser (1982), pp. 56-7.

conclusion of hostilities. In distant Byzantium, the defeat of the Hungarians in the west led to a destructive raid against Thrace in 958, and also closed down a channel of information gathering on the west that had been cultivated in the mid 940s.

4.5 Byzantium and Ottonian Saxony in the personal reign of Constantine VII

Otto I's Frankish realm was one which had envisaged an expansion of influence (if not physical expansion) in all four directions, though it lacked the military resources and the internal stability to attempt much more than gaining clients and establishing tributary relations with some eastern tribes. Despite possessing a more stable centralising state with a regular military and navy, Byzantium's own capabilities within the central Mediterranean were limited to sections of the Adriatic shoreline and to its possessions in Apulia and Calabria. Byzantine historical sources are entirely silent in on relations with the Franks. The only Latin writer who could have been expected to comment on relations between the Byzantines and the Franks, Liudprand of Cremona, did not write on events between 950 and 961, though the *Antapodosis* was composed around 958. This is understandable as politics in his homeland of the Kingdom of Italy were particularly complex in the 950s, with the villain of the *Antapodosis*, Berengar II, continuing to hold sway in Italy. While the Ottonians continued to allow Berengar II to remain in his position in Italy, it was impossible for Liudprand to question their motives or doubt their ability to bring the rogue vassal to heel. The matter was only resolved with Otto's entry into Italy in 961, ostensibly to protect the Papal States from Berengar's attempt at gaining control over them.⁵⁵¹

From the very beginning of Constantine VII's personal reign, attempts were made to understand this new threat to Byzantine interests in Italy. The first recorded contact between the Byzantine and Ottonian courts took place in 945, when the *Annales Hildesheimenses* and others mention the

⁵⁵¹ *Historia Ottonis*, 1-10, pp. 169-76.

arrival of a Greek envoy with many precious gifts. The next recorded contact is in 949, when both the *Annales Quedlinburgenses* and the *Annales Hildesheimensis* record the arrival of a ‘second’ Greek envoy. There is a notice in the annals of Flodoard of Reims of an Easter visit from Byzantines, Italians, Angles and others, when Otto I was in Aachen in 949.⁵⁵² According to Flodoard, Otto was in Aachen at the request of his sister Gerberga, wife of Louis IV, King of West Francia. The previous year had seen great fighting between Louis, assisted by Conrad, Duke of Lotharingia, and the forces of Hugh, Count of Paris, and his Norman mercenaries. At a council at Ingelheim in June 948, Otto had summoned a synod to discuss west Frankish affairs, and, at a further synod in Trier at the end of the year, Louis IV’s rival, Hugh the Great, had been excommunicated in the presence of Marianus, the papal legate, at Otto’s behest. The legate was then taken by Otto’s chaplain, Liudolfus, to Fulda and overwintered in Saxony before returning to Rome in 949.⁵⁵³ There were no clearer signs of Otto’s supremacy in the Frankish world than his having interceded on behalf of the West Frankish ruler, summoned a synod, and determined the spiritual fate of the most powerful nobleman in the west.⁵⁵⁴ Although peace between Louis and Hugh was not achieved until 950, Otto had secured an unassailable position as the arbiter of power in West Francia. The Byzantine envoy present in Aachen over the Easter of 949, at the palace where Charlemagne had spent most of his winters, would have relayed to their masters that no other Frankish ruler was as powerful or influential as Otto I.

This Byzantine envoy at Aachen can be identified as the eunuch Salomon, who had first visited the court of Abd ar-Rahmān in Spain and who subsequently set off for Constantinople from Venice with Liudprand on 25 August 949.⁵⁵⁵ Salomon was accompanying an envoy from the court of Otto, Liutefred, a merchant from Mainz, perhaps the epicentre of the Frankish

⁵⁵² Flodoard, p. 398.

⁵⁵³ Flodoard, pp. 397-8.

⁵⁵⁴ Reuter (1991), p. 167.

⁵⁵⁵ *Antapodosis*, VI.4, p. 146.

mercantile world, where, according to Ibn Ya‘qūb, rare Eastern spices and aromatics were readily available.⁵⁵⁶ We know nothing more of Liutefred, or of his mission in Constantinople, apart from the fact that he had brought worthy gifts from Otto I.⁵⁵⁷ Liudprand’s own embassy to Constantinople in 949 was on behalf of Berengar II, the *de facto* ruler of the Kingdom of Italy, though Hugh of Provence’s son Lothair, who was also the brother of Romanos II’s first wife Bertha Eudokia, was nominally the ruler until his death on 22 November 950. Otto I’s role in replacing Hugh of Provence with Berengar II has been discussed above. The concern of the Byzantine court at the Berengar II’s usurpation was, according to Liudprand, the reason why he was sent to Constantinople. Having heard of the death of Hugh of Provence in 947, Constantine sent a certain Andreas to Berengar, with a letter which urged the latter to despatch an embassy to Constantinople and another which implored him to take care of Lothair.⁵⁵⁸ From Salomon, who had visited Otto at Aachen, from Otto’s own envoy Liutefred, and from Liudprand, the envoy of Otto’s candidate in Italy, the Byzantine administration would have received a resounding message that Otto I exerted, or hoped to exert an influence across Europe, which had not been achieved since the reign of Charlemagne.

The trail of embassies then grows cold with neither Saxon nor Byzantine sources mentioning any further exchanges for the entire reign apart from a general notice saying that Saracens and Greeks came bearing gifts in 956 after Otto’s victory over the Hungarians at Lechfeld.⁵⁵⁹ There is evidence, however, to suggest that, between the death of Bertha-Eudokia around 949 and Romanos II’s marriage to Anastaso-Theophano in 956, diplomacy had been underway to secure a Saxon bride for Romanos II. The undated reference comes from a monastic history, written at the Abbey of St Gall, by the monk Ekkehard in the first half of the eleventh century. The

⁵⁵⁶ Ibn Yaqub, p. 388.

⁵⁵⁷ *Antapodosis*, VI.5, p. 147.

⁵⁵⁸ *Antapodosis*, VI.2, p. 146.

⁵⁵⁹ Widukind, III.56, p. 135.

account states that Hadwig, daughter of Duke Henry of Bavaria, brother of Otto I, was betrothed to Romanos II. A eunuch was sent from Constantinople to teach her Greek, while a painter was sent to capture her likeness. Ekkehard states that she made faces when the painter tried to paint her and that it was she who managed to extricate herself from the engagement. The story of the betrothal might seem like a fanciful legend, but the monks at the Abbey of St Gall were well placed to know about Hadwig as she had gone on to marry Burchard III, the Duke of Swabia. She was still alive and active in political life when Ekkehard entered the abbey as a monk.⁵⁶⁰ Hadwig's selection as a future Byzantine empress is often considered to have had been made as early as 949, as this was when Bertha-Eudokia died.⁵⁶¹ It is more likely, however, that the marriage negotiations were conducted after Otto's entry into Italy in 951, which would also go some way in explaining the choice of Hadwig as the proposed Byzantine bride. Hadwig's father, Henry I, had been instrumental in arranging Otto's marriage to Adelheid, Lothair's widow, and had been Otto's key adviser in Italy, for which he had been rewarded with the marches of Friuli and Verona. Friuli was also a vantage point from which Henry could insert himself into the affairs of Venice and the Dalmatian coast, both of which were of prime importance to Byzantine interests.⁵⁶² As noted above, Henry's Bavarian forces were also the first line of defence against Hungarian attacks. A Byzantine embassy was present in Augsburg, in the summer of 952, when Berengar and Adalbert accepted Otto's overlordship, as is mentioned by Liudprand in the *Legatio*.⁵⁶³ It is possible therefore, that Byzantium sought not only a Saxon marriage alliance, but one into the Bavarian branch of the ruling clan

The importance of marriage alliances in both Ottonian Saxony and Byzantium cannot be overemphasised. In practical terms, opportunities for marriages between ruling dynasties were

⁵⁶⁰ Ekkehardo IV, p. 122.

⁵⁶¹ Engels (1995), 29-30. Davids (1995), 106-7.

⁵⁶² Shepard (1999), pp. 610-11.

⁵⁶³ *Legatio*, 5, pp. 189-90; Ohsorge (1958), pp. 234-6.

relatively rare in the context of monogamous Christian rulers, and years could pass before the most politically advantageous alliance could be effected. Otto I's first wife, Edith, had died in 946, but it was almost six years later that Otto married Adelheid, in an attempt to lay claim on the Kingdom of Italy. He delayed his marriage until he could maximise the gain from it. Otto's son, Liudolf, and brother, Henry, had received their dukedoms through marriage alliances with the daughters of previous dukes. In Lotharingia, where Duke Giselbert had rebelled against Otto, attempts to bring the duchy under direct Saxon rule under Henry I failed for want of a legitimising link to the family of the rebel duke. For Otto, these marriages provided the twin benefits of extending the influence of the Liudolfings across East Francia and of easing competition within Saxony itself.⁵⁶⁴ The abandoned marriage alliance with Byzantium is the only recorded attempt of an alliance with a non-Frankish power. For Byzantium, the negotiations were certainly made in light of the growing Saxon influence in Italy and Eastern Europe. Securing the Byzantine Emperor for a son-in-law would have resulted in a rise in status for both Otto, as well as Henry, the bride's father, but the political gain from a marriage in Swabia was much more immediate and practical than that which could have been expected from a Byzantine match. The dangers of the match also clearly outweighed the benefits, as Otto needed the Bavarian duke to champion his interests in Italy rather than those of Byzantium and must have known that a clash with Byzantine interests was inevitable if intervention in Italy went according to plan. It was not until 968 that another Byzantine marriage alliance was sought for Otto's heir, Otto II.

Around the same time that marriage negotiations were underway in Saxony/ Bavaria, the acceptability of a Frankish alliance were being outlined in the *De Administrando Imperio*.⁵⁶⁵ The only outsiders deemed fit for marriage with the imperial family were Franks. The reasoning provided

⁵⁶⁴ Reuter (1991), pp. 148-54.

⁵⁶⁵ *DAI* 13, pp. 70-3.

by Constantine VII was that Constantine the Great had himself been a Frank, that there was a relationship of longstanding between the Franks and the Byzantines, and that the Franks came from a noble race. Part of this can be seen as an attempt to rationalise Romanos II's earlier marriage to Bertha-Eudokia, who was the daughter of Hugh of Provence, King of Italy; a descendent of Charlemagne on his mother's side.⁵⁶⁶ However, while commenting on the 'Belocroats', Constantine mentions that they were subject to Otto, the 'great king' of Francia and Saxony, thus indicating that he knew that Otto was the most powerful Frankish ruler of his time, with influence extending towards the Adriatic.⁵⁶⁷

The title of *megalōi rhēgi Phrangias* is unknown from the list of protocols in the *De Cerimoniis*, though there is an indication that there was an elevation in the status of the Ottonians at some point during the reign of Constantine VII. The first recorded protocol is for the kings of Saxony, Bavaria (the so-called *Nemitzjoi*), Gallia, and Germania.⁵⁶⁸ The last two are notional kingships, as no king in the East or West Francia ever referred to themselves as kings of Gaul or Germany. In fact, the Franks never, in this period, referred to themselves by their territories, rather as rulers of the Frankish peoples. There was also never a Saxon or Bavarian 'king', only dukes, though some like Arnulf, Duke of Bavaria (d. 937), practiced an independent foreign policy, while others like Henry (made Duke of Bavaria in 948 by his brother Otto I) were also charged with the subjugation of foreign peoples like the Hungarians and the Bohemians. The first protocol reflects Byzantium's difficulty in comprehending a complex system of political power where dukes were semi-autonomous, insofar as they controlled all the royal palaces and ecclesiastical foundations in their duchies. The fact that the Bavarians are called the *Nemitzjoi* (a Slavic term for the Bavarians

⁵⁶⁶ *DAI* 26, pp. 108-9.

⁵⁶⁷ *DAI* 30, pp. 142-3.

⁵⁶⁸ *De cer.*, II.48, p.689

unattested in any other Greek or Latin source), also indicates that Byzantine information about continental Europe often came from Slavic sources.

The second protocol regarding the Franks appears two pages later, after the protocols for Croats, Serbs, and Moravians. Constantine and Romanos are described as ‘sublime *augustoi*’, ‘sovereigns’ and ‘great emperors of the Romans’. The recipient, the King of Francia, is also referred to as the ‘most nobly-born’ and ‘esteemed’ king. This protocol was certainly used for Otto I in the 950s, when there was no doubt as to Otto’s supreme position among the Franks. This subtle acknowledgement of Otto’s position is counterbalanced by the addition of a more complex chain of exalted epithets for the Byzantine Emperors, a device which was only used in correspondence with the Fatimid and Umayyad caliphs, the pre-eminent powers of the Western and Central Mediterranean. There can be no clearer indication that Byzantium was growing increasingly wary of Ottonian influence.

While the records of relations are superficial and imprecise about outcomes, it is clear that Byzantium and Ottonian Saxony were brought into contact by the overlapping spheres of interest and a competition for influence in Italy and Central and Eastern Europe. Byzantium had well-established relations with the Frankish regime in the Kingdom of Italy, which had been independent of outside control between 925 and the rise of Berengar II, backed by Otto I, after 945. With the dawning of his personal reign, Constantine VII found the empire to be without a single Frankish ally, and must have witnessed with some consternation, the increasing influence of transalpine politics on Italy. Otto’s interest in Italy also coincided with Constantine’s renewed Mediterranean focus, which aimed to bring Byzantine Southern Italy under more immediate central control and on untangling the power dynamics between the Umayyads of Spain and the

Fātimids of North Africa.⁵⁶⁹ The simultaneous emergence of another power vying for a position in the Italian peninsula was reminiscent of the Carolingian push into Byzantine spheres of influence and the usurpation of ancient claims. There is no way of assessing how seriously Byzantium took Otto's capabilities and ambitions in Italy, but the empire's foreign policy quickly expanded to include Ottonian Saxony in its diplomatic circuit and the most celebrated events in Otto's reign – the defeat of the Hungarians at Lechfeld in 955 and the coronation in Rome in 962 – were included in Byzantium's historical record.⁵⁷⁰

The other Byzantine approach to Ottonian Saxony was through relations with the Franks' eastern neighbours, the Hungarians. The Hungarians, known to the Byzantines as the *Turkoi*, had been in the Carpathian Basin for half a century, but began making high level overtures to Constantinople in the second half of the 940s. The only description of Hungarian political organisation in the tenth century is found in the *De Administrando Imperio* and was based on information gleaned from the chieftains Bulscu and Gylas and their entourages, when they visited Constantinople and received baptism around 948.⁵⁷¹ Byzantium was too far removed from Germany to have directly utilised Hungarian raiders against Otto, in the way that rebellious Frankish leaders had. The escalation of their raiding activities before their ultimate defeat at Lechfeld was, however, to Byzantium's advantage, as no member of the Liudolfing clan ventured south of the Alps until 956. This time, the lead was taken by Otto's son Liudolf, who had allegedly made major advances in gaining control over the Kingdom of Italy, before his sudden death in September 957.⁵⁷² No further forays were made in Italy, while Otto was preoccupied with the Elbe Slavs.⁵⁷³

⁵⁶⁹ See Chapters 3 and 6, pp. 13-59, 257-75.

⁵⁷⁰ Skylitzes, p. 231.

⁵⁷¹ Chapter. *DAI*, 40, pp. 178-9.

⁵⁷² Thietmar, II.12, pp. 50-2.

⁵⁷³ Widukind, III.53-5, pp. 132-4; Thietmar, II.12, pp. 50-2; Althoff (1999), pp. 281-5.

Conclusion

Despite the sporadic and patchy coverage in the extant sources, it is possible to piece together a coordinated Byzantine policy for dealing with the growing influence of Otto I. It was a policy that took into consideration the fact that Byzantium's operational capacity in the west was mainly naval and limited to the Mediterranean. The only option open to Byzantium for dealing with the growing power of the Eastern Franks under Otto I was the establishment of regular communications with both the Ottonians and their rivals for the purpose of information gathering. Byzantine envoys to Otto's court appear in the sources at least four times between 945 and 955, and these provided the Empire the opportunity to keep a close eye on the changing fortunes of Otto I and on his activities in Italy and against threats from the east. The failed negotiations for procuring a Saxon bride for Romanos II also signal Byzantium's acknowledgement of the fact that the Kingdom of Italy was firmly within Otto's sphere of influence, and that Byzantine diplomacy had to shift its focus to the north of the Alps in order to have any hope of influencing Frankish intervention in Italy.

The events of the 960s, triggered by Otto's *adventus* into Rome, might lead one to conclude that Constantine VII's policy *vis-à-vis* Otto I was ultimately ineffectual, but this was not for want of effort. There were at least three significant developments in Constantine's reign, which had an impact on events after the emperor's death. The first was the mere act of establishing immediate and regular diplomatic contact with the new great power in the north after half a century of disengagement with Frankish regimes north of the Alps. Constantine VII was the first to propose a marital alliance between the Saxons and the Byzantine imperial family, but this request was renewed from the Saxon side in 968, and then, successfully, in 971, in recognition of the fact that two were the only Christian powers with imperial pretensions and the wherewithal to project their power beyond the frontiers of their realms.

As has been shown in the previous chapter, and will be discussed in the next chapter, the Byzantine response to Otto's rise was to form closer ties with Otto's real and potential adversaries – especially the Hungarians, but also the Spanish Umayyads. The strengthening of Byzantine naval capabilities along the Dalmatian coast, and a more centrally directed military presence in Byzantine Southern Italy would prove crucial in later decades when Otto and his successors began to devote themselves to the project for Italian hegemony.⁵⁷⁴ The greatest proof that Byzantium was able to make its presence felt in the Ottonian court can be found after Otto's imperial coronation in 962, when the visual representation of the emperor, in manuscripts, ivories, and other media, began to closely resemble Byzantine models.⁵⁷⁵ Byzantium under Constantine had impressed upon the Ottonians that it was the benchmark for imperial power in the Christian world.

⁵⁷⁴ See Chapters 3 and 6.

⁵⁷⁵ Mayr-Harting (1991), pp. 61, 65, 209-11.

Chapter 5. The Danger from the North

At the start of Constantine VII's personal reign, the political landscape around the Black Sea had remained largely unchanged since the 890s. This cannot be taken to mean that all the peoples had achieved a lasting internal stability, but simply that they had occupied the same territorial space around the Black Sea for half a century. With the Black Sea and its hinterland playing host to such a multiplicity of peoples, one might well question the logic behind dealing with them together. It will be argued throughout this chapter that, while recognising the individual characteristics of all these peoples, Byzantine foreign policy itself considered the northern peoples *en bloc*. This was clearly the case in the *De administrando imperio*, in which the primary concerns of the contributions made personally by Constantine to the sections on the north were the ways in which each state could be used to attack one other and on how Byzantium should deny them the symbols of state and military technology reserved for Byzantium alone.⁵⁷⁶ Even Bulgaria, which was geographically contiguous to Byzantium and shared a religion, was grouped together with the more nomadic and non-Christian states further north.

This chapter will first sketch the geopolitical setting of the peoples that made up the north, which will be followed by a look at the history of relations with Byzantium in the period immediately preceding Constantine's accession. The chapter will then focus on the emerging challenges in Constantine's personal reign and the mechanisms of the state's response to the constant and changing dangers from the north. It will deal with the two distinct but interlinked clusters of peoples which formed the basis of relations with the north. The first of these clusters was to the north and north-east, comprising the Khazars, the Rus, and the Pechenegs. The second was in

⁵⁷⁶ *DAI*, 1-13, pp. 48-77.

the Slav and Turkic areas to the west of the Black Sea, inhabited by the Hungarians, the Bulgars, and the Slav political formations of the Western Balkans.

5.1 The Geopolitical Background

More than in any other realm of Byzantine foreign policy, the historical developments in relations with the north cannot be understood without reference to the basic geography, coupled with patterns of migration and settlement, of the regions inhabited by the different peoples. The terrain they inhabited was the vast grassland of the west Eurasian Steppe, stretching from the Danube to the Aral Sea. From the eighth century until at least the 940s, the great power of the Black Sea and the Caucasus was the Khazar khaganate, with a core territory between the Sea of Azov to the north of the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus. Khazaria was a highly developed nomadic power with a fixed capital at Itil on the Volga delta. To the south, the Caucasus Mountains provided a natural barrier. This was the eastern half of two great concentric arcs of territory: the first being the arc along the coast of the Black Sea to the Caucasus, with its centre in the southern Crimea, and the second the arc bounded by the Carpathian Mountains and the Lower Volga.⁵⁷⁷ With its commanding position over the lower Volga into the Caspian Sea, the Don and Donets riverine systems, and southern Crimea, the Khazar polity was based on tribute collection from resident populations of Turkic peoples and Slavs and on the transit of trade goods on the river systems. That said, the exact dimensions of the Khazar Empire in the tenth century are not easy to define, and it is likely that the Khazar hold over eastern Crimea had been considerably weakened by the Pechenegs by the early tenth century.⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁷ Obolensky (1971), p. 28.

⁵⁷⁸ Franklin and Shepard (1996), p. 86.

Our most detailed information comes from the so called ‘northern dossier’ embedded in the *DAI*, which, it has been suggested, was compiled in the reign of Leo VI, in the first quarter of the tenth century.⁵⁷⁹ To Leo VI, the Khazars were important as the puppet-masters of the Eurasian steppe, who wielded considerable control over the Pechenegs and the Hungarians, both of whom were of much greater immediate concern to Byzantine geopolitical strategy. The introduction to chapter 42 clearly marks out the extent of the Pecheneg controlled domains, giving us some idea of where their influence ended and that of the Khazars began.⁵⁸⁰ The Pechenegs inhabited the territory between the Danube and the Don. From mentions in the chapters on the dispatch of imperial agents to the Pechenegs, it is likely that they also controlled some part of north western Crimea, but it is possible that the agents met them near the mouth of the Dnieper, which we know was under their control.⁵⁸¹ The rest of Chapter 42 describes strategic sites – Sarkel, Bosphorus (Kerch), and Tamatarkha - but with no indication that these sites were under Khazar control after the end of the ninth century. However, the great geographical detail in the northern dossier was probably collected in the mid ninth century, when at least the territory up to Bosphorus might have been in Byzantine hands. Even after it passed into Khazar hands, details could have filtered through from the Byzantine ecclesiastical missions, which ministered to Orthodox believers in Khazar-controlled territory.⁵⁸² While the information is technically correct for the time it was compiled, it cannot be taken to reflect precisely the political map of the region in the mid tenth century.

