

Constantinople as Center and Crossroad

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	7
OLOF HEILO & INGELA NILSSON WITH RAGNAR HEDLUND	
Constantinople as Crossroad: Some introductory remarks	9
RAGNAR HEDLUND	
Byzantium, Zeuxippos, and Constantinople: The emergence of an imperial city	20
GRIGORI SIMEONOV	
Crossing the Straits in the Search for a Cure: Travelling to Constantinople in the Miracles of its healer saints	34
FEDIR ANDROSHCHUK	
When and How Were Byzantine <i>Miliaresia</i> Brought to Scandinavia? Constantinople and the dissemination of silver coinage outside the empire	55
ANNALINDEN WELLER	
Mediating the Eastern Frontier: Classical models of warfare in the work of Nikephoros Ouranos.....	89
CLAUDIA RAPP	
A Medieval Cosmopolis: Constantinople and its foreigners	100
MABI ANGAR	
Disturbed Orders: Architectural representations in Saint Mary Peribleptos as seen by Ruy González de Clavijo.....	116
ISABEL KIMMELFIELD	
Argyropolis: A diachronic approach to the study of Constantinople's suburbs.....	142

MILOŠ PETROVIĆ	
Belgrade Toponyms along the Bosphorus: From the Belgrade Forest to the Belgrade Gate	158
FEDERICA GIGANTE	
‘New and Rare Items Coming from India and Turkey’: Changing perceptions of Islamic artefacts in Early Modern Italy.....	173
LEE BEAUDOEN	
A Mediterraneanizing Approach: Constantinople as a nexus	182
Maps.....	195
Bibliography	197
Index.....	228

A Medieval Cosmopolis

*Constantinople and its foreigners**

CLAUDIA RAPP

The concept of ‘cosmopolitanism’ has a fascinating history. The Stoic philosophers of the Roman Empire held the positive view that the man of true wisdom looks beyond the confines of the polity into which he was born, and considers himself a citizen, a *polites*, of the whole world and, beyond that, of the *kosmos*. This wider notion of citizenship was first propagated in the English language by the great English geographer Hakluyt who outlined this ideal in 1598: “to finde himselfe Cosmopolites, a citizen and member of the whole and onely one mysticall citie universall, and so consequently to meditate of Cosmopoliticall government thereof.”¹ It is thus considered beneficial and praiseworthy for individuals to think of themselves in global terms, to use a modern expression.

But when it is adopted by larger civic bodies, this cosmopolitan mind-set does not necessarily bestow the same benefits. When the noun ‘cosmopolis’ and the adjective ‘cosmopolitan’ came into use at the beginning of the twentieth century as referring to cities and societies, their application was colored by the distinct desire to protect the integrity and cohesiveness of society from extraneous influences. George Bernard Shaw spoke in 1907 of “cosmopolitan riffraff.”² Only since the 1950s has cosmopolitanism acquired an unquestioned positive meaning,

* This article, which deliberately retains its character as a lecture presentation, has its origin in a paper presented at the conference “Encounters along the Mediterranean Rim: Cross-Cultural Dynamics between Arabic, Byzantine, Jewish, and Latin Civilizations in the Middle Ages,” Claremont, California 1995. It was published as “A Medieval Cosmopolis: Constantinople and its Foreigners,” in J. M. Asgeirsson & N. van Deusen (eds.), *Alexander’s Revenge: Hellenistic Culture through the Centuries* ([n.p.]: University of Iceland Press 2002), 153–71. In the more than two decades since the article’s inception, the topic has generated a large amount of scholarship. I am grateful to Olof Heilo and Ingela Nilsson for including it in this volume (and the editorial work that this involved), with an updated bibliography of selected works, and to the University of Iceland Press for their permission for its re-use in adapted form. Research assistance for the initial version was provided by Constantina Scourtis (Gaddis) and Jason Moralee, and for the current version by Paraskevi Sykopetritou. It is a pleasure to acknowledge my debt of gratitude to all involved.