To the west of the Khazars, along the lower reaches of the Dniester and to the east of the Carpathian Mountains was the realm of the Pechenegs, of whose culture surprisingly little is

⁵⁷⁹ Howard-Johnston (2000), pp. 312-4, 316-17.

⁵⁸⁰ *DAI*, 42, pp 182-189.

⁵⁸¹ *DAI*, 7-8, pp 54-57.

⁵⁸² *Letters*, 68, 106, pp 314-4, 388-90; Noonan, (1998/9), pp. 206-230.

known in the tenth century, apart from the description in Chapter 37 of the *DAI*. What can be said with some certainty is that they faced forced migration at the end of the ninth century, ultimately resulting in their own displacement of the Hungarians from the coast of the Black Sea. The first migration was from their settlement between the Volga and Ural rivers in ca. 893, when they were defeated by the Uzes and pushed out of the Emba region north of the Caspian Sea. This whole westward movement was set in motion by the interventions of the Samānid Emir of Transoxiana in the Qarluq Turk regions immediately to the north of the Pamir Knot and to the east of the Syr Darya.⁵⁸³ According to the *DAI*, the Uzes allied with the Khazars to drive the Pechenegs out from their lands.⁵⁸⁴ A portion of the Pechenegs travelled to the region between the Dnieper and the Danube, and, having defeated the Hungarians, settled there.⁵⁸⁵ Their strategic position to the north of Byzantine Cherson and at the mouth of the Dniester pushed them squarely into the remit of Byzantine foreign policy and also in the way of the Rus travelling from Kiev to the Black Sea and beyond.

Like the Khazars and Pechenegs, the Hungarians (or Turks, as they were known to the Byzantines), were a political and social group who were Turkic in their social organisation, although they were a part of a Finno-Ugric linguistic culture which had once extended from the Baltic to the Urals. In the last decade of the ninth century, the Hungarians, who had hitherto occupied a region between the deltas of the Dniester and Danube rivers, came to occupy the Great Plain of Hungary as a result of an alliance with the Frankish king, Arnulf of Carinthia, against the Moravians and with the Byzantines against the Bulgars.⁵⁸⁶ In ca. 899, the Pechenegs removed them from the Black Sea once and for all. The Carpathian Basin, the drainage area of the Middle Danube Valley, is protected by the Carpathian Mountains to the north, east and

⁵⁸³ Kristó (1996), p.185.

⁵⁸⁴ *DAI*, 37, pp. 166-7.

⁵⁸⁵ *DAI*, 38, pp. 170-5; Regino of Prum, pp. 131-3.

⁵⁸⁶ *Annales Fuldenses*, pp. 412-3; *LC*, pp. 275-7; *PVL*, p.63-4; Skylitzes, pp. 176-7.

south-east. It is internally divided into two regions; to the west of the Danube it consists of a fertile plain with hills of modest elevations and to the east of the Danube is the profoundly different Great Hungarian Plain from Budapest to Oradea in the east and Belgrade in the south. This second part is an appendix to the Eurasian steppe, with the difference that there was abundant water from the Tisza and its many tributaries.

The Carpathian Basin had the great advantage of being behind the Carpathian Mountains and the Transylvanian Plateau, but the steppe did not provide adequate grazing land. Recent scholarship has concluded that the entire basin could support pastures for the horses of fourteen to fifteen thousand warriors, alongside other domesticated animals, but the numbers of inhabitants exceeded the natural resources, providing a natural basis for the warriors to spend large periods of time raiding deep into Western Europe, and occasionally into Byzantium.⁵⁸⁷ Warrior graves from the period, i.e., graves with characteristic goods such as sabres, riding accoutrements, horse remains, etc., are largely concentrated around the southern fringes of the Great Plain close to confluence of the Maros and Körös rivers with Tisza near the cities of Szeged and Csongrád, in the Nyírség region to the northeast near the mountain passes that led to the Black Sea and also near the steppe to the west of the Danube, in present day Austria and Slovakia. This shows a concentration of armed men along Hungarian frontiers with the Frankish world. Coin finds from these three areas show that the first had a large number of Byzantine coins and artefacts of the Eastern Empire, the second had a concentration of richly decorated sabres and Samānid silver dirhams from the early decades of the century, while the third had a number of northern Italian and Frankish silver coins.⁵⁸⁸ This immediately tells us that the Hungarians were in contact with

⁵⁸⁷ Bowlus (2006), pp. 22-7.

⁵⁸⁸ Daim and Lauermaun (2006), pp. 1-3.

the Byzantines and that they also exacted payments from Western powers; coins from both Berengar I and Hugh of Provence are present in large numbers.

To the south of Hungarian and Pecheneg domains were perhaps the most stable of Turkic peoples, the Bulgar Kingdom, the structure of which had been largely unchanged since the early eighth century. The heartland of the Bulgar realm was located between the Danube and Byzantine Thrace, and extended westwards to the confluence of the Drava and the Danube. The northern limits on the southern Tisza, Prut, and Dniester are harder to establish, but the core territories were bounded by the Danube to the north for the two and a half centuries preceding the personal reign of Constantine VII. Bulgar power was extended into part of the Carpathian basin after the destruction of the Avars, but the Hungarian migration caused a contraction after 900 to its historic core. The Bulgar rulers established their capital at Pliska to the northeast of the Balkan mountains, about 75 kilometres inland from the Black Sea port of Varna. Their political influence, however, expanded further west to Croatia and Serbia, where their interests came into conflict with those of the Byzantine state. The Byzantine westward push into Macedonia in the middle of the ninth century and its intervention in the tenth century into Serbia and Croatia were the main points of contention between the two powers.⁵⁸⁹

Unlike the other northern powers, the Bulgar ruler, though not the entirety of the ruling class and the populace, had been a Christian since the conversion of Boris I in 865 and Christianisation and the spread of Byzantine style monastic foundations had been continuing apace since the late ninth century despite minor setbacks.⁵⁹⁰ The Bulgars were also embedded in two important trading networks – with the Byzantines through markets in Constantinople (and perhaps also

⁵⁸⁹ *DAI*, 30-1, pp. 146-61; Curta (2006), pp. 199-213.

⁵⁹⁰ Obolensky (1971), pp. 93-7; Morris (1995), pp. 24-6.

closer to the borders), and with the markets of the Slavic world in Eastern Europe. For the latter economic sphere, the information comes from the travelogue/ geographical work of Ibrāhīm ibn Ya‘qūb, who visited Prague as early as 961-2. He mentioned the King of the Bulgars as one of the four kings of the Slavs and later speaks of the Slavs inhabiting the west of the Bulgar territory, to be identified with Bulgar-controlled Macedonia, as a region which exported goods to Constantinople and to the Rus.⁵⁹¹ Although the account of the Russian Primary Chronicle is far from reliable on many counts, the author has Svyatoslav say to his mother that he preferred to stay on in Preslav after having conquered much of trans-Danubian Bulgaria, rather than return to Kiev. His reasoning for this was that it was ‘where all riches are concentrated; gold, silk, wine and various fruits from Greece, silver and horses from Hungary and Bohemia, and from the Rus furs, wax, honey, and slaves’.⁵⁹² This sheds some light on the economic links between the Bulgar state and its neighbours.

While the Turkic peoples settled along the two southern arcs of Byzantium’s northern world, the emerging powers in the third and northernmost zone were of Norse origin. This was the area of primarily East Slav settlement into which, from the end of the eighth century, groups of Viking origin established themselves. The motivations for these settlers were the same as those for their kinsmen who branched out into the northern seas and the Frankish realms, namely, reputation, territory, and wealth. The first major settlements were inland from the Gulf of Finland, on River Volkhov between Lake Ladoga and Lake Ilmen, an area that was Finnish (Sopka Culture) before settlement by the Eastern Slavs in the ninth century.⁵⁹³ This region was reachable by waterways from Lake Neva and Lake Ladoga and was connected to the Dniester river system by a series of portages beyond River Lovat. The main Norse site, Staraja Ladoga, was established sometime in

⁵⁹¹ Ibn Ya‘qūb, (1968), pp. 388.

⁵⁹² *PVL*, p. 86.

⁵⁹³ Jansson (1997), p.30.

the 750s, with major expansion between 840 and 863, which included the establishment of satellite states.⁵⁹⁴ By 850, another major Scandinavian site, Gorodische, was established at the Lake Ilmen end of the Volkhov. This fortified site was settled by Scandinavians of both sexes and thrived throughout the tenth century. The areas beyond the river, in either direction were inhabited almost exclusively by non-Scandinavians, indicating that the Scandinavians settled along strategic points on the riverine transport network from whence both slaves and the products of the deciduous forests could be transported to markets further afield.⁵⁹⁵ This was followed by settlements at Gnëzdovo (near present-day Smolensk), which controlled the portage from the Lovat to the Dniester network and then on to Kiev. Kiev was initially a defensive military outpost, protecting Gnëzdovo, before it developed into a key political centre in its own right. Another area of settlement was further west along the lower reaches of River Velikaja, near its delta south of Lake Peipus and the modern day town of Pskov. To the east, Scandinavian burials indicate the routes taken towards the Volga Bulgars and the Khazars, with burials found in the region around Rostov and, further south, near Vladimir, on the Kljazma (a tributary of Volga, north of the Oka). These Scandinavians, the Viking Rus, therefore settled not in the forests and plains, but along the rivers by which goods they collected as tribute or bought from local Slav and Finnish populations could be transported to their far-flung markets. The two most important centres of the Rus in the tenth century – Novgorod and Kiev – were at the two most important points in this network. The first was at the northern entrance to the riverine network at Lake Ladoga and the second was at the point at which all the tributaries of the Dniester met on the way to the Black Sea.

⁵⁹⁴ Duczko (2004), p. 67.

⁵⁹⁵ Price (2000), pp. 264-5

In light of this array of peoples to the north, who took an active interest in Byzantine affairs, or could be manipulated to participate in the Empire's security and offensive actions, it is unsurprising that Byzantium maintained its own presence in the Crimea, at Cherson. Cherson was a historic Greek colony built on a rocky cape on the south-eastern tip of the Crimean Peninsula, which became subject to the Byzantine Empire around the end of the fourth century. It had become a formal Byzantine theme in the 830s, and continued to play a key role in relations with the northern peoples in the tenth century.⁵⁹⁶ Cherson was used as a base for imperial administration in the reign of Theophilos, when the emperor entered into closer dealings with the Khazars, and built a fortress at Sarkel for them on River Don.⁵⁹⁷ The predominant ceramic culture of the ninth century in Cherson is the Saltovo-Mayatskoe culture, which was shared with the Khazar territories that stretched between the Don and the Dnieper.⁵⁹⁸ By the early tenth century, the Kievan Rus challenged Khazar dominance to the east of the Dnieper, and the Pechenegs were very active along the southern barrages of the river. The *DAI* is quite specific when it says that the ford on the Dnieper, used by the Chersonites to cross over into Pecheneg territory and for Pechenegs to travel to Cherson, was in the domain controlled by the Rus.⁵⁹⁹ It is impossible to determine whether the Rus influence continued to the western coast of the Sea of Azov, thereby blocking Khazar access to the Crimea, but Cherson certainly crops up with greater regularity in reference to the Rus and the Pechenegs, and no references to Cherson's dealings with the Khazars exist for the tenth century.

Cherson's place in Byzantine trade is more difficult to determine. The many extant seals of *kommerkiarioi* from Cherson have been taken to suggest that these officials were in charge of

⁵⁹⁶ Nesbitt and Oikonomides (1991), pp. 182-3; *ODB*, 'Cherson'; *De thematibus*, pp. 182-3.

⁵⁹⁷ *DAI*, 42, pp. 182-4.

⁵⁹⁸ Zalesskaya (2011), p. 124.

⁵⁹⁹ *DAI*, 9, p. 60.

collecting import and export duties on behalf of Byzantium.⁶⁰⁰ This might refer to localised trading with the peoples in the immediate vicinity of Cherson, including the Pechenegs, but the bulk of the high value trade carried out by the Rus was conducted in Constantinople and not Cherson.⁶⁰¹ Cherson was also certainly not a defensive theme with any significant military might – stationing valuable military resources in a region where central reinforcements could not be reliably despatched was not strategically sound. Diplomatic relations with the Pechenegs were carried out by imperial agents despatched from Constantinople, and not by the local officials from Cherson, but channels of communication between Cherson and the Pechenegs were used to arrange meetings between the agents and the Pechenegs.⁶⁰² Cherson could also be bypassed altogether, if agents wanted to contact the Pechenegs in spring, when they went directly to the region between the Dnieper and the Dniester in warships.⁶⁰³ Therefore Cherson could be relied upon to deliver quotidian updates on the activities of the Rus and the Pechenegs, but meetings to military affairs or to deliver gifts were conducted by the centre.

Relations with the north were carefully orchestrated from Constantinople, and the city played host to diplomatic missions and traders from amongst northern peoples. Representatives of the Rus, the Hungarians, and the Bulgars were received by the emperor, while agents from the capital were despatched to deal with the Pechenegs and Khazars in their homelands.⁶⁰⁴ It was also the premier Byzantine trading destination for the Bulgars and the Kievan Rus, leading to a number of trading agreements which prescribed the numbers of foreign traders allowed into the city, the quarters where they were to be housed, the periods for which they were allowed to remain in the city, and the quality and value of goods they were able to buy.⁶⁰⁵ Individual members of the

⁶⁰⁰ *ODB*, 'Kommerkiarioi'; Oikonomides (1986); Alekseyenko (2007).

⁶⁰¹ *DAI*, 6, p. 52.

⁶⁰² *DAI*, 7, p. 54.

⁶⁰³ *DAI*, 8, pp. 54-6.

⁶⁰⁴ Shepard (1992), pp. 44-50.

⁶⁰⁵ *PVL*, pp. 64-9, 73-7.

northern peoples also sought their fortunes in the Empire's armies, particularly in the *Hetaeria*, and were displayed in their distinctive costumes in palace ceremonies for foreign visitors.⁶⁰⁶ They were generally placed in *tagma* contingents and are reported to have participated in key battles between Byzantium and the Hamdānids, as well as in campaigns in Crete.⁶⁰⁷ Cenotaphs of Rus mercenaries who perished in Byzantium, which become numerous by the end of the tenth and early eleventh centuries, exist in considerable numbers in the Middle Dnieper in the early tenth century, indicating that the Kievan Rus mercenaries were the precursors to the great influx of Scandinavians into the Byzantine army half a century later.⁶⁰⁸

5.2 Relations with the northern peoples in the first half of the tenth century: sources and events

Although the peoples of the Black Sea littoral had remained in the same geographical areas for nearly half a century before the accession of Constantine VII, their activities and the Empire's foreign policy objectives meant that they were periodically re-evaluated for their potential to aid or harm the Empire. The reconstruction of relations for both the period directly preceding Constantine's independent rule and the era of the emperor's personal reign presents serious challenges as the only primary sources for both periods originated in Constantinople. We have neither contemporary written sources from within the northern world nor accounts from Byzantine frontier districts in Crimea or Thrace. The earliest indigenous historical source is the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, or *Povest' Vremennjkh Let*, a Kievan compilation dating from the early twelfth century, which provides a pre-history of the Rus in the Middle Dnieper, but relies heavily on Byzantine historical sources for its information on the Rus in the tenth century.⁶⁰⁹ The only credible information found uniquely in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, consists of the trade treaties

⁶⁰⁶ *De cer.*, II. 15, p. 579.

⁶⁰⁷ *De cer.*, II.44, p. 651; II.45, p. 664.

⁶⁰⁸ Franklin and Sheperd (1996), p. 121.

⁶⁰⁹ Franklin and Shepard (1996), p. xviii; *PVL*, pp. 23 – 30.

(or ‘charters of privilege’) between the Rus and Byzantium, which were concluded in 907, 911, and 944.⁶¹⁰

Hungarian historiography arrived on the scene only in the thirteenth century, and authors like Simon of Kéza wrote in Latin and were often disparaging of the pre-Christian Hungarians. Much of the early medieval history of the Hungarian peoples was unknown to early Hungarian historians, and the only detailed information that Simon provides is on the different areas of settlement chosen by the seven *exercitus* who settled the Carpathian Basin.⁶¹¹ All the terms used by Simon for military formations do not reflect ninth- or tenth-century Hungarian clan formations and the author betrays ignorance of the meanings of the words *gyula* or *kunde* and treats them as the proper names of the leaders of the different hosts, rather than titles. Accounts of Hungarian confrontations with the Moravians and Saxons are so anodyne and devoid of any specifically Hungarian information that the accounts could have been derived from any number of western sources and not from pre-existing Hungarian historical traditions. Therefore, historical traditions about the Hungarians are invariably from external sources, most often from the histories written by their adversaries.

For the Pechenegs and the Bulgars, no sources survive for the early tenth century. The Pechenegs lost their independent identity by the mid twelfth century, arguably before they had developed a writing system as there are no known Pecheneg inscriptions or documents. The complete lack of any Bulgar historical narrative for this period is somewhat more difficult to explain, as ecclesiastical and elite literacy was widespread. There exists a considerable amount of epigraphic evidence in Greek and Cyrillic, as well as hagiographic and other ecclesiastical works attributed to

⁶¹⁰ *PVL*, pp. 64-68, 73-78; Franklin and Shepard (1996), 103-4.

⁶¹¹ *Gesta Hungarorum*, II. 27.

the early tenth century and later, but no historical narrative emerges before the composite account of the fourteenth century, dealing with the conversion of the Bulgars.⁶¹² If there was a Bulgar historical tradition, it was either destroyed by the Rus raids of the 960s or superseded by Byzantine historiography at a later date.

The Khazars, who are conspicuously absent from Byzantine historical narratives in the tenth century, certainly had their own historical tradition, which is in evidence in the surviving letters between the Khazar *khagan* Joseph and Hisdai ibn Shaprut, physician and vizier of the Umayyad Caliph Abd ar-Rahmān II, unearthed in Egypt in the sixteenth century, and a variant letter, discovered by Solomon Schechter in the Cairo *Genizah* at the turn of the twentieth century.⁶¹³ Both letters were written in Hebrew and in Joseph's name in the 950s, and both recount the legend regarding the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism, and both describe geographical location of their capital on the Volga. The *Schechter Letter* goes on to describe how the Rus of the Middle Dnieper became Khazar clients around the year 940. Apart from these letters, there are no surviving historical records from the Khazar Khaganate.

With the paucity of historical sources emanating from the northern peoples, one can turn to one other source of information on Byzantine relations with the north, before turning to the Byzantine sources themselves. This source is the historical material in Arabic, which can be found in histories and geographies from the mid ninth to the tenth centuries. On the whole, geographers from Ibn Khurradādhbeh to Ibn Rustah and Ibn Hawqal were only interested in geographical and ethnographical information and chose to ignore notable events in the histories of the northern peoples. To get some inkling of the developments in the tenth century, one has

⁶¹² Petkov (2008), pp. 33-140.

⁶¹³ Schechter (1912), pp. 181-219. Golb and Pritsak (1982), pp.101-25.

to consult a geographer who actively sought to include recent history of non-Islamic peoples in his work. Mas'ūdī, who completed his *Murij adb-dhabab wa ma'ādīn al-jawāhir* in 947 tells us about how Khazaria attracted Jews from other Muslim countries and the Byzantine Empire. The latter, under Romanos Lekapenos, is singled out for having tried to forcibly convert Jews to Christianity. He also tells us that the Rus constantly traded with al-Andalus, Rome, Constantinople and Khazaria. He places, in 912, an attack on Jilān, Daylam, Tabaristān, Abaskun and Azerbaijan by the Rus, who had ostensibly received permission from the Khazars to go through their territory, but who, on the way back were attacked by the troops of the Khazars. The Khazars blamed this on the fact that a large corpus of their troops was Muslim and hence sought revenge for an attack on their co-religionists.⁶¹⁴

Later, in a universal history, in which he wrote about the rise of the Buwayhids or Buyids, the historian Miskawayh wrote about another Rus attack on the Islamic Caucasus, this time leading to the capture and occupation of Bardha'a, the capital of Arrān (present-day Azerbaijan).⁶¹⁵ It has been effectively argued that while the Igor, king of the Kievan Rus was concluding a trade treaty with Byzantium, another group of Rus under Oleg was attacking the Islamic Caucasus, and stayed for in Bardha for about a year between 944 and 945 before being routed by Marzubān ibn Muhammad, the Sallarid ruler of Azerbaijan.⁶¹⁶ This attack was a result of the debacle of the Rus attack on Constantinople in 941. According to the *Schechter Letter* from the Cairo Genizah, the attack was instigated by the Khazars in retaliation for a Byzantine-backed attack on the Severians, Khazar clients on the north-western flank of Khazaria.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁴ *Murij*, II, pp. 212-3.

⁶¹⁵ Miskawayh, I, pp. 63-7.

⁶¹⁶ Zuckerman (1995), pp. 259-270.

⁶¹⁷ *Schechter Letter*, pp. 217-8.

For Byzantium's relations with the north in the first half of the tenth century, our sources focus on three major episodes, two of which will be dealt with in this section. At the turn of the tenth century, Leo VI was fundamentally changing the way Byzantium dealt with the northern peoples. This is the period when a two-pronged approach to foreign policy emerged, with the Hungarians and the Rus taking central position as the empire's favoured allies. Under Basil I, the peace brokered between the Bulgar ruler Boris-Michael and Michael III had held to the extent that the only references to Basil's policy in Bulgaria are in the context of assisting the Bulgars in maintaining and extending the reach of Orthodox Christianity in the newly converted realm.⁶¹⁸ It was not until the Bulgar succession crisis in the 890s that Byzantium's attitudes to this neighbour changed. With Symeon freshly elevated to the helm of affairs in Bulgaria, Leo VI attempted to confine Bulgar traders to Thessaloniki, resulting in the first Bulgar attack against Macedonia in the autumn of 894, in which the Byzantines were routed.⁶¹⁹ Leo's intention was probably to contain the Bulgars at the borders of the Empire, and then to push them out of Macedonia and Thrace. Striking at the time of a regime change was the best option. He had miscalculated the Bulgar military strength and also the extent of Byzantine military capabilities at a time when the Empire was actively engaged on the eastern frontier. Symeon was unrelenting in his opposition to the Byzantines, leading to approaches being made to the Hungarians to cross the Danube and attack Symeon from the north. The Hungarians did cross the Danube with Byzantine assistance, and were able to engage the Bulgar forces throughout 895, reaching as far as Preslav. The Bulgars, however, forged their own alliance with the Pechenegs and, at the Battle of Southern Buh in 896, were victorious over the Hungarians. The Hungarians could not then be persuaded to continue their attacks on the Bulgars, as the Pechenegs, their feared immediate neighbours had been deployed against them.⁶²⁰ While the Hungarians were deployed against Symeon, Byzantium

⁶¹⁸ *VB*, 96, pp. 310-3.