¹ R. Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques & Discoveries of the English Nation*, vol. 1 (Glasgow 1903; first published 1598), 15, citing an earlier work, *The Navigation of King Edgar*.

² B. Shaw, *John Bull’s Other Island with a Preface for Politicians* (New York 1913), preface, viii, contains a sneer against “the hybrid cosmopolitans, slum poisoned or square pampered, who call themselves Englishmen today;” in Act I, 19, an attack is launched against “the modern hybrids that now monopolize England. Hypocrites, humbugs, Germans, Jews, Yankees, foreigners, Park Laners, cosmopolitan riffraff.”

not only for individuals, but also for societies. It is in this sense of describing a city where the whole world is at home, that I have chosen the title of this article.

Would a Byzantine inhabitant of Constantinople have agreed with my characterization of the city as a cosmopolis? Yes and no. Yes, he would take great pride in the fact that his capital city attracted people from all over the world, from England to China and from Scandinavia to Ethiopia. Yet, it was more than obvious that those who visited the capital of the Byzantine Empire for a limited period of time, usually as merchants or diplomats, were not normally made to feel 'at home', but constantly were reminded of their status as outsiders and guests. But once foreigners, attracted by the economic opportunities of this center of politics, trade and commerce, took up residence in Constantinople, they were gladly accommodated and granted a surprising degree of social and cultural autonomy and religious tolerance.³

The reason for this openness is that Byzantium was, in modern parlance, a multi-ethnic society. What constituted a person's identity was his or her religion and place of origin or residence. In the eyes of the central government, what constituted a person's citizenship in the Empire was his recognition of the Emperor as highest authority, payment of taxes, and adherence to Orthodox Christianity. But religious belief was treated with some flexibility: the Empire included minorities of Christian dissenters, particularly non-Chalcedonian (most prominent here are the Armenians), as well as non-Christians, especially Jews.⁴

It is important to be aware of the inadequacies in our terminology. If we called our inhabitant of Constantinople a 'Byzantine', he would respond with a blank stare: The term is anachronistic. It was coined by sixteenth century scholars to denote the Empire whose capital of Constantinople was the re-foundation by the Emperor Constantine the Great (324–37) of an ancient city by the name of 'Byzantion'. If we called him a 'Greek', his hand would move in a threatening motion towards his dagger: *Graeci* was the denigrating term so favored by Latin diplomats in their dealings with the Empire in the East. In their own definition, the Byzantines were *Rhomaioi*, the only true heirs and continuators of the Roman Empire after its collapse in the West as a result of the Germanic invasions of the fourth and fifth centuries. If, finally, we called him a 'Hellene', he would probably become very angry and draw that dagger: the word 'Hellene' had since the fourth century acquired the sense 'pagan'—the ultimate insult to any Christian. No, our friend would simply identify himself as Georgios, of Constantinople, an Orthodox Christian, whose parents or ancestors had come from such and such a city in Asia Minor, Syria, or Greece.⁵

³ F. Kolovou, "Byzanz und seine Rolle als *urbs humana* im Welttheater des Spätmittelalters," in A. Berger et al. (eds.), *Koinotaton Doron. Das späte Byzanz zwischen Machtlosigkeit und kultureller Blüte (1204–1461)* (Boston 2016), 71–86; C. G. Pitsakis, "Quelques aspects du cosmopolitisme byzantin," in E. Chrysos & E. A. Zachariadou (eds.), *Captain and Scholar: Papers in Memory of Demetrios I. Polemis* (Andros 2009), 227–66; E. Chrysos, "The Jews and Other Minorities in Byzantium," in Chrysos & Zachariadou (eds.), *Captain and Scholar*, 63–77.