⁶¹⁹ *LC*, pp. 275-7; *PVL*, p.63-4; Skylitzes, pp. 176-7.

⁶²⁰ *DAI*, 40, pp. 175-7.

attempted to orchestrate a negotiated settlement through the envoy Leo Choirosphraktes, but Symeon proved to be a superior strategist and pinned his hopes on an alliance with the Pechenegs instead. With the Hungarians despatched, Symeon's attention returned to Thrace in the summer of 896. This time the Byzantines were ready for battle, having diverted thematic and *tagma* forces from the East under the *domestikos tōn skolōn*, Leo Katakalon. They were unable to stop Symeon's advance and suffered a crushing defeat at Bulgarophygon, after which Symeon proceeded to the outskirts of Constantinople. Leo VI was left with no choice but to agree to an annual payment to the Bulgars and allow Bulgar traders to return to Constantinople.⁶²¹

While the seismic jolt delivered to Byzantium's prestige and power by the Bulgars in the reign of Leo VI meant that Byzantine historical sources abound with details about engagements and strategic matters, almost nothing can be said about relations with the Rus of the Middle Dnieper or the Khazars in the same period. The only pieces of evidence upon which we might build a hypothesis of the state of relations with the Rus are the two treaties which found their way into the *Russian Primary Chronicle*. After the Rus attack on Constantinople in 860, the sources are almost silent on relations with the far north in this period. The *Vita Basilii* refers to gift exchanges and peace treaties with the Rus in the reign of Basil I, but largely focuses on the emperor's attempts to baptise them into the Christian faith, leading to their acceptance of an archbishop.⁶²² Fleeting though this reference is, it is proof that relations with the Rus were actively maintained by the Byzantines ever since their attack on Constantinople.

The treaty negotiated between the Rus and the Empire under Leo VI were not pre-empted by a Rus attack on Byzantine territory, despite the *Russian Primary Chronicle's* assertions to that effect.⁶²³

⁶²¹ *LC*, pp. 275-7; Skylitzes, pp. 176-7.

⁶²² *VB*, 97, pp. 312-7; Skylitzes, p. 165.

⁶²³ *PVL*, p. 64.

The fragment preserved for the year 907 is essentially a trade document, which stipulates that the Rus traders coming to Constantinople would be housed in the Sant Mamas quarter (near Galata) at the Emperor's expense for up to six months while they conducted their trade – effectively allowing them enough time to negotiate the best prices for their wares. The stipulations from the Byzantine side were that they were to arrive fifty at a time, with peaceful intentions, and unarmed.⁶²⁴ The second fragment is a more legalistic one, dealing with the protocol to be followed in resolving disputes over crimes like murder, wounding, or theft; the return of cargo or its value in coin if a trading ship was lost; and the return of runaway slaves and criminals. From the diplomatic perspective, the most important conditions regard the free recruitment of Rus mercenaries into Byzantine armies.

The Middle Dnieper had only just started to be brought under Rus control in the early tenth century, allowing the Rus settled there the opportunity to seek their fortunes in Byzantium in both trade and the military. Unlike any of Byzantium's other potential allies, the Rus provided Byzantium with skilled men of arms who were also experienced seafarers. Seven hundred Rus mercenaries were involved in Leo VI's failed attempt to capture Crete from the Arabs in 911. The Khazars, who had been the Empire's old allies and had also provided forces for the *Hetaeria*, could no longer be counted upon to act against the Muslims in the Caucasus and, according to the *Schechter Letter*, were boastful of their ability to prevent Rus attacks against the Muslim emirates between the Black Sea and the Caspian.⁶²⁵ The Rus displayed their ability to sail across the Black Sea and attack Jilān, Daylam, Tabaristān, Abaskun (Abkhazia), and Azerbaijan in ca. 912, and their safe return was only thwarted by an attack by the mainly Muslim Khazar forces.⁶²⁶ This attack was within a year of the treaty of 911, and might have been at the instigation of the

⁶²⁴ *PVL*, pp. 64-5.

⁶²⁵ *Schechter Letter*, p. 218.

⁶²⁶ *Murij*, II, pp. 18-25.

Byzantines, who could have exploited the Rus ambition to create a passage between the Black Sea and the Caspian to enfeeble the indomitable emir of Azerbaijan. In the Rus of the Middle Dnieper, the government of Leo VI saw an emerging power that was looking for its own special access to both Byzantine markets and the Caspian. From dirham finds in Ukraine and Scandinavia, we know that the trade with the Islamic world was of much greater importance to the Rus than the Byzantine trade.⁶²⁷ They had the capacity to protect Byzantine interests in the Crimea from Khazar encroachments, and to wage long distance naval warfare against the Sājīd emir of Azerbaijan, who was harassing the Empire's Armenian and Georgian clients. They also carried luxury northern goods to the heart of Byzantium, which had previously acquired these goods via the emporia of Armenia, or perhaps via Bulgaria.⁶²⁸

Leo VI's policy towards the Hungarians and the Rus was one that envisaged their use in proxy warfare along with the usual role for northern mercenaries in the Byzantine army. This policy, however, was dropped soon after his death in 912. The next phase of the Bulgar wars was precipitated by Emperor Alexander's refusal to fulfil the treaty obligation to pay annual tribute to the Bulgars in the spring of 913. Alexander's sudden death on 6 June 913 plunged the Byzantine Empire into a crisis which brought Symeon and a Bulgar host to the walls of Constantinople in August 913. The head of the regency council at the time, Patriarch Nikolaos Mystikos, was able to arrange a truce at Hebdomon and it is almost certain that the negotiations resulted in the resumption of tribute payments and a possible marriage alliance with Constantine VII, as can be seen in the letters of the patriarch.⁶²⁹ The peace of 913 did not hold as Symeon again intervened in Thrace once it became clear that the patriarch's position in the regency was being taken by Zoe Karbonopsina who had removed him from his position. In 914, he was able to seize Adrianople,

⁶²⁷ Noonan (2001), pp. 94-102.

⁶²⁸ *DAI*, 46, pp. 216-7.

⁶²⁹ *Letters*, 7, pp. 42-4.

which was released back to Byzantium once Zoe sent gifts and assurances with an official as close to the emperor as the *kanikleios*, a certain Basil, leading the delegation.⁶³⁰ Our sources tell us that it was at this point that Byzantium decided on a more forward policy against Bulgaria, but this time the two pronged attack envisaged deploying Pechenegs from across the Danube, while the Byzantine field army attacked along the corridor from the Black Sea. In preparation, Zoe's government sued for peace with the Arabs so that, as the Logothete puts it, 'the whole army of the east' could be used against the Bulgars.⁶³¹ This campaign resulted in double defeat for the Byzantines, first at the Battle at Acheloos on 20 August 917 and then at Katasyrtai where the Byzantine defensive forces were unable to hold the Bulgars back as they forged their way ahead to Constantinople.⁶³²

Despite these victories, Symeon seemed hesitant to act against Constantinople again, especially since it would take another two years before it became clear who held the reins of power in the empire. His incursions thus far had been aimed at securing tribute payments and making demands for a marriage alliance. Once it was clear that Romanos Lekapenos had seized power in Constantinople just as Constantine VII was coming to the conventional age of maturity (fourteen), and had married his daughter Helena to Constantine on 27 April 919, Symeon would have known that the agreement on a marriage alliance would no longer be honoured, and that it was time to intervene again to safeguard the empire's other historical obligations towards the Bulgars. Around the time of the defeat at Acheloos, the *DAI* tells us that a third possible front had been opened against the Bulgars with a Byzantine intervention in Serbia.⁶³³ Symeon was able to install his candidate, Paul as *archōn* of Serbia around 918. This prompted Romanos to send a Serbian hostage, Zacharias, to challenge Paul at some point after April 919. Zacharias was

⁶³⁰ *LC*, p. 303.

⁶³¹ *LC*, p. 304.

⁶³² *LC*, pp. 304-5.

⁶³³ *DAI*, 32, pp. 154-61.

defeated by a joint Bulgar and Serbian force and captured by Symeon, only to be installed as *archōn* of Serbia in about 921, which demonstrates that the Byzantine will could not be disregarded altogether.

While the proxy war continued in the Western Balkans, Symeon launched fresh attacks against Byzantium in the early 920s with an advance on Katasyrtai, a further campaign against Constantinople which resulted in the destruction by fire of the palaces of Pegai and the Stenon, a second campaign against Hebdomon (where they burned the palace of Theodora) and a further siege of Adrianople. In 922, Bulgar emissaries were to be found in Mahdia, where they tried to negotiate an alliance with the Fātimids against Byzantium. Finally, in 923, after another attack ravaging Thrace and Macedonia, Symeon reached Blachernai and sued for peace. In a meeting arranged on 19 November at a specially built platform off the Golden Horn at Kosmidion, an unspecified agreement was made between Romanos I and Symeon.⁶³⁴ Symeon withdrew, never to attack Constantinople again, most likely because his attentions were shifted to western Balkans, where the *archōn* of Serbia, Zacharias had switched loyalties once more to Byzantium. When Bulgar forces retaliated, he fled to Croatia. This was followed by a Bulgar attack on the Croats, which was roundly defeated with both the *DAI* and the *Logothete's Chronicle* claiming that the entire Bulgar host was killed in the battle.⁶³⁵ Symeon died shortly after on 27 May 927, an event some historians have directly associated with the defeat against the Croats.⁶³⁶ Although this direct causal link might be a deduction too far, Symeon's death ushered in a new phase of Byzantine-Bulgar relations.

⁶³⁴ *LC*, pp. 320-24.

⁶³⁵ *DAI*, 32, pp. 160-1; *LC*, pp. 326-7.

⁶³⁶ Obolensky (1971), p. 113.

Symeon's son Peter came to power upon his father's death, but real power lay with his maternal uncle George Soursouboules. Peter's accession allegedly brought with it threats of attacks from the Turks, Serbs and Croats, which the Bulgars tried to counter through an offensive campaign in Thrace.⁶³⁷ They quickly sued for peace with Byzantium, and got it easily. On 8 October 927, a new peace was established with Bulgaria, crowned by a marriage alliance between Maria Lekapena, daughter of Romanos' son Christopher, and Peter. When Liudprand of Cremona visited the court of Nikephoros II Phokas in 968, he was told that the Bulgars had precedence over all other foreign envoys since the marriage of Peter and Maria Lekapena.⁶³⁸ The marriage ushered in a time of peace between Byzantium and Bulgaria for forty years, and also a period of near complete silence on Bulgaria in Byzantine historical narratives. Despite the peace in Thrace and Macedonia, Byzantium was still uncertain enough of Peter's loyalty to seek out and give shelter to his brother John, who had rebelled against him. Romanos gave John a house, properties and a noble wife after the rebellion, and the next dateable event in the Logothete's Chronicle is the end of Patriarch Tryphon's term in October 931. This clearly shows that the empire was either uncertain about Peter's capacity to hold on to the Bulgar throne or about the depth of the peace of 927 despite the claim that 'all are in Community of brotherly love and concord' made after it was concluded.⁶³⁹ The fact that Hungarian raiders were able to penetrate through Bulgaria in order to ravage Thrace in 934 and 943 would certainly not have inspired confidence in this new fraternity. Bulgaria had prior form in engaging the nomads to the north to fight on its behalf, so even if the Hungarian raids were not instigated by the Bulgars, they might well have assisted in their execution.

⁶³⁷ *LC*, p. 328.

⁶³⁸ *Legatio*, 19, pp. 195-6.

⁶³⁹ *Daphnopates*, p. 297.

At this point the trail goes cold on relations with the northern peoples. The situation under Romanos I had changed considerably. The Bulgars had been brought back into the Byzantine fold through a marriage alliance and were kept engaged in the Western Balkans through Byzantine interventions in Serbian and Croat affairs. The Hungarians had moved to the Carpathian Basin and were no longer as easy to communicate with as they had been when they were settled on the shores of the Black Sea. After their initial forays south of the Caucasus, the Rus seem to have been either called off or preoccupied with establishing their tributary relations with the local population to the east of the Dnieper. Their defeat at the hands of the Khazars in 912 was perhaps another reason for the dampening of their ardour for service in the Byzantine cause. The Khazars were further antagonised by Romanos's anti-Jewish policies, which had led to migrations of Byzantine Jewry to Khazaria and was commented upon by both Joseph and Mas'ūdī.⁶⁴⁰ Anti-Jewish sentiment was not new in Byzantium, and Constantine VII credits Basil I with a drive to convert the Empire's Jews, but Romanos's policy was much more punitive and appears to have led to Jews fleeing Byzantium.⁶⁴¹ The Pechenegs, after appearing for the Bulgars in 896, had almost entered the fray on the side of the Byzantines in 913, and seem to have increased in importance in the Byzantine reckoning. In the years preceding 940, Byzantium realised that it had no need for allies who could carry out long distance raids in Transcaucasia, or those who could menace the Thracian frontier in long-distance raids. The preceding half century had, however, brought the Empire into direct contact with all the peoples settled along the Black Sea and Byzantium had no option but to maintain regular contacts with them all, regardless of whether or not they were expressly allied with the Byzantines. The decades since the 890s had proved that the northern peoples maintained contacts with each other and could act in concert to harm the Empire's interests. This is the clearest message from the first thirteen chapters of the *De*

⁶⁴⁰ *Murij*, II, pp. 212-3; *Schechter Letter*, p. 217.

⁶⁴¹ *VB*, 96, pp. 310-3.

Administrando Imperio. It was essential to know who had the ability to attack whom, and to evolve diplomatic and strategic policies which would ensure the Empire's protection. Constantine's own view of the north was indelibly coloured by the events of 941, which, although they occurred before he assumed the reins of power, will be dealt with in the next section due to their impact on Constantine's northern policy.

5.3 Relations with the northern peoples in the personal reign of Constantine VII

The personal reign of Constantine VII was marked by two events of great importance, with regard to relations with the northern peoples, one before it started, and one in the last years of the reign. The first occurred just over three years before Constantine's accession in 941, when a fleet of Rus ships sailed down to Constantinople and besieged the city, staying for nearly four months before the armies of the east arrived to drive them off Byzantine soil.⁶⁴² This was followed by a treaty in 944 and then quiet diplomacy, which must have been continuous but fails to find mention in the sources, until 957, when Olga, the *archontissa* of the Rus, was baptised in Constantinople with Constantine's wife Helena acting as sponsor. Interwoven with this, but on a separate, West-oriented trajectory, were the baptisms of the Hungarian chieftains Bulscu and Gyula in 948 and 952 and the Hungarian raids into Thrace in 958. There are also documents from the Cairo Geniza that are almost impossible to date apart from a *terminus post quem* of 949, which form the correspondence between the Khazars and the Umayyad advisor Hisdai ibn Shaprut. The Khazars, as we shall see, started the period as the instigators of the 941 Rus raid, but faced mounting challenges to their authority from the Rus after that incident. Relations with Bulgaria entered a new phase, with Byzantium suing for closer dealings and offering greater honours in return.

⁶⁴² *LC*, pp. 335-6; *PVL*, 71-2.

Although it took place before Constantine's personal reign formally started, the Rus attack of 941 must be taken as a starting point for Constantine's great interest in the north, as reflected in the *DAI*, and as the catalyst for innovations in the very framework of imperial strategic thinking about the north. Three descriptions of the raid of 941 have come down to us. The first is the account transmitted through the *Logothete's Chronicle*, which was reproduced in the chronicle of Skylitzes and the Russian Primary Chronicle.⁶⁴³ The second independent source is the account in the *Antapodosis* of Liudprand of Cremona, which was derived from his stepfather's recollection of his embassy to Constantinople in 941, as an envoy from Hugh of Provence.⁶⁴⁴ The final account comes to us in the *Schechter Letter* sent from an unnamed Khazar author to an unidentified Jewish dignitary, generally thought to be another version of the letter from the *khagan* Joseph to Hisdai ibn Shaprut.⁶⁴⁵

The first historical tradition tells of the arrival of ten thousand Rus ships (a fanciful number, no doubt), a figure that is repeated in each copy of the Logothete's account. The figure of a thousand ships provided by Liudprand is probably closer to the actual number.⁶⁴⁶ The first encounter with the Byzantines took place near Hieron, at the mouth of the Black Sea, in June 941, with the Patrician Theophanes leading the counterattack with vessels which were protecting the city. Some ships, especially the ones led by Igor probably retreated at this stage and returned to Kiev.⁶⁴⁷ Some of the remaining Rus ships travelled to Bithynia to pick up supplies, where they were met by the forces of Bardas Phokas and the army of the east under John Kourkouas and routed, before September 941. There is a stray reference in a tenth-century saint's life to say that this contingent reached Nicomedia, but they seem to have been stopped before they could carry

⁶⁴³ *LC*, pp. 335-6; Skylitzes, pp. 229-30; *PVL*, pp. 71-2.

⁶⁴⁴ *Antapodosis*, V. 15, pp. 131-2.

⁶⁴⁵ *Schechter Letter*, pp. 217-9.

⁶⁴⁶ *Antapodosis*, V.15, pp. 131-2.

⁶⁴⁷ Zuckerman (1995), pp. 264-5.

out their mission.⁶⁴⁸ The main Rus contingent remained in Stenon, a suburb near Pera, which had important monasteries, and committed a litany of atrocities against the civilian and ecclesiastical population including arson, enslavement, and murder, reminiscent of Viking attacks on monasteries in Britain and northern Europe. Driven away by the Byzantine forces, the Rus ships fled towards the Thracian shore, but were once again attacked by the naval forces of the Patrician Theophanes. The great detail in which we hear of the Byzantine manoeuvres possibly derived from an official report, which was circulated and/or declaimed at the triumph in honour of the Patrician Theophanes, held after the victory. That he was given a ‘reception with full honours’ and was elevated to the position of *parakoimomenos* is mentioned in the *Logothete’s Chronicle*.⁶⁴⁹ The key determinant in the victory was Greek fire, and there is no indication that the rest of the Byzantine fleet was able to make its way from the Aegean or the coast of Asia Minor to Constantinople in time to join in the defence of the city. The Rus attack might have also been a catalyst for the actions against Edessa over the next three years, since their principal result was the acquisition of the Mandylion as a protective talisman for Constantinople.⁶⁵⁰

Neither the *Logothete’s Chronicle* or Skylitzes was interested in the names and origins of the leaders of the Rus expedition. The compiler of the Russian Primary Chronicle certainly had to contend with this question, as his history, however heavily based on the Byzantine account, had the primary purpose of tracing early Rus history. He names Igor as the Rus leader at the helm of that expedition, but provides no reasons for why it was launched. Liudprand too names Igor as the leader of the Rus attack, but mentions only the first phase of the Byzantine victory, which took place in the environs of Constantinople. Rus prisoners from this campaign were then publicly beheaded in the presence of foreign envoys, including Liudprand’s stepfather.⁶⁵¹ Some

⁶⁴⁸ *Vita Basil iunioris*, pp. 318-9.

⁶⁴⁹ *LC*, p. 336.

⁶⁵⁰ See Chapter 2

⁶⁵¹ *Antapodosis*, V.15, pp. 131-2.

clarification is added by the convergence of information found in the *Schechter Letter* and the account of Miskawayh for the coming of a Rus attachment to Bardha in 944. The *Schechter Letter* indicates that the Rus attack of 941 was instigated by the Khazars. It alleges that sometime before the attacks took place, Romanos had been in contact with Oleg and had urged him to rise up against the Khazars and to invade the territory of the Severians, between the Dnieper and the Don. The Khazars retaliated by launching an attack against the towns of Byzantine Crimea and then proceeded to attack the Rus, who capitulated and agreed to attack Byzantium on behalf of the Khazars. These negotiations took place not with Igor, but with Oleg.⁶⁵² While Igor returned to Kiev and was back in Constantinople in 944 to negotiate a treaty on behalf of the Rus from Kiev and Chernigov, Oleg, probably aware that his position in Kiev was now wholly lost to Igor, continued east to Azerbaijan. From Schechter it seems that Oleg was in charge. He deputed Igor to attack Byzantium, whilst taking charge of the more important campaign himself. Here the Rus sailed down the Kura River and occupied Bardha'a, with an aim to settle there, and were successful in their attempts until an unknown epidemic cut down their numbers, and they were finally expelled by the forces of Marzuban ibn Muhammad in 945.⁶⁵³ Oleg seems to have been killed at this time.

The parting of ways of Oleg and Igor has been explained as a sort of watershed between a Kievan Rus allied and subordinate to Khazaria and one which was entering ever-friendlier relations with Byzantium.⁶⁵⁴ An attack on Constantinople and the Black Sea coast of Asia Minor would have prompted the Byzantines to forge a closer relationship with the Rus, if only to increase surveillance and monitor developments in north-western Eurasia. This may in turn have encouraged the Rus in their final confrontation with the Khazars in 965. The treaty concluded

⁶⁵² *Schechter Letter*, pp. 217-9

⁶⁵³ Miskawayh, I, pp. 65-67.

⁶⁵⁴ Zuckerman (1995), pp. 266-9.

between Igor and Romanos is a complex document and is preserved in the Russian Primary Chronicle.⁶⁵⁵ The initial clauses of the treaty echo the treaty of 911 and deal primarily with trading rights, stating that Russian traders would henceforth require certificates issued by the rulers of Kiev in order to enter Constantinople. The traders were to enter the city unarmed, through only one gate, and in groups of fifty. They were to be guarded at all times, kept in quarters near the Church of St Mamas, and would have to return to their homeland in the autumn. The new treaty placed elaborate restrictions on the sale of Byzantine silks, on the return of slaves, and the ransom of prisoners of war. It also turned to military and defensive matters, unlike the older treaty, stipulating first that the Rus were to desist from making war with Cherson or to make it subject to their rule. They were also prohibited from wintering at the mouth of the Dnieper and were required to return to the land of the Rus before the winter months. Finally, the treaty instructs that, if either side were to require it, the other would send military assistance.⁶⁵⁶ The right of the Rus to ask for military aid is mentioned in the section that deals with Cherson; the military governor of Cherson would possibly relay any such request to Constantinople. Rus mercenaries participated in large numbers in Byzantine campaigns such as the Cretan campaign of 959 (a figure of 700 is mentioned in the surviving inventory of troops), but it is difficult to say if this was based on agreements made between the Kievan Rus and Byzantium or if it was due to an influx of Rus adventurers, who enrolled themselves in the Byzantine army.⁶⁵⁷

Constantine VII's consternation regarding the Rus finds ample space in the *DAI*, both in the chapter about the arrival of the Rus ships or *monoxylla* as well as in the chapters that advise on how the Pechenegs could be used against them if the need arose.⁶⁵⁸ At the time that Constantine was compiling the *DAI*, immediately preceding his personal reign, the Rus and their ability to

⁶⁵⁵ *PVL*, pp. 73-7.

⁶⁵⁶ *PVL*, p. 76.

⁶⁵⁷ *De cer.* II.45, p. 664.

⁶⁵⁸ *DAI*, 2, 4, 9, pp. 48-53, 56-63.

strike at the core of the Byzantine Empire, as well as diplomatic strategies to contain them must have been uppermost in the minds of the Byzantine administration. It had taken the *tagma* forces of Constantinople as well as the army of the east to push the Rus back in 941. The *DAI* necessarily concentrated on creating conditions, monitored through Cherson, which would trigger a forward attack by the Pechenegs if plans of a Rus attack were afoot.⁶⁵⁹ A strategy was also conceived by which, if the Rus succeeded in attacking Byzantine interests again, the Pechenegs were to be deployed to attack their homelands, thereby hastening a retreat.⁶⁶⁰ A knowledge of barrages and portage points along their journey down the Dnieper also became of greater interest to the Byzantines, and Constantine VII in particular, as Pechenegs could also be bribed into attacking the Rus, while they carried their *monoxyla* from one section of the river to another.⁶⁶¹ Unfortunately for us, neither Constantine nor any of the Byzantine sources have much to say about what transpired in Byzantine-Rus relations between 944 and near the very end of the reign, in 957. The *Logothete's Chronicle*, which is the only contemporary chronicle of the period, stops its coverage with Romanos I's death in 948, but its substantive coverage of events in Constantine VII's reign ends even earlier, in 945. *Theophanes Continuatus* is entirely quiet on the subject as well, which is unsurprising as the source concerns itself with dramatic events and laudable imperial achievements, rather than on-going relations. It is only with the baptism of Olga in 957, that Byzantine notices on the Rus re-emerge in both the narrative sources as well as in the description of ceremonies in the *De cer.*

While the Rus successfully renegotiated the treaty relations they had enjoyed with Byzantium under Leo VI, another people who had been central to Leo's northern worldview also came into more direct contact with Constantinople. From Skylitzes, we hear of the arrival in Constantinople

⁶⁵⁹ *DAI*, 2, 4, pp. 48-53.

⁶⁶⁰ *DAI*, 2, pp. 48-51.

⁶⁶¹ *DAI*, 9, pp. 60-3.

of Bulscu (Boultzous in the Greek), the Hungarian *kbarba* or third prince, who was baptised with Constantine VII as his sponsor, and raised to the rank of *patrikios*.⁶⁶² The dating of this visit is uncertain, but two factors place it in the year 948. Firstly, this was exactly five years since a Hungarian raid had ravaged Hellas in 943, making it the ideal time to renew arrangements for peace.⁶⁶³ Secondly, as the visit of Bulscu is mentioned in the *DAI*, and the text's detailed information about the internal clan structure of the Hungarians seems to have derived from this visit, it would have to have been before 952, which is the final date of composition of the *DAI*. In the summer of the 947, the chieftain Taksony had also conducted devastating raids in Italy, as far as Apulia, making it an even more pressing concern for the Byzantines to sue for peace.⁶⁶⁴ Skylitzes informs us that Bulscu did not abide by either his new faith nor the bonds of friendship established with Byzantium and he raided Byzantium many times before he was put to death by Otto I.⁶⁶⁵ The death of Bulscu in 955 is well attested by a number of Latin sources, but we do not have any record of any further Hungarian raids into Byzantine territory until 958. A few years after Bulscu's baptism, the *gyula*, who was the second-ranked chieftain, was given the same reception and honours as Bulscu. This meant that he was also personally baptised by Constantine and was raised to the rank of *patrikios*. The difference in his baptism was that he was sent back accompanied by the monk Hierotheos, as a bishop for his people. Skylitzes assures us that the *gyula* persevered in his new faith and took care of his Christian captives as a result of it.⁶⁶⁶

Despite it being a 'northern' polity, Byzantium's relationship with Hungary was very different from its general Black Sea policy. After their move to the Carpathian Basin, Byzantium's relationship with the Hungarians was mainly bound up in its policy towards the Frankish west

⁶⁶² Róna-Tas (1999), p. 346; Skylitzes, p. 239.

⁶⁶³ Skylitzes, p. 231.

⁶⁶⁴ *Antapodosis*, V.33, p. 144; Lupus Protospatarius, p. 54.

⁶⁶⁵ Skylitzes, p. 231.

⁶⁶⁶ Stephenson (2000), p. 40; Skylitzes, p. 231.

and Italy, as has been noted in the preceding chapter and as will be discussed further in the next chapter. However, Hungarian origins and clan structures were very similar to those of the Pechenegs and the Khazars, who were at the core of Byzantine northern policy. Apart from the Rus, the Hungarians were also the only other northern power that possessed the ability to physically menace Byzantine territories, which they did both in Thrace as well as in Southern Italy. However, the western focus of the Hungarians meant that they were instrumental in engaging both Berengar II and the Eastern Franks through their raiding activities, keeping both away from Byzantine interests in Italy. Until the extension of Catholicism and sedentary life based on the Saxon model arrived in Hungary, the nomadic-pastoralist pattern of life continued as it had in the Eurasian steppe, but the Carpathian basin and the lands to the east of the Danube and Tisza were unable to support the number of horses required by the customs of this equestrian people.⁶⁶⁷ This necessitated the annual raiding activities undertaken by the Hungarian horsemen, and Byzantium was quick to understand that all it could do was offer them religion, titles, and monetary inducements in order to stave off future attacks.

The attacks did, however, resume briefly once the Hungarians had been beaten back by the Saxon armies in 955. With the western routes blocked to them, the Hungarians raided Byzantine Thrace in 958 and came to the very environs of Constantinople around the time of the feast of Easter. The timing of the raid, at a time of year when military officials gathered in Constantinople to receive their wages or *rogai*, meant that they were robustly fought back by the Exkoubitores, followed closely by the *stratēgoi* of the Boukelarioi, the Opsikion and the Thrakesioi, the three major themes of Western Anatolia.⁶⁶⁸ This was in complete contrast to the Byzantine reaction to raids in 934 and 943, when there had been no attempt to respond militarily. On both of those

⁶⁶⁷ Sinor (1972) says no more than 15,000 men and their horses could be supported, p. 177.

⁶⁶⁸ *Theo. Cont.*, pp. 462-3.

occasions, negotiations for peace were hastily initiated and ransoms were paid for prisoners held by the Hungarians.⁶⁶⁹ In 958, the raiding party appears to have been easily overcome and stripped of booty and prisoners. The fact that raids stopped altogether after this indicates that the Byzantines had read the situation correctly; there was no need to continue a conciliatory policy towards the Hungarians, now that they had lost so many leaders and men and could no longer be counted on to destabilise the Franks in Germany and Italy.

The Hungarians were first brought into Byzantium's diplomatic field of vision when Leo VI envisaged a role for them as potential allies against Bulgaria. After Symeon I's death and the marriage between Peter I and Maria Lekapena, there is an absolute silence on Bulgar affairs in the historical narrative until the outbreak of renewed hostilities in 965/6. It is from the list of addresses and protocols in the *De cer.* that three distinct phases, if not four, can be discerned in the Byzantine policy towards Bulgaria in the mid tenth century; one from the reign of Romanos I and at least two, if not three, from the reign of Constantine VII.⁶⁷⁰ The earliest phase can be seen in the address to the Byzantine Emperor by Bulgar ambassadors and in the enquiries of the *logothētes tou dromou* to them. The Emperor in question is surely Romanos I as he is referred to as the *pneumatikōs pāppos* or 'spiritual grandfather' of *hō ek Theou archōn* of Bulgaria, who must be identified as Peter. At the time of this address, Peter already had two sons, thereby placing this set of addresses in the early 930s at the very earliest.⁶⁷¹ The next set of addresses is from a time when the name of the Byzantine Emperor changed and the *archōn* of Bulgaria entered 'sonship'. This clearly refers to the personal reign of Constantine VII, who became Peter's 'spiritual father'. That there were only two Byzantine Emperors is also mentioned, leaving us without any doubt that this was the revised address once Constantine VII and Romanos II were the sole emperors

⁶⁶⁹ *LC*, pp. 334, 337.

⁶⁷⁰ *De cer.*, II.47-48, pp. 680-92.

⁶⁷¹ *De cer.*, II.47, p. 681.

of Byzantium. Here too, the Bulgar ruler is referred to as *hō ek Theō archōn* or, simply, ‘god-appointed prince’.⁶⁷²

After the addresses and enquiries in Book II.47, the next chapter deals with protocols of address for foreign rulers in written communication. In the list of protocols from the reign of Constantine VII, two for the ruler of Bulgaria are preserved. The first is from ‘Constantine and Romanos, Emperors of the Romans’ to the ‘most sought-after (*pepothemēnon*) god-appointed prince (and our spiritual son) of the most Christian people of the Bulgars’. The second, singled out as the ‘recent’ one, reads ‘Constantine and Romanos, pious Autocrators and Emperors of the Romans, to our sought-after spiritual son, Lord X, Emperor of Bulgaria (*hō deīma Basileā Bulgarīas*)’.⁶⁷³ What the addresses and protocols prove without much room for doubt is that the *official* recognition of an overtly *imperial* title for the Bulgar ruler did not come until the second part of Constantine VII’s personal rule, at some point between 952 and 959. Most historians believe the title of *basileus* of the Bulgars, or that of the *basileus* of the Romans, was granted to Symeon in 913.⁶⁷⁴ The evidence cited for this is the use of the terms *Symeōn basileus* and *eirēnopoios basileus* on his seals dated to this time. The use of the formula *en Christō basileus Rōmaion* and depiction in full imperial vestments has likewise been associated with the granting of these titles in 924.⁶⁷⁵ However, this was clearly a self-proclaimed title, rather than one granted by Byzantium, and a letter written by Theodore Daphnopates on behalf of Romanos I states that Symeon had *assumed* the title of Emperor of the Bulgars and the Romans (*basileus Boulgarōn kai Rōmaion*).⁶⁷⁶ This change in titulature was tolerated by Byzantium, but was never applied in its own dealings with the Bulgars.

⁶⁷² *De cer.*, II.47, p. 682.

⁶⁷³ *De cer.*, II.48, p. 690.

⁶⁷⁴ Shepard (1999), p. 574; Whittow (1996), p. 289; Obolensky (1971), p. 114.

⁶⁷⁵ Beshevliev (1963), 8, pp. 330-1; Shepard (1999), p. 578.

⁶⁷⁶ Theodore Daphnopates, p. 59.

The few seals from Peter's reign are iconographically far more similar to Byzantine imperial seals, but one might easily separate the decorative elements, which were evidence of the 'Byzantinisation' of the Bulgar court, from the inscriptional ones. Four out of the five known types of seals attributed to Peter depict him and Maria Lekapena *en buste* on either side of a patriarchal cross. Apart from one type, all show them both wearing Byzantine style crowns with *stemma* and *pendilia*. On the legends that are possible to decipher, three emphatically mention Peter as being a *basileus*, while others have unclear readings. It is perfectly possible that Peter had seals depicting him as the *basileus* as this title was clearly accepted at some point in the 950s. His seals cannot be compared to those struck by Symeon, which are more independent in iconography and are not consistent in their inscriptional formulae. It is entirely reasonable that Maria Lekapena had some sort of Theophano effect, taking with her not only a rich dowry, but also possibly a retinue of artisans and craftsmen.⁶⁷⁷ Despite Liudprand's assertion that the Bulgar emissary he encountered in 968 was unwashed and shod 'in the Hungarian fashion', Ibrāhīm ibn Ya'qūb, the Jewish merchant from Tortosa who visited East-Central Europe in 965, was duly impressed by the Bulgar envoys to the court of Otto I in Magdeburg and describes them as wearing Byzantine-style dress. It is difficult to gauge whether their appearance was particularly Byzantine, but they told him that their king wore a crown, had secretaries and officials and scribes, issued edicts and prohibitions, etc. He also said that they had the 'knowledge of languages'.⁶⁷⁸ All in all, the Bulgar envoys he encountered were educated and part of an imperial bureaucracy, which no doubt borrowed from the Byzantine model.

⁶⁷⁷ Shepard (1995a), pp. 134-5.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibn Yaqub, p. 404.

The other justification often given for placing the elevation to emperorship in Symeon's reign is the notice at the end of the Logothete's account of 923, which relates the story of the omen of two eagles flying overhead while 'the emperors were meeting'.⁶⁷⁹ The fact that Symeon is called an emperor in the *Logothete's Chronicle* cannot be taken as proof that he had received this title from Romanos – at the time that the chronicle was being compiled/composed in the 960s, the ruler of Bulgaria was certainly an emperor, so this mistake is understandable. What we can say with certainty is that Symeon *desired* to be Emperor of the Romans, that his entourage was allowed to acclaim him emperor in the 'Roman language' in 923, and that he assumed both the titles of 'emperor' and of 'Emperor of the Bulgars and the Romans' in his personal seals. Symeon's assumption of the titles in itself was not a *causus belli* for the Byzantines, as they refused either to acknowledge it or use it in official correspondence till the mid 950s.

At the time of the composition of the *DAI*, it is clear that Constantine VII was opposed to the marital alliance between Peter and Maria Lekapena. This must have stemmed from the fact that Maria's marriage to Peter brought the still formidable Bulgar ruling class into kinship with the Lekapenoi. It has already been suggested that Romanos took the opportunity provided by the wedding to promote Christopher above Constantine in the order of co-emperors, and he was acclaimed before Constantine at the wedding celebrations.⁶⁸⁰ We do not know of the Bulgar position on the coup that removed Romanos I or the one which brought Constantine VII to power, but it must have been a concern for Constantine that the Lekapenoi could have called upon Bulgar support. The *DAI* clearly shows that the Bulgars could not be trusted, and that a legion of northern and Balkan clients had to be cultivated to keep them in check.

⁶⁷⁹ *LC*, p. 324.

⁶⁸⁰ Shepard (1995a), p. 132.

Given Constantine's misgivings, one can only conjecture over the reasons behind the change in official use of the imperial title for the ruler of Bulgaria in the 950s. The wooing of Peter as a close ally could have something to do with the failure of the first Cretan campaign in 949 and Otto I's adventus into Italy. It can perhaps be seen in the context of the greater mobilisation of naval forces to the Dalmatian and Greek themes in preparation for engagements in Southern Italy and the second campaign for Crete in 961. Equally, alarmed by Otto's incursions into the Kingdom of Italy in 950/1, the granting of the imperial title might have been a pre-emptive strike, which went to demonstrate that, while Otto was a mere seeker of an imperial title, it was in the power of the Byzantine emperor to actually *bestow* it, and giving it to a Turkic/Slavic power like the Bulgars might have dampened the impact of any putative imperial title for the Ottonians. Nikephoros II's policy in the west, both as the Domestic of the Schools as well as Emperor, saw the Balkans, Italy and Germanic Europe as interconnected fields of operation – it is possible that this view of the West was one that developed in the personal reign of Constantine VII. Finally, with the Hungarians greatly reduced in strength after Lechfeld in 955 (and increasingly drawn into the Saxon sphere of influence), Byzantium could probably no longer count on them to honour the friendship cultivated by Constantine before 952.

The final episode in Byzantine relations with the north in Constantine's personal reign was the baptism of Olga, *archontissa* of the Rus, in 957. The dating of this event has been a matter of considerable debate as the description of two receptions for Olga are mentioned in the same chapter of the *De cer.* as the reception for the emissaries from Tarsos and Abū Taghlib, both of which occurred in 946.⁶⁸¹ The dates and days of the week for her visit also correspond to the year 957, but there would be no reason to seek out this alternate date if it were not for evidence from other sources. The *Russian Primary Chronicle* places the event in the years 6456-6463 (948-955), and

⁶⁸¹ *De cer.*, II.15, pp.566-598.

perhaps more precisely ca. 954, based on the *Eulogy of Vladimir* that stated that she had been Christian for the last fifteen years of her life (she died 11 July 969).⁶⁸² This might have easily been an approximation rather than a precise number of years. The *Lotharingian Chronicle* mentions, in its entry for 959, that ‘the envoys of Helen, the queen of the Rugi, who was baptised in Constantinople under Romanos, Emperor of Constantinople, having come to the king, requested, spuriously as it turned out later, to ordain a bishop and priests for her people’, the king mentioned being Otto I.⁶⁸³ As this account was based on Adalbert’s own experience of having been sent to Olga in 961-62 and then spurned, there are some facts that one can take from this account as incontrovertible. Olga’s baptismal name was Helena (as is mentioned in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*) and she was baptised in Constantinople. The attribution of the baptism to Romanos II is simply an error based on the fact that he was the Byzantine emperor when Adalbert was sent on his mission.⁶⁸⁴

Another argument for dating the receptions, and hence the baptism, to 957 is based on the structure of Book II of the *De cer.* The preface and chapters 1 to 15 (first part) were left in completed form in the lifetime of Constantine VII. To this the redactor added material from a dossier of documents, which had been compiled for later chapters and he was also responsible for the chapter headings. In arranging ceremonies of the same type together, the compiler of the Leipzig manuscript added the receptions for Olga to the pre-existing chapter. The argument is strengthened by the fact that the dates for the receptions for Olga are rendered in a different formula compared to the minuscule used for the dating of the two previous receptions for the Tarsiots and Daylamites. In the text itself, there is mention of a gathering for dessert in the Aristetaron next to the Chrysotriklinos at which both emperors were present with *their*

⁶⁸² *PVL*, pp. 82-3, 239-40.

⁶⁸³ Adalbert of St Maximin, p. 170.

⁶⁸⁴ Pritsak (1985), p. 9.

children.⁶⁸⁵ In 946 it would have been impossible for Romanos to be a father, but it is quite possible that Basil II was born around 955-56.⁶⁸⁶ To this, one can add the circumstantial evidence that neither a visit from Olga, nor her baptism, is mentioned in the *DAI*, which was completed around the year 952. Furthermore, the *Vita Basilii*, completed around the year 950, mentions attempts made by Basil I to spread Christianity to the Rus and does not mention the recent successes in this area (if 946 is to be taken as the date of the baptism) in the reign of Constantine. The Rus are also described as being the ‘most indomitable’ and the ‘most godless’ of all peoples, a characterisation that appears to be at odds with that of a people led by a newly Christian ruler.⁶⁸⁷

The *De cer.* does not mention the baptism directly, but Skylitzes does speak of the baptism of Olga and says that she visited Constantinople after the death of her husband Oleg, was baptised, and honoured in the manner she merited.⁶⁸⁸ This honour seems to be the rank of *zoste patrikia*, previously given to high-ranking females of neighbouring dynasties, including Bulgaria.⁶⁸⁹ The fact that she sat at a special table reserved for the *zostai* indicates that this was the case.⁶⁹⁰ Although the compiler of the *De cer.* grouped the reception for Olga in the same section as those for the Tarsiots and Abū Taghlib, the ceremony is fundamentally different as it was for a woman, it was organised around an event of great religious significance, and because it included staged displays of the baptised *archontissa*’s place in the spiritual family of the emperor.

The series of events which prompted Olga’s arrival in Constantinople are more difficult to reconstruct than the receptions in her honour. One can probably assume that the relations

⁶⁸⁵ *De cer.*, II.15, pp. 594-5.

⁶⁸⁶ Featherstone (2003), pp. 241 -263.

⁶⁸⁷ *VB* 97, p. 312.

⁶⁸⁸ Skylitzes, p. 240.

⁶⁹⁰ *De cer.*, II. 15, p. 594.

continued much in the same vein as had been decided in the treaty of 944.⁶⁹¹ Rus soldiers are mentioned as attending the reception for the Tarsiots early in Chapter 15 and are also mentioned by Arabic sources for the eastern campaigns of the early 950s.⁶⁹² The silence on the diplomatic front has been interpreted as an attempt by Constantine VII to move away from the policy of alliances with the Russians in favour of the Pechenegs, who could not attack Constantinople, but could keep the Rus in check.⁶⁹³ However, with the exceedingly poor coverage of most of our texts of anything but particularly remarkable Constantinopolitan affairs, it is unsurprising that a time of relative peace was overlooked. If we know little about the Rus in this period, we know absolutely nothing about the Pechenegs apart from the role of primary northern ally, assigned to them by the *DAI*.⁶⁹⁴ That the empire cultivated the Pechenegs, localised landlubbers, as a counterbalance to the seafaring and ambitious Rus is unquestionably true. However, it does not follow that it would actively antagonise the Rus or do anything to damage the cordial relations established after 944. Constantine VII's reign was marked by pragmatism and the maintenance of cordial relations with friends, rivals, and enemies alike. Imperial international objectives such as the conquest of Crete and certain strategically important strongholds on the eastern frontier, the strengthening of the Byzantine presence in Italy and the Adriatic, and safeguarding imperial territories from attacks by northern peoples were all achieved while keeping channels of communication with potential adversaries open, and by honouring them through word and gift.

The reception might just have been a knee-jerk reaction to the news that Olga was on her way, but, considering how Skylitzes places the baptism of Olga just after the baptism of Hungarian chieftains several years previously, it would appear that that the baptism of the steppe peoples was on the political agenda. The religious affiliations of distant peoples had always been of

⁶⁹¹ *PVL*, pp. 74-77.

⁶⁹² *De cer.*, II.15, p. 595.

⁶⁹³ Shepard (1996), p. 272.