⁴ On the issue of ethnic identity, see C. Mango, *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome* (New York 1980), 13–31; H. Ahrweiler, "Byzantine Concepts of the Foreigner: The Case of the Nomads," in H. Ahrweiler & A. E. Laiou (eds.), *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire* (Washington D. C. 1998), 1–15; P. Magdalino, "Constantinople and the Outside World," in D. Smythe (ed.), *Strangers to Themselves: The Byzantine Outsider* (Aldershot 2000), 149–62, repr. in his *Studies on the History and Topography of Byzantine Constantinople* (Aldershot, Hampshire & Burlington VT 2007).

⁵ The recent work of Anthony Kaldellis engages with issues of 'Hellenism' and *romanitas* in Byzantium. See, for example, A. Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge 2007) and *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in*

If regional origin along with religious belief constituted a person's identity in the Byzantine Empire, then Constantinople with its diverse population and many foreign inhabitants cannot be taken as representative of the conditions of the provinces of the Empire. As the Empire's capital, however, the city is representative of how the central government wished to present itself to its own people and to the rest of the world.

Constantinople and its foreign inhabitants

For over a millennium, Constantinople was the cultural, political, economic and religious center of the Eastern Mediterranean. Its location at the intersection of important trade routes by land and by sea gave the city a privileged position as an international marketplace.⁶ The palace was not only the residence of the Emperor and his court, but also the seat of government and the focal point for encounters with foreign ambassadors. All of Orthodox Christendom looked to Constantinople as the seat of the Patriarch of Constantinople, highest in rank among the Patriarchs, and the location of important Church Councils. Her prestigious institutions of higher learning and her libraries attracted the most brilliant minds. From the provinces, people would flock to the capital, in the hope of finding employment in the imperial administration, to obtain an education, to conduct business, to visit relatives, to pursue a legal case at the highest court of appeals, or to petition the Emperor. Extended visits of bishops from the provinces were taken for granted. They formed the *synodos endemousa* (the Sitting Synod) which served as an advisory body for the Patriarch.

The city was designed as a veritable showcase to impress all of them: Constantine the Great had planned it as his capital in the East. He enlarged the ancient city of Byzantium and gave it a palace for the emperor, government buildings, a hippodrome for public entertainment, and churches.⁷ Under the reign of Justinian in the sixth century, the city reached its first peak of beauty and ostentatiousness. By then, it had been enlarged, under Theodosius II (408–50), by the famous land-walls which were virtually impenetrable for over 1000 years until they crumbled in 1453 under the fire of Ottoman cannons. Justinian was known to his contemporaries as a 'lithomaniac,' and his church of Saint Sophia bears witness to his ambition even up to the present day. In the tenth century, the city experienced another revival under Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos and his successors. The well-documented visits of an Italian diplomat and Russian traders fall in this period, as do the first attestations of a Muslim community in the city, all of which I will discuss shortly. Since the late eleventh century, the desperate need for poli-

New Rome (Cambridge MA & London 2015); Y. Stouraitis, "Roman Identity in Byzantium: A Critical Approach," *BZ* 107/1 (2014), 175–220, and further material at <https://byzideo.blogspot.co.at> (last visited 2018-10-01); for Hellenism, see C. Rapp, "Hellenism and Identity in Byzantium," in K. Zacharia (ed.), *Hellenisms. Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity from Antiquity to Modernity* (Aldershot 2008), 127–48. See also the contribution by Weller in this volume.

⁶ This is underscored by the archaeological discovery, since 2005, of over 30 shipwrecks at Yenikapi, the site of the Theodosian Harbor. See, for example Z. Kızıltan, *Stories from the Hidden Harbor: The Shipwrecks of Yenikapi* (Istanbul 2013); U. Kocabas et al., "The World's Largest Collection of Medieval Shipwrecks: The Ships of the Theodosian Harbor," in P. Magdalino, N. Necipoglu & I. Jevtic (eds.), *Trade in Byzantium: Papers from the Third International Sevgi Gönül Byzantine Studies Symposium* (Istanbul 2016), 363–78.