⁶⁹⁴ *DAI*, 2 -6, pp. 48-53.

concern to the Macedonian emperors, but the usual practice had been to send religion to them, rather than to bring them into the fold in Constantinople. Olga was shown off as the newest member of the emperor's spiritual family at a banquet on Sunday 18 October, when she was seated next to the empress, her daughters and her daughter-in-law. This image of a paternal emperor with the dangerous nations of the north submitting in filial piety to him would not have gone unnoticed amongst the officials present and other foreign guests, and was a far more potent image than the despatching of monks to Kiev. Missionary activity in the northern lands had been taking place since the Cyrillo-Methodian missions of the early ninth century, and there were churches in the Middle Dnieper region well before Olga's baptism, but what was happening in Constantinople in 957 had more to do with the political ties which the Emperor hoped would stem from the baptism, rather than the spiritual rewards of bringing pagans to the fold.

Although Olga later became the first in the pantheon of Russian Christian saints, her baptism in Constantinople was soon followed by overtures to Otto I for a bishop to bring Latin Christianity to the Rus in 961.⁶⁹⁵ The Ottonians had spent the second half of the 950s in regular campaigns against the Slavs on the eastern frontier, and the first mentions of Mieszko I of Poland in Saxon sources start around the year 960.⁶⁹⁶ Margrave Gero, Otto's commander in the east, was able to extract some sort of tribute from Mieszko in the early 960s and Mieszko was baptised into Latin rite Christianity in 966 at the very latest.⁶⁹⁷ The reason behind Olga's embassy to Otto was probably a shared interest in checking the power of the emerging Polish state under Mieszko, which lay directly to the west of the domains of the Kievan Rus. The rejection of Adalbert's mission was perhaps in recognition of the fact that the Ottonians intended for the Polish state to be a Frankish client, and did not seek its outright destruction. As there are no early Polish or

⁶⁹⁵ Reuter (1991), pp. 164-6.

⁶⁹⁶ Widukind, III.36, pp. 120-1.

⁶⁹⁷ Widukind, III.66-7, pp. 141-2; Thietmar, II.14, p. 54.

Russian histories that shed any more light on relations between the two states, the analysis of motives cannot be taken much further.

Conclusion

From Constantine's policies, as outlined in the northern dossier of the *DAI* as well as from the known events that occurred during or directly preceded his reign, it is clear that the Byzantine state had broadly identified the peoples who could cause them direct harm – the Rus and the Hungarians, the powers who could instigate or facilitate attacks – the Khazars and the Bulgars, as well as the people who could help contain this threat – the Pechenegs. All these steppe peoples, in the vast swathe of the Eurasian steppe to the north of the Black Sea, and in the pools of grassland in the Carpathian Basin and Bulgaria, were plugged into the wider world around them in all directions, in relationships based on both commerce and violence. By the middle of the tenth century, the trade routes leading from the Islamic world to the north and west had made the Rus and their Viking kin in Scandinavia and Northern Europe immensely rich, and there is evidence that the arc of economic exchange incorporated much of Eastern Europe by this time.⁶⁹⁸ What concerned Byzantine policy makers, however, was the old potential for violence and disruption that the northern peoples posed to the realm and the fleeting opportunities to gain political leverage against Frankish rivals who threatened the Byzantine position in Italy. The nomads of the steppe could always have some impact on Byzantium, especially on the Crimea. Bulgaria, despite having been brought closer into the imperial orbit through the marriage of Peter and Maria Lekapena, had continued to be very resilient against any attempts to reduce it to client status. Constantine's accession and the end of Lekapenid influence at the Byzantine court would have had the potential to unravel the hard-won peace on that front, and reaching out to the Bulgar ruler had to have been very high on the list of imperial priorities.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibn Ya'qūb, pp. 154-84.

Added to this, were the two new dynamic elements, which emerged in the 930s and 940s to devastating effect – the Rus and the Hungarians. The more worrisome of the two were the Rus, who demonstrated in 941 that they could sail down to Constantinople in large numbers and could hold out against the city's naval defences for several months, probably because their smaller boats could navigate in shallower waters than the Byzantine *cbelandia* and *drōmons*.⁶⁹⁹ It required the army of the east to redeploy to the defence of the capital in order to push back the Rus. Byzantium's concern about the Rus was perhaps mitigated by the fact that, unlike the case in northern Europe, the Rus seem to have had no appetite for conquest in Byzantium. There were many more lucrative avenues to trade and wealth, especially by carving out a passage to the Caspian in order to evade the Khazars as intermediaries to trade with the Islamic world. As we know, this was attempted directly after the attack on Constantinople. Nonetheless, having a rich and waterborne adversary in the north, whose settlements were moving southwards towards the Black Sea, required Byzantium to increase its vigilance in the north.

The Hungarians, on the other hand, had dropped from Byzantium's radar after the move of their organising centre to the Carpathian Basin at the end of the ninth century. The imperial administration would have been well aware of their unmatched reputation for violence in Italy since the beginning of the tenth century and their increasing raiding into Germanic areas in the 930s and 940s. This reputation must have been the reason that neither the raid of 934 nor the raid of 943, both of which are said to have ravaged Thrace, was countered by Byzantine arms. The Hungarians had made deals in both Italy and Germany, which had protected certain regions from their raids, and the fact that this was Byzantium's response indicates that the bureau of foreign affairs was aware of events in both those places and knew how the Hungarians could be

⁶⁹⁹ Franklin and Shepard (1996), pp. 114-5.

persuaded to cease their raiding.⁷⁰⁰ Relations with the Hungarians had to be renegotiated, as did all other foreign relations, upon Constantine's accession, providing an opportunity to recast them to reflect Byzantium's changing foreign policy objectives.

What these objectives were is difficult to reconstruct from the historical record, as so little apart from the *DAI* actually deals with policy matters in peacetime. The first objective must have been to keep relations with the Bulgars amicable, as the fall of Romanos might have disturbed earlier arrangements with them. The war with the Bulgars had dominated the foreign policy agenda between the 890s and 927, and taken the lion's share of military resources whenever hostilities broke out. Drawing the Bulgars further under Byzantium's political influence was also essential for a host of other reasons. Byzantium under Constantine VII pursued a policy of greater visibility and influence in the central Mediterranean, and peace in Dalmatia was crucial in this regard. Land and sea raids to Constantinople and its Thracian hinterland also passed through Bulgaria or hugged its coastline. We know very little about relations with Bulgaria in the reign of Constantine VII, apart from the grant of the imperial title discussed above. The granting of this most elevated title must not be seen as an acknowledgement of equivalence in status with Byzantium. Instead, it probably speaks of the imperial administration's success in bringing Bulgaria into a more binding client relationship. The most elevated titled previously held by a foreign notable was that of *kouropalates*, held by the King of Iberia since the sixth century, who was a Byzantine client in Transcaucasia.⁷⁰¹ Constantine had probably succeeded where predecessors had failed, and this 'special relationship' was commented upon by Liudprand in his visit in 968.

⁷⁰⁰ See Chapters 4 and 6, pp. 183-7, 253.

⁷⁰¹ *ODB*, 'Kouropalates'.

Further north, Constantine VII does not seem to have been concerned with improving relations with the Khazars, and the lingering hostility between the two states is apparent in the correspondence between *khagan* Joseph and Hisdai ibn Shaprut. Byzantium does not seem concerned with increasing its influence over the Khazar Khaganate, as the Rus had become their principal problem, and were able to operate independently. The *DAI* clearly shows that Byzantium was collecting what information it could about the route taken by the Rus when they sailed down to Constantinople.⁷⁰² It also reflects how the imperial administration was trying to organise northern peoples against the Rus, with the Pechenegs identified as the primary northern clients. As inveterate landlubbers, the Pechenegs did not pose a direct threat to core Byzantine territory, and a constant stream of diplomatic visits and presents was kept up through Cherson to protect Byzantine holdings in the Crimea. There are no signs of this Pecheneg-Byzantine axis having been brought into service during the reign of Constantine VII, but it was to play a crucial role in stopping Sviatoslav in 972, when the Pechenegs killed him in the Dnieper rapids, thereby ending the four-year Rus occupation of Bulgaria. It was certainly not an ‘alliance’ in the strictest sense of the term, as much diplomatic persuasion was used to elicit their cooperation at that date. Olga’s visit to Constantinople and her subsequent baptism must have been orchestrated by Constantinople to reassure the citizenry that their emperor had succeeded in neutralising this dangerous northern threat. This objective, however, was not achieved until Vladimir was supported in the civil war in the Rus realms by Byzantium, ushering in an era of Rus military support for Byzantium, which had been envisaged in the treaty of 944, but had not come to pass in Constantine’s personal reign.

Finally, Constantine’s policy towards the Hungarians can be seen as an experiment to extend Byzantine influence into Central Europe, but with mixed results. To Byzantium, the Hungarians’

⁷⁰² *DAI* 9

ability to destabilise Ottonian rule in Germany, requiring Otto I to withdraw from Italy and concentrate on matters closer to home, must have made them attractive as potential allies. Bulscu and the *gyula* were admitted to Constantinople, had imperial audiences, and were baptised with the emperor as sponsor precisely because of their reputation for being the henchmen of Otto's adversaries. Byzantine embassies to Otto I have been discussed in a previous chapter. Their increased frequency must have resulted in the flow of greater intelligence about the Hungarians to Constantinople. What we find in the *DAI*, however, is information gleaned from them, first hand, when they arrived in Constantinople – information that would not have made it into the *DAI* had Constantine not been interested in using them as proxies in Europe. This experiment with Hungary came to a halt after Otto defeated the Hungarians at Lechfeld in 955. Bulscu is known to have died in the battle, thus severing the personal ties between Constantinople and the Hungarians. The Hungarian host which raided Thrace during Easter festivities in 958 must not have been of the same dangerous calibre as those assembled before Lechfeld. This is why Byzantium responded militarily and seems to have won the day with relative ease. No further diplomatic relationship was established with Hungary in the tenth century.

Constantine VII's foreign policy in the north had to be formulated in the face of several new challenges. His personal reign was the first for half a century which saw no conflict with any northern power. The three powers that could do the empire harm, the Bulgars, the Rus, and the Hungarians, were studied and watched. Diplomacy must have been targeted to identifying influential leaders amongst these people, and Byzantium succeeded in drawing some of the most powerful to Constantinople, where personal ties could be established between the emperor and northern notables in a way that had ceased to happen since the reign of Heraclius.⁷⁰³ As mentioned before, the baptism of nomadic leaders in Constantinople had stopped after the

⁷⁰³ Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople, pp. 48-51.

seventh century, as the political potential of a relationship with Byzantium diminished in the wake of the Islamic conquests. The granting of the imperial title by Byzantium, already used by the Bulgar ruler in his own realm, was also a diplomatic coup for the empire, instantaneously making the ability to grant subordinate imperial titles another of the Byzantine emperor's unique attributes. In the arena of Byzantine relations with the north, Constantine's administration proved that the empire was not only alert to changes and opportunities in the north, but could also innovate within the narrow parameters of what it was possible to achieve in diplomatic relations with the north.

Chapter 6. Italy: Byzantium's Western Frontier

Introduction

Italy was as central to Byzantine foreign policy for Constantine VII as it had been for his grandfather, Basil I, nearly a century before.⁷⁰⁴ It had been in the latter's reign that Byzantium had regained its southern Italian territories in Calabria and Apulia, while decisively losing the bulk of Byzantine Sicily to the Aghlabids.⁷⁰⁵ Byzantium's presence in the peninsula took several forms, either through direct rule in Calabria and Apulia, or through diplomatic contacts, assisted by the distribution of titles, military aid, and preferential trading rights. Diplomatic contact was maintained with Rome, Gaeta, Naples, Amalfi, Venice, and the Lombard principalities of Capua-Benevento and Salerno. Italy was also the intersection of three major spheres of international influence in the tenth-century world. These were the post-Carolingian Frankish sphere, the emerging Fātimid sphere in North Africa, and the relatively weak, but intermittently menacing, sphere of the Lombards. The Lombards as well as the Papal State could also influence the Byzantine position in Italy through the extension or, alternatively, the withholding of cooperation. The complexity of the ruling formations was mirrored by shifting and unsteady alliances, which made Italy both a land of political opportunity, as well as a constant cause for concern to the Byzantine Empire.

6.1 The Political Geography of Italy

The Appenines are the dominant feature of the Italian landscape and divide the northern half of the peninsula into three great zones – the Po Valley, Latium, and the fertile land of Campania.

The terrain to the south and Sicily is more continuously mountainous, with intermittent plains in

⁷⁰⁴ For Constantine's version of events in Italy in the reign of Basil I, see *VB*, 52-71, pp. 188-247 and *DAI*, ch. 29, pp. 126-35.

⁷⁰⁵ The best analysis of this period is still Falkenhausen (1978), pp. 20-7.

Apulia and along the Sicilian coastline. The political formations of Italy in the tenth century were as geographically determined as the post-Roman and Carolingian ones. The limits of the political reach of all the Italian states ran along natural divisions, with any attempts at expansion also following predictable patterns according to the lay of the land. Defensive and offensive strategies had to be carefully calibrated according to the constraints of the landscape. In the period between the dramatic Lombard and Carolingian campaigns in the eighth century and the gruelling and drawn-out Norman conquests of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Italian peninsula was a very difficult region in which to establish a new regime. At the same time, existing states were locked in intractable and, for the most part, low level conflict, which could seldom be resolved through military means alone. This resulted in the constant renegotiation of relations and concessions, as no state possessed the manpower and resources to dominate the difficult terrain through force of arms alone. Additionally, for the largest and most powerful entity in southern Italy, Byzantium, the ability to cope with the internal politics of the peninsula was hindered by the distance between Italy and the empire's mainland and the resultant difficulties in supporting civil, military, and social institutions in this arm of empire. A presence in Italy was as fundamental to Byzantine self-perception as the empire of the Romans as well as to its strategic interests in the Balkans and Mediterranean.

In the north, the semi-autonomous *Regnum Italiae* (Kingdom of Italy) between the Alps and the Abruzzian Appenines was the frontier of Frankish political power in Italy and, indeed, in southern Europe.⁷⁰⁶ The fact that many key players in the region from the penultimate decade of the ninth century to the mid tenth century were *margraves* or marcher lords further emphasises this frontier feeling. The margraves and dukes of areas from Ivrea to Friuli in the north and Tuscany and Spoleto in the south tended to originate from the heart of the Carolingian domains

⁷⁰⁶ Sergi (1999), pp. 346-8, 354.

along the Rhine, and laid claim to titles in Burgundy and West Francia from time to time, while simultaneously fighting for local autonomy. The region was centred on the fertile plains of the Po Valley, which supported a number of important cities like Pavia, Piacenza, Verona, Brescia, and Milan. In his description of Hugh of Provence's successful bid for the Kingdom of Italy, Liudprand provides us with evidence of how closely Burgundy and Northern Italy were intertwined and pinpoints the seats of power in the Central Po Valley. When he tried to intervene in the political turmoil of the Kingdom of Italy after Berengar I's defeat and subsequent murder (923 and then 924), Hugh of Provence went by sea from Provence to Pisa, where he was met by envoys from the Pope and other Italian states, who invited him to claim the throne of Italy. He then went to Pavia where he was crowned and thereafter travelled to Mantua in order to conclude a treaty with Pope John X.⁷⁰⁷ Control over the Kingdom of Italy was held through the distribution of civil and ecclesiastical positions to partisans and anyone who wanted to challenge the power of the reigning king had to convince the cities to support them, as was the case when Hugh was ousted from power by Berengar II in 945.⁷⁰⁸

To the south and west of the Kingdom of Italy was the Papal state, centred on Rome and the Latium. In the first half of the tenth century, Rome was under the control of the powerful Teofilatti family, which came to power with the help of the Duke of Spoleto, the leader of the neighbouring duchy. All the papal appointments, from that of Sergius in 904, were controlled by this family, and Pope John XI (931-936) and John XII (955-964) were members of this family.⁷⁰⁹ Political control over Rome was highly desirable for any Italian ruler as papal confirmation of appointments and titles was a way of legitimising ruling regimes.⁷¹⁰ This led to conflicts in the 930s and 940s between Hugh of Provence and the Duke of Spoleto, both of whom sought to

⁷⁰⁷ *Antapodosis*, III.16, p. 75.

⁷⁰⁸ *Antapodosis*, V. 26, pp. 138-9.

⁷⁰⁹ For the Teofilatti, see Toubert (1973), pp. 967-1015 and Wickham (2015), pp. 22-5, 186-91.

⁷¹⁰ West (2010), pp. 379-84.

rule Rome and, by extension, control the papacy. From 955 the religious and secular roles of the Pope and the *princeps* of Rome were combined for the first time in the person of John XII, who was the son of the previous *princeps*, Alberic II.

South of the Latium and Spoleto were the hilly Lombard principalities of Capua-Benevento and Salerno. This was all that was left of the Lombard Kingdom in Italy, which, at its greatest extent in the mid 8th century, extended from the Alps to southern Italy. The late ninth and early tenth centuries were periods of intense civil war in the Lombard principalities, which allowed Byzantium under Basil I and Leo VI the breathing room to reclaim many of its territories in Calabria and Apulia in the 880s. The limitations of historiography and archaeological evidence make it very difficult to trace either Lombard political institutions or the basis of the economy.⁷¹¹ It is probable that the Lombards received regular gifts from Byzantium in order to buy their acquiescence to the Byzantine re-conquest in Longibardia.⁷¹² There also exists evidence from the ninth century that the Lombards of Benevento charged Neapolitan merchants a toll for crossing rivers in their territory.⁷¹³ As we shall see, relations between the Lombards and the Campanian trading cities (Naples and Amalfi) were both economic and political and had an impact on relations with Byzantium.

In the tenth century, Byzantine Italy consisted of only Apulia and Calabria, but the exact borders with the Lombard principalities are impossible to determine. It has been suggested that the northern limit of the theme of Longibardia was probably the mouth of the River Trigno, to the

⁷¹¹ The best study remains Poupardin (1907), summarised on pp. 18-23, though some of the conclusions are now outdated. The main argument of Di Muro (2009) is that the Lombard principalities were institutionally advanced and economically well-structured, especially in the case of Salerno, but he acknowledges the lack of clear evidence. T. S. Brown (1993), pp. 7-8, is far more sceptical about the institutional underpinnings of the wealth of the Lombard aristocracy.

⁷¹² *Taktika*, 18, pp.466-7.

⁷¹³ *Pactum Sicardi* in Lopez and Raymond (1955), pp. 33-5.

north of the Gargano Peninsula, but the contemporary sources do not shed any light on this.⁷¹⁴ To the southeast, we also do not know the location of the borders with Salerno, though the River Lao has been suggested.⁷¹⁵ The theme, which came into existence in the late-ninth century, after the fall of the Emirate of Bari, covered the modern province of Apulia. The early *stratēgoi* of Longibardia in the 890s were also in charge of Balkan themes of Macedonia, Thrace, and Kephallonia, indicating their early role as guardians of the Adriatic. The other Byzantine theme in Southern Italy was that of Calabria, which came into being at some point between 938 and 952.⁷¹⁶ Prior to this time, it was a division of the theme of Sikelia, but became a theme in its own right once it was all that was left of the earlier theme of Sikelia.

The patterns of settlement and administrative control in the two Byzantine themes were very distinct, and reflected the geographical setting as well as the social milieu. Apulia, with its proximity to the Lombard territories had a largely Latin population, and the majority faith was Latin rite Christianity. The authority of the Empire was founded on walled cities or *kastra*, which housed the officials and bishops with authority over a certain district or *diakratēsis*. In strategically important areas there were also *kastellia*, or small fortified establishments, some of which might have been in private hands such as the monastery of San Vincenzo al Vorturno near the shore of Lake Lesina. Further inland, in the coastal lowlands, long lines of *chōria*, or large villages dominated, and very large proprietors were rare.⁷¹⁷

Calabria, on the other hand, had been painstakingly recovered from the Arabs by Nikephoros Phokas the Elder in the 890s, but remained vulnerable to raids by the Sicilians throughout the early tenth century. Its proximity to Sicily and its relative remoteness from the rest of Italy meant

⁷¹⁴ Gay (1904), pp. 181-2; Peters-Custot (2009), p. 91.

⁷¹⁵ Gay (1904), p. 183-4.

⁷¹⁶ Trinchera (1865), p. 5; *De Them.* 10, p. 96; Falkenhausen (1978), pp. 30-1.

⁷¹⁷ Martin (1993), pp. 258-70.

that it remained Hellenised, unlike Apulia, and also had a sizable population of Muslims and Jews.⁷¹⁸ The Tyrrhenian region was somewhat more dynamic than the Ionian region, as it escaped the worst of the Sicilian raids.⁷¹⁹ Northern Calabria and the Basilicata region were very discontinuously populated and the rocky terrain of the peninsula as a whole was dotted with troglodyte villages. Documentary evidence from Calabria is very poor in comparison with Apulia (which is poor enough for our period), and hence a true picture of the nature of landholding cannot be ascertained, though it is clear that its coastline was more heavily fortified than that of Apulia. Calabria was also less involved with the Byzantine economy than Longibardia; while the *solidus* was the main gold coin in use in Byzantine Apulia, in Calabria it was the Sicilian *tari*. The remoteness of Calabria also resulted in decades of civil unrest, compounded by frequent raids across the straits of Messina, with little, if any help forthcoming from either Bari or Constantinople. In effect, it was easier for a fleet to sail from Bari to Dyrrhachion, than it was to traverse the distance to Reggio.⁷²⁰

Sicily, which had been the site of intense conflict with the Muslims from North Africa from 827, was effectively lost to the empire in 902, with the fall of the last stronghold of Taormina. Some vestigial resistance to Islamic rule continued until the mid 960s in the hilly north-eastern edge of the island, and Byzantium's assistance to the rebels will be discussed in the next section. The headquarters of the Byzantine military and civil presence in Sicily, Syracuse, had been lost on 21 May, 878.⁷²¹ The penetration of Islamic rule in Sicily was also along geographical lines, with the most enduring Islamic impact felt on the Western cities of Palermo, Mazara, and Agrigento; Mazara was the island's main port, while Palermo became the administrative capital. Further inland, the Arabic toponyms and records of disputes regarding the *kharāj* and land ownership

⁷¹⁸ Gay (1905), pp. 283, 591-2. Falkenhausen, p. 144.

⁷¹⁹ Di Gangi and Lebole (2006), p. 478.

⁷²⁰ Martin (2006), pp. 547-54.

⁷²¹ *Chronicle of Cambridge*, p. 32; *VB*, 69, pp. 236-41.

indicate that the Islamic presence was strongest in the Val di Mazara and the Val di Noto in western and southern Sicily.⁷²² The Val Démone in north-eastern Sicily was the area of least penetration, with the least number of Arabic place names. Rametta and Taormina are mentioned as having been captured by the Arabs on multiple occasions, and we know that *jizya* was imposed on Taormina in 902, but the repeated captures indicate that, once a payment was fixed, the inhabitants were left to their own devices until they rose up to defy their Muslim overlords.⁷²³ The Christian populations were subject to paying *jizya*, and some, in the more fertile regions, were prohibited from selling or abandoning their properties so that cultivated land did not become fallow.⁷²⁴ Until 947, the island witnessed waves of civil wars based on ethnicity (Arabs against Berbers) and religion (Shi'ī against Sunnī), which provided Byzantium with opportunities to strengthen control over Calabria and to intervene on behalf of rebel forces in Sicily.

Apart from the states which controlled larger territories, there were also the small and individually influential maritime city states of Venice in the Northern Adriatic and the Campanian states of Naples, Amalfi, and Gaeta. These states were nominally under the command of the Byzantine Emperor, but largely maintained their own governments and formulated their own policies.⁷²⁵ Especially in the case of the Campanian states, their loyalty to Byzantium depended very strongly on perceptions of Byzantium's strength in the region at any given time. As for Venice, we have very little information on Byzantium's relationship with it in this period, but we do know that it was the port from which the ship carrying Liudprand and a returning Byzantine envoy, Salomon, set sail in August 949. Its location made it the ideal place from which goods could be transported across the Alps, and Liudprand mentions Venetian merchants as buying

⁷²² Metcalfe (2009), pp. 36-8. Abdul-Wahab and Dachraoui (1962), pp. 401-444.

⁷²³ *Chronicle of Cambridge*, p. 36.

⁷²⁴ Abdul-Wahab and Dachraoui (1962), pp. 430-432.

⁷²⁵ *DAI*, 27, pp. 116-7.

substantial quantities of Byzantine silk in his mission of 968⁷²⁶. Liudprand also tells us that there were legates from the Kingdom of Italy, Amalfi, Rome, and Gaeta in Constantinople at the time of the coup which brought Constantine to power on 27 January 945.⁷²⁷ As we shall see in the sections that follow, the Italian city-states had special economic and political relationships with the larger territorial states in their hinterlands (Naples with Capua-Benevento and Amalfi with Salerno), and were also freer in making commercial and strategic alliances with Byzantium and the Arabs of the western Mediterranean.

6.2 Byzantium and Italy in the first half of the tenth century

The growing influence of Byzantium in Italy was premised on the final collapse of the Carolingian influence in southern Italy by 871, when Louis II, who had based himself in Benevento, while fighting the Arabs in Bari and Salerno, was forced to leave the city and to agree never again to bring forces to it. After Louis's death in 875, there was a 'Carolingian vacuum' in southern Italy, and Byzantium was quick to take advantage of it.⁷²⁸ The Lombard *gastald* installed in Bari by Louis in 871 was expelled by an occupying Byzantine force, giving Byzantium its administrative centre for operations in Apulia. The true Byzantine restoration in southern Italy did not take place until the campaigns in the mid 880s of Nicephorus Phocas the Elder, which systematically cleared most of Apulia and virtually all of Calabria of Arab occupation. This provided a base from which to defend Byzantine Italy from the Arabs, who had all but conquered Sicily.⁷²⁹

The return of Bari to Byzantium was a major victory for the empire, and was soon to become the base of all operations in Byzantine Italy. For it to be secure, Basil I knew that the Adriatic had to

⁷²⁶ *Legatio*, 55, pp. 211-2.

⁷²⁷ *Antapodosis*, V.21, p. 136.

⁷²⁸ Kreutz (1991), p. 57.

⁷²⁹ Grégoire (1953), pp. 232-54.

be made into a safe sea for Byzantine communications, and thus began an engagement with Venice, which had its own interest in keeping Slav and Muslim raiders at bay and extending its influence throughout the Gulf of Venice. In 879, an embassy from Basil I conferred the title of *prōtopatharios* on Orso I, Doge of Venice. Subsequent doges sent their sons to Constantinople to receive the title until at least the reign of Pietro II Candiano (932-9).⁷³⁰ This is why Constantine was very well informed about the history of the city-state and identified Torcello as the main trading settlement on the mainland.⁷³¹ The Franks had long since accepted Venice's independence through charters, and the Byzantines seem to have honoured this status, especially since Venice did not trade with Islamic states.⁷³² A free city, which shared Byzantium's interest in keeping the Adriatic free of piracy, was a beneficial ally for Byzantium, and one which Constantine used as a base for embassies to Saxony and Spain. Keeping Bari and the Adriatic coastline of Longibardia free from attack was also the rationale behind the creation of the theme of Dalmatia.⁷³³

A significant proportion of the territories recovered by the Byzantine campaign had been a part of the Lombard principalities prior to the Arab incursions. Though they had only notional control over these territories for decades, the very real prospect of losing them to Byzantium forced the Lombards to negotiate relations with Byzantium. Apart from this, intervention in the infighting between different states also helped Byzantium emerge as the lynchpin of Southern Italian politics. Aid was given to Salerno against the combined forces of Naples and locally recruited Arabs in 887, while Naples was given its own detachment of Byzantine soldiers a few years later to fight a mixed force of Capuans and Beneventans.⁷³⁴ The imperial authorities were beginning to be invoked in documents from as early as 887 (an act of an abbot of S. Vincenzo in

⁷³⁰ John the Deacon, pp. 21-24; Nicol (1988), pp. 20-36.

⁷³¹ *DAI*, c. 27, pp. 116-9; *DAI Comm*, pp. 91-3.

⁷³² Kretschmayr (1905), pp. 95, 97, 432.

⁷³³ It is possible that theme itself came into existence in the first half of the ninth century, but was strengthened under Basil I. *DAI*, c. 29, pp. 124-9, 138-9; *VB*, 53-4, pp. 191-197; Ferluga (1978), pp. 164-89.

⁷³⁴ Erchempert, pp. 257-8.

Volturno is dated by the regnal years of Leo VI and Alexander as well as the Lombard prince, Aion) in Benevento, 889/90 in Capua (a private document is dated by the years of the 'grand emperors' Leo and Alexander) and Guiamar I of Salerno was using styling himself *princeps et imperialis patricius* by 899.⁷³⁵ In 891, upon the death of the Beneventan prince Aion, the Byzantine *stratēgos* of Sicily annexed Benevento and tried to do the same in Salerno the year after.⁷³⁶ Although Byzantium was unable to hold onto Benevento or to take Salerno, the gains in Southern Italy, newly conquered or reclaimed, were organised into the new theme of Longibardia.

The next major enhancement to Byzantium's stature in southern Italy came with its substantial intervention in the removal of the last Arab stronghold on the Italian mainland, at the mouth of the Garigliano River, in 915. They had tried once before to remove the colony in alliance with Atenulf I, ruler of Capua-Benevento, in 903, but their attempts had been thwarted, not least by forces of Gaeta, which supported the Arabs (and had done so historically to defend the state against Capua). This only forced Capua-Benevento closer to Byzantium and Landulf, the son of Atenulf I, was sent to Constantinople c. 909 and, apart from mustering support, returned with the titles of *anthypatos* and *patrikios* (the *Annales Beneventani* refers to him as '*antipati, patricii et principis*').⁷³⁷ Although the final attack on Garigliano was brokered by Pope John X, it was Byzantium which bestowed the titles of *imperialis patricius* on the Duke of Gaeta at about this time, indicating that the Southern Italian states actively sought titles from the Byzantines.⁷³⁸ Documents in Gaeta continued to be intermittently dated by the regnal years of Byzantine emperors until 934.⁷³⁹

⁷³⁵ Martin (2000), pp. 621-622.

⁷³⁶ *Annales Beneventani*, p. 174.

⁷³⁷ *Annales Beneventani*, p. 175.

⁷³⁸ Leo of Ostia, p. 616.

⁷³⁹ Martin (2000), pp 630-1.

The steadily rising power of Byzantines in southern Italy for nearly half a century faced a formidable challenge at the beginning of the 920s. This has been attributed to ‘disaffection among the inhabitants of their provinces’ coupled with the growing ambitions of the Capuans, insurrection by the one *stratēgos* and ‘chronic disinterest’ from the centre.⁷⁴⁰ In 921, *stratēgos* of Sikelia, John Muzalon, was killed near Reggio after a popular uprising. The following year, the *stratēgos* of Longibardia, Ursoleon, was killed in Ascoli while fighting the forces of Capua-Benevento, which had occupied much of northern Apulia. In the case of Muzalon, we are told that he governed with great brutality or even that he fed insurrections against the emperor and was close to turning to the Arabs.⁷⁴¹ In the case of Ursoleon, we know that Landulf I of Capua Benevento wrote to Constantinople to ask to be appointed the *stratēgos* of Longibardia. Letters of Nicholas Mystikos sought to assure the *proconsul* (not his Byzantine title) that he had spoken to the emperors about it and that they would consider it if ‘they should receive from you a confirmation or your sure and untainted love toward their Majesty, and of your subjection and servitude to them’, but the idea was soon rejected.⁷⁴² It is interesting, however, that Landulf asked to be absorbed, if only notionally, into the Byzantine administration of southern Italy. However deep the ‘crisis’ of the early 920s was, Byzantium was powerful enough to discourage outright annexation.

The insurrection theory put forward to explain Muzalon’s demise could have some validity as 920 had seen a regime change in Constantinople, which had brought Romanos I to power. Furthermore, Sicilian Arabs had recently attacked Reggio and the Greek population of

⁷⁴⁰ Loud (1999), p. 627; Gay (1904), pp 202-3; Noyé (1998), pp 96-97.

⁷⁴¹ Skylitzes, p. 263; *Vita S. Nili iunioris*, pp. 120-1, pp ; Gay (1904), p. 203.

⁷⁴² *Letters*, 82, 85 pp. 341, 347.

Taormina.⁷⁴³ Liudprand, in a very confused account, indicates that, in the first year of Romanos's reign, there was a rebellion in Calabria and Apulia which the emperor was unable to stop due to military commitments in the east. Liudprand alleges that Romanos offered money to the Fātimids to help subdue the rebellious provinces.⁷⁴⁴ There can be no doubt that, at this time, Romanos was preoccupied by the fight against Symeon, who had reached Constantinople by 921 after ravaging Thrace. Unlike expansionist Sicily under the Aghlabids, Sicily under the Fātimids was internally very unstable until 947, and was therefore only engaged in raiding activity without any lasting territorial conquests. Therefore it is not inconceivable that Romanos might have used the threat of Arab attacks to keep the rebellious subjects in check. This might not have been due to disinterest in Italian affairs, but rather an inability to respond.

This brings us to the question of the nature of Byzantine control in southern Italy. This has always been a very contentious subject as, while Byzantium's authority in its territories in Southern Italy was seldom challenged by its Latin neighbours, they were very susceptible to Arab raids from Sicily and North Africa. Even within Byzantine territories, Latin rite Christianity continued to thrive and monasteries like S. Vincenzo in Volturno continued to own properties in Byzantine Apulia, the fiscal immunity of which was granted by the emperors in 927. In 938, *stratēgos* Basil Kladon confirmed the possessions of the Bishop of Benevento in imperial territories.⁷⁴⁵ Byzantine forces seemed to allow the raiders to raid into Calabria without putting up much resistance.⁷⁴⁶ The local thematic troops and *stratēgoi* negotiated tribute payments with the Sicilians and seem to have concentrated on extracting the sums from the population rather than on putting up a reasonable defence. The centre's role in southern Italy at this time was primarily diplomatic. When the people of Calabria rebelled against Muzalon, Skylitzes says that

⁷⁴³ *Chronicle of Cambridge*, p. 42.

⁷⁴⁴ *Antapodosis*, II.60, p. 59.

⁷⁴⁵ Falkenhausen (1978), p. 40.

⁷⁴⁶ Noyé (1998), pp. 98-100.

Constantinople sent Cosmas of Thessaloniki to Landulf I to warn him against acceding to the population's demands for a Lombard takeover.⁷⁴⁷ According to the sources, he threatened him with a 'force too large and mighty' to counter. Whether he meant Byzantine reprisals or Arab attacks is impossible to ascertain, though the former would have been exceedingly difficult at a time when Constantinople was engaged in a bitter dispute with the Bulgars and Asia Minor continued to face *jihad* attacks from Arab Cilicia.

Although Skylitzes places Cosmas's embassy to the period of Muzalon's assassination, this could just as easily refer to the period at the end of the 920s, when both major Lombard principalities made attempts to extend their control. Byzantium's role as defender against the Arab raiders had been the primary reason for the support of its Latin inhabitants and the Lombard states, but the raiders extended their attacks from Calabria (Hagia Agatha in 921/2, Bruzanno in 923/4 and 929/30) to Apulia and Campania (Oria in 925, Taranto in 927/8 and up to Salerno and Naples in 928/9).⁷⁴⁸ The details of the Lombard response after this point are somewhat hazy, but it is certain that Guimar II of Salerno invaded Lucania and held northern Calabria from 926/7, while Landulf I of Capua Benevento continued to hold parts of Apulia captured in 921.⁷⁴⁹ In 929 combined Lombard forces struck at the Basintello River and Salernitan forces were possibly advancing through the following years until they reappear in our sources in about 940, having reached as far as Matera, less than seventy-five kilometres from Taranto.⁷⁵⁰ The weakness of Byzantine military presence in the 920s was acute enough to enable the Lombards to attack along main Roman roads when the *stratēgoi* were engaged in countering Arab raids. Disaffection with Byzantium was serious and is demonstrated by the fact that Guiamar II of Salerno ceased to use

⁷⁴⁷ Skylitzes, pp. 263-64.

⁷⁴⁸ Noyé (1998), p. 100; *Chronicle of Cambridge*, pp. 42-4.

⁷⁴⁹ *Chronicon Salernitanum*, pp. 549-51.

⁷⁵⁰ Lupus Protospatarius, p. 58.

his Byzantine titles at some point between 923 and 926.⁷⁵¹ The Lombard attacks continued till 934.

The impasse with the Lombards was only broken through the intervention of Hugh of Provence, with whom the Byzantines sought an alliance, not only against the southern Italian Lombards, but also against the rising power of Otto I in Saxony. Hugh had been the King of Italy since 926, had begun to intervene in dynastic succession among the Italian margraves from 929, and had married Marozia, the *defacto* ruler of Rome, in 931. His ambitions brought him into direct conflict with the Frankish aristocracy in the Kingdom of Italy as well as with Alberic, son of Marozia. In a show of strength, Hugh started to intervene more deeply in Italian and Provençal politics and was on the lookout for allies, of which Byzantium became one.⁷⁵² In 934/5, an expedition was sent out against the ‘rebel princes’ under the *prōtospatharios* Epiphanius, which followed one sent under the Patrician Cosmas the year before. Along with eleven *chelandia* (the same number that Cosmas had led) and seven Rus ships, a total of one thousand four hundred and fifty three cavalymen were sent. More importantly, valuable inducements were sent to Hugh in return for his aid against the Lombard principalities. The items were only to be sent to Hugh *in return* for his assistance and only if the force he sent was successful in returning the *kastra* of Longibardia to the *stratēgos*. Hugh’s intervention, the nature of which is unknown to us, must have assisted in the Byzantine aims as Liudprand tells us that the seven year conflict with the Lombards only ended through the alliance with Hugh, culminating in the marital alliance between Hugh’s daughter Bertha and Romanos II.⁷⁵³ One of the ways in which Hugh might have intervened was by sending a Hungarian raiding party to Capua, Monte Cassino, and Naples in 937, which seems to have left the Frankish territories to the north unmolested.⁷⁵⁴

⁷⁵¹ Martin (2000), p. 622.

⁷⁵² *DAI*, ch. 26, pp. 108-113; Sergi (1999), pp. 352-5.

⁷⁵³ *Legatio*, 7, p. 190; *Theo. Cont.*, p.480

⁷⁵⁴ *Annales Beneventani*, p. 175.

A recent study has argued that the despatch of the two naval missions to southern Italy in the mid 930s was also part of Romanos's strategy against the Sicily.⁷⁵⁵ The study suggests that the Val Démone, including Taormina, were held outright by the Byzantines throughout the early tenth century, and that this zone was extended to include Termini Imerese on the northern coast of the island, seventy kilometres from Palermo, in 956.⁷⁵⁶ According to the argument put forward, after making peace with the Lombard principalities, the Byzantine commanders turned their attention to Sicily, which was in the throes of a major civil disturbance centred in Agrigento (936-941) and Palermo (937/8). A letter from the Jewish congregation of Palermo to the *exilarch* in Baghdad states that the rebels in Palermo wrote to the 'king of the great town called Qustantiniyya' for support, and that the emperor despatched forces across the Strait of Messina, which captured a 'fortified and settled city'.⁷⁵⁷ This help was allegedly provided from spring 939, and the Byzantine forces crossed from Caltavuturo in north-central Sicily to Caltabellotta and Platani, both of which lie between Mazara and Agrigento, until the final defeat of the Christians near Dardarin in 941.⁷⁵⁸ The defeat of the Byzantines is said to have led to a new wave of migration of the Greek Christian population of the island to Calabria.⁷⁵⁹ The final proof provided for the return of the Byzantines, in force, to Sicily is the discovery of nineteen *folles* of Romanos I, the majority of which were coined after 931. This is considered to be significant as there are no other *folles* of the period apart from one *follis* of Constantine VII from the time of his personal reign. The find spots of the *folles* of Romanos I are unknown, while that of Constantine VII was found in Messina.⁷⁶⁰

⁷⁵⁵ Prigent (2010), pp. 63-84.

⁷⁵⁶ Prigent (2010), pp. 66-7. Such a reading of the sources is untenable as it is based on an interpretation of the Arabic word *akbadh*, which simply means to take, and does not denote long-term possession.

⁷⁵⁷ Gil (1995), pp. 103-5.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibn al-Athīr, VIII, pp. 337-9; *Chronicle of Cambridge*, p. 44.

⁷⁵⁹ Life of Saint Sabas the Younger, p. 46.

⁷⁶⁰ Grierson (1973), nos. 23, 24, 25.

The logistical underpinnings of such a campaign under Romanos I, comprising a fleet of between eleven and twenty-two *chelandia* (if one is to assume that a similar number of ships were despatched under Cosmas in 933/4 as were sent under Epiphanius, and were also used for the Sicilian campaign), assisted by the between fourteen hundred and three thousand centrally mustered troops, do not seem to suggest the ability to penetrate as deeply into the island as the above study would have us believe. The Cretan campaign of 949, which was significantly smaller than that of 911, involved the despatch of approximately one hundred vessels and between eight and ten thousand men.⁷⁶¹ If additional troops had been despatched by Romanos I to Sicily, it would have certainly left a trace in the Byzantine historical record, and would have been accorded the status of an attempt at conquest, as with the Cretan campaigns. The suggestion that Byzantine forces engaged in outright offensive warfare in Sicily is very difficult to justify as the texts do not once indicate that the Byzantine ships despatched to assist the Palermitan rebels even landed on Sicilian soil after crossing the Strait of Messina, much less conquered the north-eastern half of the coastline and then made inroads over the mountainous plateau towards Agrigento. A proportion of the rebels were indeed Christian, and it is not surprising that the fortress redoubts that held out against the Fātimids (Caltavuturo, Caltabellotta, and Platani) were inhabited by large Christian populations. The record of the final defeat at Derdarin, mentioned in the *Chronicle of Cambridge*, does not say that the forces of the emperor were defeated. It simply states that the *christianoī* were defeated, which could equally mean the local population. The expulsion of Christians from Collesano, as described in the *Vita of Saint Sabas the Younger*, should also be seen in light of their hand in fomenting rebellion against the Fātimid government of the island. The Byzantines in Calabria might have sympathised with the rebels, or even provided supplies to rebels through the Christian strongholds in north-eastern Sicily, but there is no

⁷⁶¹ Chapter 2, pp. 90-1

evidence of an invasion nor the recovery of territory on the island for the Byzantines. We do not know whether the *folles* of Romanos found on the island had anything to do with military engagement. The border between Reggio and Messina was relatively porous and anyone might have carried across and lost the coins in Sicily. They cannot have been a part of soldiers' pay, as this would have been in *miliaresia* and gold.

There are no further notices of any activities in Italy or Sicily for the remainder of Romanos I's reign. The Byzantine presence in Italy from the late-ninth century to the beginning of the personal reign of Constantine VII went through three distinct phases. The first phase, under Basil I and Leo VI, saw the consolidation of the Empire's territories in Apulia and Calabria, followed by the establishment of close diplomatic relations with the Lombards and the city states of Campania and Venice. This carefully constructed presence in the peninsula came under threat from the time of the accession of Romanos I, when internal rebellions in Calabria and Apulia caused the Lombard principalities to expand into Byzantine territory once again began the second phase. The disaffection with Byzantine rule was exacerbated by the inability of Constantinople to defend its territories or those of the Lombards from opportunistic raids from Sicily. It was only through an alliance with Hugh of Provence that Romanos I was able to regain the Byzantine position in Italy in the third phase. However, the Lombards and the city-states were allowed to become politically more distant from the Empire.

6. 3 Byzantine relations with Italy in the personal reign of Constantine VII

Before launching into the key features of Constantine's relations with Italy in his personal reign, it is essential to discuss, briefly, the primary sources which inform us about events in his reign. The key narrative source for the history of relations with Italy before Constantine's personal reign, Liudprand's *Antapodosis* has been analysed in some detail in a previous chapter. This source falls

silent on relations in Constantine's reign bar the immediate background to Liudprand's embassy to Constantinople, due to the difficulty the author must have had in recounting his services for Berengar II at a time when his erstwhile master had been deposed.⁷⁶² The Byzantine histories provide snippets of information, especially *Theo. Cont.*, but the information is limited and without much attention to context, or indeed much understanding of Italian affairs. A bit more is available in the Venetian history of John the Deacon, who wrote in the first decade of the tenth century, but this too dries up beyond 948, before re-engaging with matters Byzantine in 977. The majority of our contemporary information about dealings with the Italian states comes from charter evidence and archival documents, which help date the use of Byzantine titles and Byzantine state functions such as the confirmation of ecclesiastical properties. There is no inscriptional evidence for our period apart from several Greek inscriptions in Sardinian churches, which can be dated to the tenth century and might belong to the personal reign of Constantine VII.⁷⁶³ They follow standard formulae found on Byzantine seals and the individuals mentioned are regularly called *archon* or *protospatharios*.⁷⁶⁴

The primary source which shows the greatest interest in Italian and Adriatic affairs is the *DAI*, which devotes eleven chapters to Italy and the Adriatic coast of the Balkans. Chapter 26 comprises a genealogy, with major errors, of Hugh of Provence, and provides justification for the wedding of Romanos II to Bertha Eudokia on the grounds that Hugh was related to Charlemagne.⁷⁶⁵ It is likely that this chapter stood in for actual geo-political information about the Kingdom of Italy as, at the time of writing, the outcome of Otto I's intervention in Italy was uncertain. Chapter 27 lists the Lombard principalities and the Campanian city-states, before providing a surprisingly accurate geographical description of Venice. Chapter 28 follows this up

⁷⁶² See Chapter 4, p. 194.