⁷ On the early development of the city of Constantinople, see the contribution by Hedlund in this volume.

tical allies and military support against the Normans in the West and the Seljuq Turks in the East forced Byzantium to grant ever-increasing concessions to the maritime republics of Italy—most prominent among them Venice, Genoa and Pisa—culminating in the Venetian pillaging expedition known as the Fourth Crusade and the establishment of a Latin Empire in Constantinople between 1204 and 1261. Constantinople never fully recovered from the ransacking and pillaging by the Crusading armies. In its heyday, it probably had a population of half a million—and that is a conservative estimate, which also excludes the suburbs. After Michael VIII Palaeologos (1258–82) had wrested the capital from the Crusaders in 1261, he made every effort to revive the economy and to infuse the city with new life, but his resources were limited. Over the next centuries, the city and especially its old center went downhill. The imperial palace complex fell into disrepair and the court took up residence in a more modest dwelling on the northwestern fringe of the city. Some neighborhoods and especially a few monasteries were still thriving. The Italians were taking up permanent residence in the city and in the suburbs and put up their own churches and convents. But the outcome was inevitable: In the final battle for the city and the Empire in 1453, there were hardly enough men to defend the walls, and those who put up valiant resistance included Scots, Catalans and Castilians, Genoese, Venetians, and Anconitans. When Mehmet the Conqueror entered Constantinople, he found the city a patchwork of inhabited quarters and deserted areas with dilapidated buildings and some parts that had over time been turned into gardens.

In this fateful and changing history of Constantinople, there is only one constant factor: not the fact that it was the residence of Emperor and Patriarch—for they were in exile in Nicaea during the interlude of Crusader rule (1204–61)—but the continued presence of foreigners in the city. They came from near and far and marveled at what they saw. The earliest descriptions of Constantinople by foreigners date from the seventh century. The first one, by the Gallic bishop Arculf, is very brief and of little interest,⁸ but the second one comes from a Chinese traveler, whose report was incorporated into the *Annals of the T'ang Dynasty*. He is an acute observer who pays special attention to the workings of government and to technical know-how. Here is what he has to say about the capital of the empire of 'Fu-lin', as he calls it:

Their kings are not people of duration. The most worthy is selected and seated on the throne. If in the empire a misfortune or something unusual occurs or if wind and rain do not come at the right time of year, the king is immediately deposed and another one instated on the throne. The crown of this king has the form of a bird with outstretched wings. The crown and necklaces are all fitted with pearls and precious stones. He sits on a bench with golden ornaments. [...] Approaching the royal palace from outside, there are three gates, one behind the other, fitted with rare and precious adornments and carvings. A large golden scale is suspended above the second gate. The crossbar of the scale is in a horizontal position and has twelve golden balls. This indicates the twelve double-hours of the day. A golden figure was made, of the size of a man, and placed at the side. Every two hours, a ball falls down and makes a clear and resounding sound. Thus they mark the time of day, and this happens without a mistake. [...] When at the height of summer the people are suffering from too much heat, water is diverted and

⁸ J. P. A. van der Vin, *Travellers to Greece and Constantinople: Ancient Monuments and Old Traditions in Medieval Travellers' Tales*, 2 vols. (Istanbul 1980), 481–83.

flows over the buildings. The contraption for this is cleverly hidden, so that others cannot recognize it. The inhabitants hear only the sound of water on the roof and then suddenly see water spaying down from the eaves on all four sides. The suspended waves become a waterfall, the moist draft brings a cool breeze. This is a marvelous effect.⁹