⁷⁶³ Guillou (1996), nos. 215-227, 230-1, pp. 235-46.

⁷⁶⁴ In Chapter 48 of the *De cer.*, the ruler of Sardinia is called an *archon*. *De cer.*, II.48, p. 690.

⁷⁶⁵ Howard-Johnston (2000), pp. 311, 315-6.

with a brief history of Venice, again accurate, which stresses the decisive attack on Venice by Pippin in 810, which made it turn towards Byzantium.⁷⁶⁶ Chapters 29 to 36 look at the peoples who inhabited the Adriatic and Dalmatian coast, with historical detail which stretches to 926. However, the bulk of the historical information deals with the rules of Diocletian, Heraclius, and Basil I.⁷⁶⁷ The Italian and Balkan sections of the *DAI* are not helpful for information about Constantine's reign, but indicate that the emperor was evaluating previous policies towards these regions and Byzantium's historic claims to hegemony in the years before 952. As we shall see, Basil I's policies provided templates for Constantine to follow at a time when it seemed that every aspect of Byzantium's approach to the central Mediterranean had to be re-evaluated.

Byzantine Italy, namely the imperial provinces of Longibardia and Calabria, had been made relatively secure in the four years before the personal reign of Constantine VII, through the effective functioning of the alliance between Romanos I and Hugh of Provence. Lombard incursions into Byzantine Apulia had been arrested by the application of military and political pressure from Hugh and his brother, Boso, Duke of Spoleto, and Romanos' modest naval intervention under the *protospatharius* Epiphanius. When Landulf I, Prince of Capua Benevento died in 943, the notice of his death in Latin records referred to him as *princeps et antipatus patricius*, indicating that the Byzantine titles, which had been ignored in official documentation since the 920s, had been brought back into use.⁷⁶⁸ Calabria too had benefitted from the intermittent rebellions in Fātimid Sicily, which had given the Byzantine province respite from Arab raids for nearly fifteen years. As outlined above, however, Romanos's Italian policy was one which did not envisage using the calm on the Sicilian front to wrest territories on the Eastern coast of the island back from the Arabs. In Central Italy, there was also no attempt to firm up the Byzantine

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid, pp. 315-6, 22.

⁷⁶⁷ Inaccuracies in Constantine's account of Balkan history are discussed by Bury, p. 574; cf. *VB*, 54, pp. 194-7.

⁷⁶⁸ *Annales Beneventani*, p. 175; Martin (2000), pp. 622-3.

position vis-a-vis the Lombards when marines and troops were deployed from 935 onwards to push back their incursions. Romanos I's policy was essentially conservative and the insertion of the expedition under Epiphanius between the records of the much larger Cretan expeditions of 911 and 949 in the *De cer.* would indicate that this was the largest expedition mounted by the Byzantine state in Italy before Constantine's sole reign, despite only despatching eleven *chelandia* to join the eleven *chelandia* that had been sent the previous year.⁷⁶⁹

Romanos's Italian policy had relied on the continued alliance with Hugh of Provence and the persistence of anti-Fātimid hostility in Sicily. Both of these came to an abrupt end within the first years of Constantine's reign. In 945, Berengar, the erstwhile Margrave of Ivrea, returned to Italy after a five-year exile spent first in Swabia and then at the court of Otto I of Saxony. According to Liudprand, Berengar was able to persuade the notables of Verona, Modena, and Milan to overthrow Hugh with the promise of positions and properties.⁷⁷⁰ What Liudprand, who was writing as a member of the court of Otto I, fails to mention is that Berengar was the Ottonian candidate for Italy and his historical claim to the Kingdom of Italy through descent from Berengar I was certainly backed by either Ottonian arms or assurances. Having heard that he had been deposed in Milan, Hugh left Pavia for Provence, leaving his son Lothair behind as the titular King of Italy, with all formal power vested in the hands of Berengar of Ivrea.

Berengar's victory in the Kingdom of Italy posed two acute problems for the new Byzantine administration under Constantine VII. Overnight, the Empire's main Italian ally, who had been instrumental in ending the Lombard uprisings of the 930s, had not only been overthrown, but had been replaced by a new leader backed by Otto I. The installation of Berengar in northern

⁷⁶⁹ *De cer.*, II.44, pp. 660-2.

⁷⁷⁰ *Antapodosis*, V. 26-28, pp. 138-41.

Italy signalled the arrival of a Saxon partisan into the Italian peninsula, which had remained relatively free from the influence of either West or East Francia since Berengar I had conclusively fought off all rivals to become King of Italy in 905. Despite his possessions and position in Provence, Hugh had proved to be entirely preoccupied with Italy since his arrival in 925, and had preferred to be in alliance with a distant Byzantium, which allowed him to establish a wide network of clients in northern and central Italy and place his relatives in positions of power as far south as Spoleto.

Hugh of Provence's withdrawal from Italy was closely followed by the death of Guiamar II, Prince of Salerno, in 946, leaving his son, the sixteen-year-old Gisulf I in charge of the principality. The death of Guiamar II prompted an attempted coup by Landulf II of Capua-Benevento, in alliance with Naples. This attempt was defeated by a defensive alliance between Mastalus I of Amalfi and the Salernitans.⁷⁷¹ Amalfi had long held an important position in Salernitan trade and was the chief port through which the Salernitans could gain access to Mediterranean trade (mainly to supply the Salernitan elites' need for comforts and luxuries). The attack by Landulf II would have directly affected its trading interests.⁷⁷² The coup attempt might have been instigated by Naples, in an attempt to undermine the protection provided by the Salernitans to its commercial rival, Amalfi. This certainly seems possible as the Salernitans were able to convince the Landulf II to enter into a fresh alliance *against* Naples. The details of the conflict are unclear, but it was brought to Byzantium's door when Giovanni III of Naples marched against Byzantine Siponto in 949, perhaps as a show of strength to Landulf II, whose territories bordered Siponto. The Duke of Naples had also tried to elevate his position in relation

⁷⁷¹ *Chronicon Salernitanum*, pp. 551-2.

⁷⁷² Kreutz (1991), p. 100.

to that of the nearby duchies by adding an unsubtle appellation in his *diplomata* by choosing, after 944, to call himself the *consul et dux, in Dei nomine, Domini gratia*.⁷⁷³

The significance of Naples's aggressive demeanour towards Amalfi and towards Byzantium will become clearer slightly later in the chapter, but it is important to reiterate that Byzantium considered Venice, Capua, Salerno, Naples, Amalfi, and Gaeta to be subject to the Empire. This listing follows the order established in Chapter 48 of *De cer.*, where the rulers of these states are listed as a group, but the actual form of address to be utilised in correspondence directed towards them is missing from the text.⁷⁷⁴ It has often been assumed that the preceding form of address, that to the ruler of Sardinia, was also to be used for the Italian states. This asked for a simple *keleusis* or 'command' from the emperor to the ruler.⁷⁷⁵ The reasoning for this is no doubt based on the assumption that Constantine VII laid claim to all of these territories for the Roman state at the beginning of Chapter 27 of the *DAI*, that they sought and used Byzantine honorific titles to varying degrees, and that many other recipients of correspondence as *keleusis* in the Caucasus and Dalmatia were not the Empire's clients or vassals. It is, however, equally possible that the form of address, if it had been reproduced in the text, would have been more carefully chosen for the Italian recipients, a number of whom had been at war with Byzantium for much of the 930s and 940s.

It is possible to say that some states were certainly more politically linked to Byzantium than others. What must be kept in mind is that small city-states had somewhat different objectives to large territorial ones. The principal state to receive mention in the sources is Amalfi. According to Liudprand, the coup which overthrew Stephen and Constantine Lekapenos was supported by

⁷⁷³ Martin (2000), p. 628.

⁷⁷⁴ *De cer.*, II.48, p. 690.

⁷⁷⁵ Martin (2000), p. 617.

Amalfi and Gaeta.⁷⁷⁶ Amalfi is mentioned again in reference to Nikephoros II's campaigns in Syria, where Amalfitans and Venetians were said to have been involved in the Byzantine army.⁷⁷⁷ The status of the Duke of Amalfi in the imperial hierarchy was also repeatedly elevated from 921 onwards, with Mastalus I being granted the title of *patrikios*, and his successor Mastalus II being granted the title of *prōtopatharios* followed by that of *patrikios*. Ioannes, another son of Mastalus I, is also referred to as *patrikios* in official documents. Before these elevations in status, the highest title the Duke of Amalfi had held was that of *spatharokandidatos*.⁷⁷⁸ Despite Amalfi's close commercial ties with the Muslims in the Mediterranean and a lack of a communal geopolitical interest apart from the rivalry with Naples, ties with Amalfi ameliorated through the 920s and 930s, and were further enhanced under Constantine VII.⁷⁷⁹ The strong mercantile class in Amalfi, which profited from its Arab connection, perhaps also wooed Constantinople in order to gain access to markets across the Mediterranean. Byzantium benefitted from Amalfi's connections as well, as it is quite likely that Constantine VII's attempts at making common cause with the Umayyads of Spain against the Fātimids was based on initial information and contacts provided by the Amalfitans, who were the only Christian traders who had access to Egyptian, Fātimid, and Umayyad markets.⁷⁸⁰ As we have seen, the first contact between Byzantium and the Umayyads in Spain since the reign of Theophilos had been established by 948, within the first three years of Constantine's personal reign.⁷⁸¹

The other city-state with which Byzantium seems to have been developing close ties in Constantine's personal reign was Venice. It is impossible to gauge the closeness of this relationship from the extant sources, but we know from Liudprand that this relationship was

⁷⁷⁶ *Antapodosis*, V, 21, pp. 135-6.

⁷⁷⁷ *Legatio*, 45, p. 207.

⁷⁷⁸ Falkenhausen (2010), p. 23.

⁷⁷⁹ For commercial ties, see Ibn Hawqal I, p. 197; Citarella (1968); Skinner (2013), pp. 235-47.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibn Hayyan (1981) V, pp. 358-9.

⁷⁸¹ See Chapter 3, pp. 142-5.

much closer than that with Amalfi by the mid 960s, when Venice was helping in Byzantine campaigns in Asia Minor, and Byzantine silks were reaching Venice in large enough quantities to elicit mention.⁷⁸² The relationship had therefore turned into one of active cooperation. The *DAI* is also surprisingly accurate in its geographical description of Venice, and takes a further interest in explaining the history of the state, which closely resembles the account in Venetian chronicles.⁷⁸³ Venice and Byzantium also shared a communal interest in keeping the Adriatic open for maritime trade and free from both Slav and Arab raiders. Venice had developed its naval capacity throughout the first half of the tenth century and, in 948, it undertook a raid against the Narentani Slavs.⁷⁸⁴ By the time Ibn Hawqal was writing in the second half of the tenth century, or perhaps even at the time *Masālik ul-Mamālik* of Istakhri was being composed (by 951), the Adriatic was known as the Gulf of Venice to the Arabs, indicating a flourishing Mediterranean trade.⁷⁸⁵ The fact that Ibn Hawqal, Mas'ūdī, and Ibn Yaqūb were all extremely ill-informed about the geography of the Gulf of Venice indicates that Venice's maritime reputation in the mid tenth century was not built on trade with Islamic territories.⁷⁸⁶

As Amalfi offered Byzantium a connection to the Islamic West, it is well known that Venice provided a similar service between Byzantium and Transalpine Europe. We know that, on 25 August 949, Liudprand of Cremona, emissary of Berengar II, Salomon, Byzantine emissary returning from Spain and Saxony, and Liutefred, emissary from Otto I, set sail for Constantinople from Venice. As we have seen, Constantine's approaches to Otto I were the first made by a Byzantine emperor to an Eastern Frankish ruler.⁷⁸⁷ Venice was the entrepôt for Eastern goods in Saxony, and was able to extract trading concessions from Berengar II when he

⁷⁸² *Legatio*, 55, pp. 211-2.

⁷⁸³ *DAI* ch. 27-8, pp. 116-120; *DAI Comm.* pp. 91-3; Kretschmayr (1904), pp. 482-9.

⁷⁸⁴ John the Deacon, p. 24.

⁷⁸⁵ Ibn Hawqal, p. 8, 61, 189, 196.

⁷⁸⁶ Ibn Hawqal, p. 190.

⁷⁸⁷ Chapter 5, p. 160.

came to power in the Kingdom of Italy. Close ties with Byzantium were also essential as it controlled the both shores at the mouth of the Gulf of Venice (Byzantine Apulia and Dyrrhachium), and Venetian trade from its very inception was oriented towards the East and Byzantium. The records of the relationship between Venice and Byzantium are rare until the end of the tenth century, but an embassy to the Doge Pietro IV Candiano in 970 demanded an end to the recent trading ties with unspecified Muslims as such trade had not been permitted by the previous Doge. This is further proof that Venice's primary long-distance commercial interests lay with Constantinople.

The role of Italian intermediaries in establishing and maintaining communications was greatly enhanced after the departure of Hugh of Provence. These communications were in response to the new situation in Italy after the departure of Hugh of Provence. Byzantium tried to treat with the new incumbent, and an embassy was sent to Berengar at some point before 949, led by a certain Andreas. Liudprand tells us that this embassy was driven by the desire to find out about the condition of Lothair, Hugh's son and brother-in-law of Romanos II.⁷⁸⁸ Byzantium's entire Italian policy was in jeopardy, and the carefully cultivated friendship and kinship ties between Byzantium and the Kingdom of Italy would cease to be of use in maintaining the Byzantine position in Italy. The Byzantine response to Hugh's deposition was not simply to try and establish similar relations with Berengar, whose reputation as a usurper and a renegade must have preceded him. Liudprand was accompanied on his journey to Constantinople both by a Byzantine emissary who had visited Umayyad Spain and Saxony, as well as by an envoy from Otto I, indicating that Byzantium had operated with some speed after the news of Hugh's withdrawal reached Constantinople. Hugh had been Byzantium's intermediary with Spain and his reign in Italy had kept interference from the Ottonians at bay. The first embassies in 948 to Spain

⁷⁸⁸ *Antapodosis*, VI.2, p. 146.

and Saxony were thus triggered by the change of regime in the Kingdom of Italy, and reflect the responsiveness of the Empire to the potentially grave situation in Italy which had exposed the imperial provinces to the threat of complete isolation in the Italian peninsula.

Unlike the embassy in 968, when Liudprand had plenty to say about conversations with Nikephoros II, the report on the embassy in 948 consists entirely of his experiences in Constantinople, and is written so as to dazzle the Frankish reader. As Liudprand was already working for Otto I at the time of writing his *Antapodosis*, it is unsurprising that he did not want to document his negotiations on behalf of his former master, who had been deposed and imprisoned by his current master. Regardless of whether Berengar wanted closer ties with Byzantium, these did not materialise for two reasons. The first of these was that he was neither the King of Italy at the time (Lothair remained king until his death on 22 November 950) and nor was he able to supplant Hugh's allies and appointees, especially in Tuscany and Spoleto. The second was that the frailty of Berengar's grasp over the Kingdom of Italy was subsequently exposed in 951, shortly after he was finally able to assume the title of the King of Italy.

Otto I's invasion of Italy in 951, though unsuccessful in gaining him the imperial title, inextricably linked the fortunes of Saxony and the Kingdom of Italy. His marriage to Lothair's widow Adelheid was an unequivocal declaration of his intent to claim Italy for the Eastern Franks, and he was also able to enter Pavia and command the homage of the Italian nobility. It was events in Germany that compelled Otto to hasten back over the Alps, and Berengar II was once again allowed to rule in the Kingdom of Italy, but only after he had sworn to be Otto's vassal and ceded the March of Friuli to the Ottonians, providing them with their first foothold in Northern Italy. Berengar therefore became inconsequential to Byzantium's aims in Italy – he had neither the contacts with the wider Mediterranean, nor reliable clients at the helm of the cities

and duchies of northern and central Italy. Therefore, when Bertha Eudokia died in 949, a marriage alliance was sought for Romanos II from within the family of Otto I, as has been discussed in the previous chapter.

Berengar II's usurpation of the Kingdom of Italy and Otto's invasion also brought the Papacy into closer ties with the Transalpine Frankish world to the north. Rome had been under the secular control of Alberic II, *princeps* of Rome since 935. The churches and ecclesiastical holdings of the Latium were reformed under Odo of Cluny from 935 to 942, who was made *archimandrite* of the monasteries of Rome and oversaw the foundation of Santa Maria on the Aventine, in the Teofilatto family home where Alberic had been born. Alberic's opposition to Hugh of Provence's designs on Rome has been discussed above. The introduction of the Cluniac reform in Rome, with its rejection of the secular control of the church and its appointments, suited Alberic's projected image as the protector of Rome from the attempts by lay rulers in the north to overrun it. Byzantium under Constantine VII was certainly in contact with Alberic, as we have a protocol for addressing the *princeps* of Rome in the *De cer.*, which could only have been used for Alberic as he was the first to adopt that title, and it died with him in 954.⁷⁸⁹ The context for this contact must have been an attempt to restore relations with the Papacy, which had been damaged due to the Empire's alliance with Hugh of Provence. Rome resisted Otto I's first attempt at gaining the imperial title in 951, but Saxon intervention in ecclesiastical matters had already begun when the John of Gorze, who was a favourite of the Saxons, in 950, was chosen to reform the key basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, one of only four papal basilicas in Rome.⁷⁹⁰ As we have seen in Chapter 3, John of Gorze was Otto's envoy to the court of Abd ar-Rahmān III in 953, and was charged with bringing a resolution to the problem of Alpine raids launched by Fraxinetum. Pope

⁷⁸⁹ *De cer.*, II.48, p. 689.

⁷⁹⁰ Hallinger (1950), p. 76.

Agapitus II also gave Otto I broad jurisdiction over the monasteries in East Francia, and allowed his brother Bruno to be appointed the archbishop of Cologne in 954.⁷⁹¹ Moreover, he endorsed Otto's plan of turning Magdeburg into a metropolitan see with the oversight of the mission to the Slavs. To Byzantium's chagrin, the conflict with Hugh of Provence had also led, in the first year of Constantine's personal reign, to a marriage alliance between Alberic's sister Theodora and John III of Naples, who was shortly to menace Byzantine territory in Apulia. There is no evidence that the political relationship with Rome was restored in any way before Otto I's imperial coronation in 962.

What the departure of Hugh of Provence did in destabilising Byzantine relations with central and northern Italy, the end to infighting in Sicily replicated in the Byzantine territories in southern Italy. It seems probable that Constantine initially carried on with the policy of low level support to the Christian rebels in Sicily, which had started in the reign of Romanos. Skylitzes is the only Byzantine commentator to mention the appointment of Krenites Chaldos as *stratēgos* of Calabria after 945, but tells us that he had been supplying the Saracens of Sicily.⁷⁹² What Skylitzes saw as corruption was possibly the continuation of the covert supplying of rebels in Palermo and the Greek strongholds of Eastern Sicily with provisions collected and delivered by the *stratēgos* of Calabria. Palermo had rebelled under the Banū al-Tabarī in 947 and it was in this context that Byzantine help to the rebels can be understood, as had been the case in the previous rebellions from 938-40.⁷⁹³ It is possible that the downfall of this particular *stratēgos* was due to profiteering from the imperial policy, resulting in the confiscation of his properties. When the Fātimids under al-Hasan ibn 'Alī al-Kalbī finally triumphed, their attention was soon turned towards Byzantine Calabria, which had fuelled the resistance in their territories. They made a new demand for

⁷⁹¹ Kelly (1986), p. 125

⁷⁹³ Prigent (2010), pp. 81-4.

tribute and also demanded the return of deserters who had been sheltered by the Byzantines, leading to the renewal of conflict.⁷⁹⁴

As seen in Chapter 3, Byzantium's approach to keeping the Sicilian problem in check was to join forces with the Umayyads in the early 950s.⁷⁹⁵ The sending of an expedition to Sicily in 951/2, timed to coincide with the Umayyad attack on Tangiers has been discussed before. The Byzantine defeat at the hands of the Sicilian Arabs further weakened the Empire's position within the peninsula and must have fomented the unrest which broke out in Calabria and Longibardia, as well as some unspecified dissent in Naples. The establishment of a vestigial Fātimid presence in Reggio from 953 might have been enough motivation for the inhabitants of Calabria to at least enter into their own arrangements with them, as alleged by *Theo. Cont.*⁷⁹⁶ The campaign under the new combined *stratēgos* of Calabria and Longibardia Marianos Argyros was targeted, in the first instance against the rebellious folk of Byzantine Italy and Naples, although the content of the rebellion against the Empire's *kastra* and *chōria* cannot be reconstructed from the extant sources.⁷⁹⁷ What we do know is that all mentions of the regnal year in private acts of Capua-Benevento come to a complete halt in 955.⁷⁹⁸ Capua-Benevento and Naples were possibly taking advantage of the troubles in Byzantine Calabria to further distance themselves from the Byzantines, who found themselves almost entirely friendless in the peninsula. Marianos Argyros, a key ally in the coup that brought Constantine VII to power, was sent with forces from Thrace and Macedonia, who were perhaps transported on the imperial fleet, which had also been used against the Lombards and Neapolitans in 934.⁷⁹⁹

⁷⁹⁴ Skylitzes, pp 265-266.

⁷⁹⁵ See Chapter 3, pp. 147-9.

⁷⁹⁶ *Theo. Cont.*, pp. 453-4.

⁷⁹⁷ For an account of this campaign, see Chapter 3, pp. 150-2.

⁷⁹⁸ Martin (2000), p. 623.

⁷⁹⁹ *Theo. Cont.*, p. 436. *De cer.*, II.48, pp. 661-2.