The Chinese traveler was not untypical in his reaction. He focused his attention on the figure of the emperor and his surroundings and on various technical gimmicks. Three hundred years after him, an Italian diplomat would find similar features worthy of note. He was Liudprand of Cremona, and he made the trip from Italy to Constantinople twice.¹⁰ His experience on both occasions was vastly different. Liudprand made his first journey when he was in his late 20s and stayed in Constantinople from fall 949 to spring 950. He came from a family distinguished through their political service and this venture, in which he was to represent Berengar, the Lombard King of Northern Italy, to the court of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (913–59), was considered an educational experience for him. Liudprand had happy memories of this stay which he described later in his *Antapodosis*. This work contains the famous description of the reception hall in the imperial palace, complete with the *automata*, or moving objects, in the form of statues of lions that roar and thrush their tails, birds that chirp, and a hydraulic device that lifts the Emperor's throne while the ambassador lays flat on the ground in prostration before the Emperor. About twenty years after this first mission, Liudprand, who had in the meantime become bishop of Cremona and an important figure at the court of the German King Otto I, was again dispatched to Constantinople. He recorded this visit in his *Relatio de legatione Constantinopolitana*, not long before his death. This time, his experience was much different.

Instead of the cultured *bonhomme* Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, he was dealing with the military-minded Nikephoros Phokas (963–69), and he was representing not a minor Italian King who was trying to be polite, but a recently crowned *Imperator Romanorum* who was in the process of attacking Byzantine territory in southern Italy and who had the audacity to ask for the hand of an imperial princess in marriage. The contrast in the treatment of Liudprand on these two occasions by the Byzantine authorities is especially illuminating and, in many ways, typical: the reception of foreigners in Constantinople, whether diplomats, traders, or prisoners of war, depended on the general political climate. The Byzantines have a word for this kind of adjustment of a theoretical principle to concrete circumstance: *oikonomia* which literally means 'household management'.

In Liudprand's case, this meant the most humiliating treatment. Arriving at one of the city gates, he was left to wait in the pouring rain until nightfall; only then—once imperial permission had been obtained—was he allowed to proceed

⁹ P. Schreiner, "Eine chinesische Beschreibung Konstantinopels aus dem 7. Jahrhundert," *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 39 (1989), 493–505, here 494–95. Another Chinese document from the early seventh century, P'ei Chü's *Report on the Western Countries*, mentions the trade routes leading to Byzantium: H. Miyakawa & A. Kollautz, "Ein Dokument zum Fernhandel zwischen Byzanz und China zur Zeit Theophylakts," *BZ* 77 (1984), 6–19. See also J. Xu, "Narratives of the Roman-Byzantine World in Ancient Chinese Sources," in J. Burke et al. (eds.), *Byzantine Narrative: Papers in Honour of Roger Scott* (Melbourne 2006), 497–504; Ch. Zhi-Qiang, "Narrative Materials about the Byzantines in Chinese Sources," in Burke et al. (eds.), *Byzantine Narrative*, 505–21; M. S. Kordosis, *T'ang China, the Chinese Nestorian Church and 'Heretical' Byzantium (AD 618–845)* (Ioannina 2008). Some English translations of Chinese sources on the Late Roman and Byzantine empire are available online: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/eastasia/romchin1.asp> (last visited 2018-10-01).

¹⁰ For general background, see J. N. Sutherland, *Liudprand of Cremona: Bishop, Diplomat, Historian* (Spoleto 1988).

to his assigned lodgings, not on horseback, as his status would have demanded, but on foot. He and his 25 attendants were assigned what he decried as a dilapidated building ‘with no air conditioning’, at a considerable distance from the palace. The building was usually guarded by at least four armed soldiers¹¹ who were under orders not to admit any visitors.¹² Liudprand recognized this arrangement for what it was, calling his lodging a “prison”.¹³ To make things worse, he was assigned a personal attendant, an exceedingly grumpy and unhelpful character, who served double duty as Liudprand’s shadow, observing his every move.¹⁴ In short, the foreign diplomat was treated like a spy, and this was quite intentional, as the emperor would not fail to point out on the occasion of their first encounter.¹⁵