Marianos Argyros must have enjoyed a certain success in Byzantine Italy, Naples, and the Lombard territories, and the blockade of Naples in either 955 or 956 is said to have resulted in the submission of the Neapolitans.⁸⁰⁰ In December 956, we find evidence of Marianos's success in the *sigillion* granted to the Abbot Aligern of the monastery of S. Benedict of Montecassino, in which he confirmed the properties of the monastery in Longibardia, exempted them from taxation, and allowed monks of the monastery free access to travel in the entire *theme*.⁸⁰¹ This was the first time in over forty years that the properties of the monastery in the Lombard territories had been confirmed, and the fact that the practice was resumed under Marianos Argyros indicates that the monastery, which had remained in exile in Capua until 950 and was governed by an appointee of the Princes of Capua-Benevento, was able to resume its ties with its Byzantine holdings due to the intervention of the *stratēgos* in 955. Furthermore, evidence of Marianos Argyros's success in Salerno can be surmised from the very brief resumption of the use of Byzantine titles in the charters between March and July 956, in which Prince Gisolf is referred to as *imperialis patricius*.⁸⁰² The title must have been bestowed, or reconfirmed, by a written diploma from Constantinople, in a diplomatic mission carried out by Marianos. We know that Salerno was economically dependent on Amalfi, Naples' rival, and might have been wooed in an attempt to increase the pressure on the latter. At least for that short period in 956, the new *stratēgos* was able to instil confidence in, or at the very least fear of, the might of the Byzantine presence in southern Italy.

The expeditionary troops sent out with Marianos Argyros in 955 were retained in Byzantine Italy and used in an ambitious series of campaigns against the Sicilians in 956-8. This is a clear sign of the escalation of Byzantine interest in the defence of Calabria, and the commitment to military

⁸⁰⁰ *Theo. Cont.*, p. 454.

⁸⁰¹ Trinchera (1865), 5, n. 6, p. 20; Bloch (1946), p. 171. Loud (2000), pp. 34-6. Martin (2006), p. 540.

⁸⁰² Kreutz (1991), p. 101.

preparedness required in order to combat a raiding emirate with access to the formidable naval resources of the Fātimids. It can also be seen as evidence of the Byzantine desire to shore up their recently gained influence over the Lombard principalities and Naples. Like the previous campaign, the action occurred at the same time as a major Umayyad campaign against North Africa. This campaign, however, was sparked by an incident where a Fātimid mail boat was intercepted and sunk by an Umayyad trading vessel.⁸⁰³ Therefore, the campaigns which followed took advantage of a chance incident, and must therefore reflect a planned build-up of military capacity in Byzantine Italy. Marianos Argyros was not sent out to simply address unrest in Campania or disorder in Calabria – he was charged with the restructuring of both the *themes*, which were united for the first time under his command.

In 956, the mosque at Reggio was destroyed by Basil, a certain *protocarabos*. A Byzantine fleet then moved west along the Sicilian coast and seized twelve Fātimid ships before it reached Mazara, the main Sicilian port, to lie in wait for reinforcements from Ifrikīya. It was not until spring of the next year that these reinforcements arrived, and they were successfully destroyed off the coast of Mazara. In 958, we find further ships arriving from North Africa, which were met by a fleet commanded by Marianos Argyros. From the sources, it seems that these ships were able to push the Byzantine forces into retreat, but were then caught in a storm and lost near Palermo.⁸⁰⁴

Though the Arab sources are quick to point out that the Muslims had the upper hand in this encounter until their ships were destroyed, it would seem that they were chased back to Palermo and had to risk dangerous sailing conditions close to the rocky coast of northwest Sicily in order to avoid the Byzantine fleet, which escaped unharmed.

⁸⁰³ Chapter 3

⁸⁰⁴ *Theo. Cont.* p. 455.

The Byzantine campaigns off the coast of Sicily were followed by an embassy to the Fātimid caliph in North Africa. This embassy, which was received in 958, allegedly sued for a ‘perpetual truce’, but we are told that the request was rejected because the idea of a long-lasting truce with a Christian adversary was considered to be theologically unacceptable by the caliph. A five-year truce was agreed, along with renewed tribute payments from the Byzantines to the Fātimids. With the island firmly in Islamic hands, the payment of tribute was a small price to pay for a substantial period of peace in Southern Italy.⁸⁰⁵

The years between the campaigns of Marianos Argyros in Sicily and the beginning of the reign of Nikephoros Phokas in 963 are obscure. It appears that the Fātimids continued to receive tribute throughout the period as Skylitzes says that they were stopped once the new emperor came to power.⁸⁰⁶ Marianos Argyros seems to have continued to hold supreme command in Italy throughout the reign of Romanos II, as he is called the *katēpanō tēs duseōs* when he was despatched to Macedonia against the Hungarians in 963.⁸⁰⁷ Such an important figure in the Byzantine military administration would not have been retained in the West for nearly a decade if he had not been engaged in securing Byzantine positions in southern Italy. The construction of a line of fortifications, comprising citadels embedded into rocky peaks, from Reggio to Pentedattilo, and Bova, dated only to the second half of the tenth century, might have been completed in this period in order to protect the south-eastern extreme of Calabria from Sicily.⁸⁰⁸ Later constructions in Calabria and the Gulf of Squillace under Nikephoros Phokas are more easily attributed to his reign, and are often attested in hagiographic and historical sources. From the *vita* of St. Nilus, we are told that a levy was raised from the maritime towns of Calabria to fit out *chelandia* for Nikephoros Hexachoniates’s putative expedition to Sicily in 965. This would indicate

⁸⁰⁵ See Chapter 3

⁸⁰⁶ Skylitzes, p. 267.

⁸⁰⁷ *Theo. Cont.*, p. 480.

⁸⁰⁸ Martin and Noyé (2001), pp. 492-3.

that the maritime ports were already protected from raids by this time and were able to provide the funds for this operation.⁸⁰⁹

Conclusion

In previous chapters, we have already discussed Constantine VII's growing interest in the central Mediterranean and in the Frankish realms to the north of the Alps.⁸¹⁰ In Italy, interests in these two regions became intertwined with the politics of the volatile peninsula. Constantine found everything changed within the first two years of his personal rule, and Byzantium found itself increasingly friendless in Italy. The old ally to the north, Hugh of Provence, had been replaced by a client of the Ottonians, Berengar II. Hugh's retreat from Italy in 945 triggered a cascade of challenging consequences for Byzantium, both in Italy and further afield. The most significant of these was the opportunity it provided for Otto to exert influence over the Kingdom of Italy and Rome. Between autumn 951 and spring 952, Otto was able to assume the functions of the King of Italy by issuing *diplomata* confirming the possessions of Frankish monasteries in Italy.⁸¹¹ Had it not been for troubles at home, his march into Rome and coronation at the hands of the Pope might have taken place a decade before it finally did. Constantine's fear of Otto's designs on Italy has been discussed in some detail, but it remains to emphasise that Byzantium had few options, diplomatic or military, to prevent Otto from gaining a foothold in Italy after Hugh's departure. Berengar II was left to rule the Kingdom of Italy at Otto's pleasure, and the latter's political reach was extended over Rome where the popes allowed Otto increasing autonomy in ecclesiastical matters in East Francia.

⁸⁰⁹ *Vita S. Nili Junioris*, p. 122.

⁸¹⁰ Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

⁸¹¹ *Diplomatum regum et imperatorum germaniae I*, pp. 215-26.

In the 920s and 30s, Romanos had been at great pains to woo Hugh to help keep the Lombards in check. He seems to have succeeded in his aims but, much like what happened after his own succession, the beginning of Constantine's sole rule also saw disturbances in Lombardy and Campania spilling over into Byzantine Apulia. This exposed the inherent weaknesses of Byzantine military control over the Italian provinces, which were brought into further relief when the Fātimid governor of Sicily al-Hasan ibn 'Alī al-Kalbī was able to suppress the rebellions which had erupted on the island soon after his arrival in 947. By 949, matters had started to get critical, as the Beneventans were pushing against the frontiers with Longibardia by attacking Siponto, and undocumented trouble with the Sicilians was pushing Byzantium into closer contact with the Umayyads of al-Andalus. The defeat of the 951/2 campaign against the Sicilians brought with it a breakdown of relations between Byzantium and Naples and Capua-Benevento. Constantine's government had to act quickly and decisively to avert the pincer movement of hostilities from both north and south.

On the checkerboard of Italian politics, Byzantium had no friends upon whom it could rely for military support against its immediate neighbours, but it did rely on Amalfi's involvement in the Islamic network to broker relations with the Umayyads and continued to rely on Venice for access to the Frankish world. Some of Constantine's aims in Italy echoed those of his grandfather and father. The first of these was the dispatch of experienced military commanders from the centre to manage deteriorating affairs in Italy. The despatch of Marianos Argyros to take overall command of both Byzantine provinces in Italy was reminiscent of the campaigns of Niketas Ooryphas in Basil's reign and that of Nikephoros the Elder in that of Leo. Romanos had left the command structure in Byzantine Italy virtually untouched while he attempted to shore up Byzantium's position through relations with Hugh of Provence. There is no evidence to suggest that, despite the failure of indigenous *stratēgoi* in Longibardia in the 920s and 30s, Romanos ever

despatched a seasoned general to the peninsula to take matters in hand and represent the interests of the centre in Italy. Marianos Argyros was charged with the dual responsibility of reversing Fātimid advances in Calabria and in renegotiating relations with Capua-Benevento and Naples. He might have also overseen the construction of defences along the Calabrian coastline, which seem to have been in place before Nikephoros Phokas' reign.

Constantine also acknowledged the greater threat posed to Byzantine defences in Italy after his accession in other ways. From the Cretan inventory, we know that seven warships were left in Dyrrhachion and Dalmatia, and three in Calabria, to guard them while the campaign was underway.⁸¹² We know from the chronicle of John the Deacon that the Narentani Slavs had become active again, resulting in the Venetian attack on them in 948. We also know that al-Hasan had set his house in order in Sicily and the Fātimids were soon to demand tribute from Calabria. Hence, the stationing of extra forces in the Adriatic and along the coast of Calabria showed that the empire was preparing itself for opportunistic attacks while the bulk of the imperial navy was engaged in what was planned as a long siege in Crete.

By the mid 950s Byzantium's aims in Italy had become more ambitious than being purely defensive. The establishment of links with the Umayyads in the western Mediterranean and the successful campaigning against Sicily indicate an escalation in Byzantine military investment in Italy and naval warfare in the central Mediterranean. Diplomatic ties in the region were also strengthened and it is no coincidence that imperial titles came back into use in the Lombard principalities and Campania after Marianos Argyros was sent to Italy. By the end of Constantine's reign, Byzantium was the dominant naval force in the eastern half of the Mediterranean, enjoying mastery of the seas from Asia Minor to the Greek islands, Dalmatia and southern Italy. This was

⁸¹² *De cer.*, II.45, p. 664.

enhanced further by the conquest of Crete in 961 and Italy's place in Byzantine foreign relations remained central under Nikephoros II, who created an additional theme (Lucania) and raised Byzantine Italy to a *katepanate*.

Conclusion:

Constantine VII: Master of his world?

Constantine VII's Byzantium was a tenth-century medieval state unlike any other. It had a whole set of institutions - a bureaucracy, a monetary economy, and a centrally administered military, which had weathered the storms of the seventh-century Islamic conquests and re-emerged more modest but adapted for the smaller state. Records were kept of interactions with the outside world and visitors were greeted with meticulously coordinated spectacle and pomp when they came to Constantinople. The treasury could, by and large, keep up with the demands of diplomacy and warfare, and the architects of both knew the extent of the resources at their disposal. Byzantium was also embedded in the widest known range of international relations in the tenth-century Christian world, abutting as it did, onto so many different geopolitical spheres. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, these relations were dynamic and fluid. The powers beyond were more volatile, vulnerable, or ambitious than stable Byzantium.

At the end of a thesis on diplomacy and foreign policy, it would perhaps be most fruitful to enumerate the different purposes of any state's foreign policy and to see how Byzantium addressed these in the personal reign of Constantine VII. The primary role of a state's foreign policy was to prevent encroachment upon and violent disturbances in its territories. The second purpose was to enhance the prestige of the state or the ruling regime both, within its territories and among its neighbours. A further purpose could be economic benefit, but this did not directly underpin Byzantine foreign policy in our period in the way that it did for the Umayyads, Fātimids, or other more mercantile states. In Byzantium, which already possessed an elaborate bureaucratic and military infrastructure, an aim was also to keep the institutions of state gainfully employed. Byzantium was not a warrior society like Rus, the Hungarians, or even the Ottonians,

but it had a military aristocracy and a standing army which had to be given something to do. Finally, all political regimes are concerned with matters of legacy, and the foreign affairs of Byzantine emperors, especially with regard to intractable adversaries like the Muslims of the Near East, formed a key component of how they were remembered. A successful foreign policy reassured both the populace and the aristocracy that the ruling emperor was performing his functions adequately, and foreign policy disasters could open the door to coups and overthrows, as had been the case in the accession of Romanos I.

As a motivations go, this last requirement of foreign policy was perhaps second only to the first, and most crucial - the prevention of encroachment and damage. Constantine was largely successful in this sphere, both in his containment of the threat from the north as well as in his re-establishment of Byzantine authority in Italy. The security of Constantinople was certainly much higher up the imperial agenda than that of godforsaken outposts on the frontier in Asia Minor, and this pragmatism allowed Byzantium to ignore those incursions which only caused temporary annoyance, like most of Sayf's raids. When Constantine came to power in 945, many imperial territories were, or were soon to become, vulnerable to attack or invasion. In the east, Sayf ad-Dawla was establishing his seat of power along the Syrian frontier and was keen to display his military prowess. In the central Mediterranean, Sicily was united within the first few years of Constantine's reign by al-Hasan ibn 'Ali al Kalbī, and Romanos' campaign to support Christian dissidents on the island was in disarray. In Italy, a Lombard succession crisis quickly spread to Longibardia, and Byzantium had lost its key ally in the peninsula, Hugh of Provence. Finally, after 941, Byzantium northern approaches were under the shadow of a particularly disruptive threat, the Rus, while the Hungarians occasionally troubled Thrace and Byzantine Italy with their raids. Faced with this range of potential disasters, Constantine VII was able to diffuse or limit each of these threats through a combination of diplomacy and military pressure.

The issue of accruing prestige for the empire is a more difficult one to address. Many of the initiatives undertaken by Constantine had the potential to cause embarrassment to Byzantium. Nowhere was this most apparent than in the failure of the Cretan campaign. This expedition was devised by the centre and its failure found mention in historical sources in the tenth and eleventh centuries. There were many other failures with the potential to damage the reputation of the ruling regime. These include the failed campaigns in the east under Bardas Phokas in the first half of the 950s and the 951/2 campaign in southern Italy, the latter of which resulted in the construction of a mosque in Reggio and the withdrawal of cooperation from Naples and some of the inhabitants of Byzantine Italy. Behind the scenes there were further reverses, like the breakdown of a proposed marital alliance with the Ottonians, but this, thankfully, did not make it into the historical record in Byzantium. Crucially, most of these unsuccessful ventures took place far away from the Byzantine heartland, where they would have had a real impact, and were poorly covered in the sources. There were no devastating attacks close to the capital, like those of the Bulgars and the Rus in the preceding period, which had succeeded in destabilising successive earlier regimes.

Prestige and the display of mastery over the world were, however, important considerations governing the presentation of foreign policy initiatives to the court and the population of Constantinople. The frenetic diplomatic activity of the first years of the reign brought many exotic visitors to the capital. The ruling regime capitalised on this by devising novel ways in which the emperor could show how sought after his friendship was. The baptisms of the Hungarians and Olga of the Rus were coded actions to show that Constantine had a spiritual and irenic influence over the untamed and dangerous peoples of the north. When victories in engagements in the east started rolling in after 956, the emperor lost no time in associating them

with himself, not allowing the generals to steal the show. Triumphs were sombre affairs, coordinated by the *logothetēs tou dromou*, and cleverly combined Christian thanksgiving with ritual humiliation in the Roman manner. Even though he never set out on campaign, the emperor was represented on the battlefield by emotive harangues, written in a way which conveyed his overall command of operations.

Despite rarely venturing far from the capital, Constantine had to play the role of commander in chief because that was what was required of the emperor in a state set up for continuous warfare. There had been no distinction between civil and military administration in the *themata* since the seventh century, and newer, smaller, more militarised themes had already started cropping up along the eastern frontier at the end of the ninth century. It was of utmost importance, when there was a sharp decline in the intensity of the Islamic threat in the Near East from the second quarter of the tenth century, for there to be clear offensive goals for the armies to pursue. Although we know woefully little about military organisation on the ground in Asia Minor, it is quite clear that warfare in the east was the domain of several powerful family firms. In Constantine's reign, the two families which dominated the fighting were the Phokades and the Kourkouas/Tzimiskes family, with the first active in Syria and the second in Armenia and Diyār Bakr. Under Romanos I, the Phokades had been out of favour and this was reflected in the fact that most campaigns took place in Armenia and the Jazīra. Under Constantine, both families flourished, and the geographical spread of the campaigns reflects this. This was probably calculated to maximise the effectiveness of the military as well as to ensure that, despite holding higher office, the Phokades were not in sole command of the empire's military resources, in the way that John Kourkoas had been under Romanos I. Greater central oversight is also evident from the fact that all naval intervention seems to have been coordinated from Constantinople and that a court favourite, like Basil Lekapenos, was involved in the successful campaigns of 958-

9. Apart from keeping the military administration engaged in the east, Constantine's government also took decisive action in the west to shore up Byzantium's position in Italy. The failed campaigns of 951/2 and the subsequent disaffection amongst clients elicited a two-pronged reaction. The first was to send an experienced general from the centre to take charge of both Byzantine provinces and the second was to make them more integral to Byzantine foreign policy through investments in naval infrastructure and diplomatic contacts.

This brings us to the complex issue of legacy as a key motivator of foreign policy. It is a common trope in Byzantine studies that the empire had a long memory and looked to its past for legitimacy and guidance. What is less frequently discussed is that Byzantine emperors also looked to the future to determine what their policies would be. All Byzantine emperors knew that their history would be included one day in the continuous historiography of the empire, and Constantine, more than any other emperor before him, was particularly exercised about how he and his forbears would be remembered and his atelier of history writers fundamentally changed how history was to be recorded in Byzantium for centuries to come. The history of the empire was transformed into the history of emperors, and Constantine's legacy, as he saw it, was incorporated into the historical record soon after his death.⁸¹³ Key among his recorded achievements were the successes that were coordinated by the centre; the campaigns of Marianos Argyros, negotiations of a truce with the Fātimids, the naval campaign of Basil Hexamilites, Basil Lekapenos' conquest of Samosata, and the massacre of the Hungarian raiding party by Pothos Argyros. The appointment of Nikephoros Phokas as *domestikos tōn skolōn* in the east and the subsequent successes was also credited to Constantine

⁸¹³ On the portrayal of Macedonian emperors in histories and art, see Magdalino (1988), especially pp. 101-15.

Constantine's legacy in Byzantine foreign policy is writ large if one makes a circuit of the world around Byzantium in the decades after 959. In the east, the empire had begun its winning streak which would push the frontiers decisively into Islamic territories under Romanos II and Nikephoros II. Relations instituted with the Umayyads would continue under Romanos II and the Byzantine presence in Italy, galvanised under Marianos Argyros, would be further strengthened with the establishment of the *katepanate* by Nikephoros II. Constantine's identification of Otto I as a key upcoming player in Italian affairs would be proven with the latter's coronation in Rome in 962 and a marital alliance between the two powers would be vigorously pursued until it finally came to pass in 972. Constantine's premonitions about the danger from the Rus would come to pass with the rise of Sviatoslav in the 960s and 70s. Despite the evidence from the *DAI* to the contrary, it would seem that Constantine VII had a firm understanding of the changing winds in foreign relations and laid the foundations upon which future regimes would build the empire's successes.

A final consideration when evaluating the foreign policy of any regime is to ask whether it was reactive or driven by innovation and initiative. Constantine's reign began with a number of diplomatic efforts, indicating that the regime believed in seizing the initiative and making the first contact. However, we have observed that Constantine's government was faced with new challenges in the Near East, Saxony, Italy, and the north, to which it was obliged to formulate a response. The test for innovation is not whether or not diplomatic and military moves were triggered by developments out of Byzantium's control, but in how priorities were shifted and the finite resources for foreign affairs were allocated. In this light, the most notable foreign policy initiatives undertaken by Byzantium under Constantine VII were diplomacy with the Ottonians and the north as well as naval action in Italy and against Crete. From the policy perspective, the east was given lower priority than it had under Romanos I – adequate resources were allocated

but the generals were just holding forth on a strategy that had been formulated at the end of the ninth century. In the personal reign of Constantine VII, diplomatic efforts were concentrated on the central and western Mediterranean, Saxony, and the north, while the Italy received military resources and defensive infrastructure. This was undoubtedly a clear and deliberate departure from the preceding reign.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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<i>AH</i>	<i>Annales Hildesheimensis</i>
<i>AQ</i>	<i>Annales Quedlinburgensis</i>
<i>BF</i>	<i>Byzantinische Forschungen</i>
<i>BGA</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum</i>
<i>BMGS</i>	<i>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies</i>
<i>BS</i>	<i>Byzantinoslavica</i>
<i>Byz</i>	<i>Byzantion</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>CFHB</i>	<i>Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae</i>
<i>DAI</i>	<i>De administrando imperio</i>
<i>De cer.</i>	<i>De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae</i>
<i>De vel.</i>	<i>De velitatione bellica</i>
<i>DO Seals</i>	<i>Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art</i>
<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>EI²</i>	<i>The Encyclopedia of Islam (Second Edition)</i>
<i>EME</i>	<i>Early Medieval Europe</i>

GA	<i>Graeco-Arabica</i>
HUS	<i>Harvard Ukrainian Studies</i>
Letters	Nicholas I, Patriarch of Constantinople, <i>Letters</i>
LC	<i>Logothete's Chronicle</i>
Legatio	<i>Relatio de Legatione Constantinopolitana</i>
Majālis	<i>Kitāb al-Majālis wa'l-musāyarāt</i>
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
Murij	<i>Murij al-dhabab wa-ma'ādin al-jawhar</i>
ODB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i>
PVL	<i>Povest' Vremennjkh Let</i>
RÉB	<i>Revue des études byzantines</i>
Tanbih	<i>Kitāb al-tanbih wa-l-isbrāf</i>
Taktika	The <i>Taktika</i> of Leo VI
Theo. Cont.	<i>Theophanes Continuatus Book VI</i>
TM	<i>Travaux et mémoires</i>
VB	<i>Vita Basilii</i>

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