Even despite such obstacles, Liudprand was successful in making contacts and procuring information. He mentions that he received ‘secret messages’ from South Italian envoys who also happened to be in the city.¹⁶ More interesting still are those little asides where Liudprand betrays the existence of a socially stratified community of Westerners in the Capital of the East: “One of his friends” sent him a basket of fruit, which was promptly destroyed by the guards; “some poor Latin-speaking people” came to his house to beg for alms and were beaten up by the soldiers; his own Greek-speaking servant seems to have used his trips to the market for the gathering not just of food, but also of useful information, until the authorities put an end to this and insisted that he send his ignorant cook instead,¹⁷ and when he mingled with the crowds on a high feast day, Liudprand managed to speak to “some persons” unobserved.¹⁸

The imperial administration clearly placed great value on control and intimidation of foreign diplomats, but no less did it emphasize indoctrination. Great care was taken to ensure Liudprand’s presence at public and ceremonial occasions. He was invited to private and public banquets, imperial processions, and the celebration of the liturgy on high feast days. But even those occasions could turn sour. At one such banquet, Liudprand felt slighted when a savage-looking Bulgarian envoy, who—Liudprand notes with condescension—had only recently converted to Christianity, was given precedence of seating; he left the table in outrage, only to be held back by imperial officials who informed him that he would now continue his meal in the company of the Emperor’s servants at an inn. It was only thanks to the Emperor’s personal intervention that this incident did not escalate. Anxious to pacify the Italian visitor, Nikephoros sent him a gift of “a fat goat, of which he himself had eaten, elegantly stuffed with garlic, onions and leeks, dripping with fish sauce.”¹⁹

Liudprand’s overall unhappy experience must be attributed to the fact that he came as the representative of a hostile power at the height of a political crisis, following the imperial coronation of Otto I in Rome that made him a rival to the Byzantine Emperor in claiming the inheritance of the *Imperium Romanum*. In fact, the fear that Liudprand would take some vital information home with him may

¹¹ *Relatio de legatione constantinopolitana*, ch. 34, in *Die Werke Liudprands von Cremona*, ed. J. Becker, 3rd ed. (Hannover & Leipzig 1915), p. 193, 7.

¹² *Op. cit.*, ch. 24, p. 188, 10–11.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, ch. 13, p. 183, 11.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, ch. 1, p. 176, 2–4.

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, ch. 4, p. 178, 6–7.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, ch. 37, p. 194, 18–19.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, ch. 46, p. 200, 6–11.

¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, ch. 49, p. 201, 27–28.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, ch. 20, p. 186, 17–19.

well be the reason why the Emperor repeatedly denied his requests for permission to return home. Other groups of foreigners were not treated much better. The same kind of strict surveillance of outside visitors as potential spies experienced by the diplomat from Italy was also applied to merchants. Their treatment is set down in the *Book of the Eparch*, a tenth century handbook of rules for the 22 guilds in Constantinople, which operated under the supervision of the Eparch, the mayor, of the City. A special official, the *legatarius*, was responsible for the foreign merchants in the city. They were lodged in hostels, presumably at public expense, for a maximum of three months. They had to transact their business under the ever-watchful eye of Byzantine officials and in observance of strict rules prescribing the availability, quantity, quality and price of specified goods. Transgressions could be punished with confiscation of goods and flogging.²⁰

We are particularly well informed about the treatment of the Russian traveling merchants who came to Constantinople once a year, in the spring. They offered furs, wax, and honey for sale, and returned with their purchases of oil, wine, walnuts, and luxury items such as silks and glass. By the tenth century, these visits had become a regular feature and it became necessary to regularize them in the form of trade agreements.²¹

The text of the trade agreements of the years of 907, 911, and 944 is preserved in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, which was compiled in the early twelfth century.²² This source also describes the usual pattern of the sojourn of Russian merchants in Constantinople. Immediately upon their arrival, a Byzantine official verified their authorization by the Prince of Kiev²³ and took down their names (and presumably also an account of their merchandise). They were assigned a hostel outside the city, in the quarter of St. Mamas. They were only allowed to enter the capital through one specific gate (where their names were probably checked against a list), in groups of fifty, without their weapons, and accompanied by a 'guide,' i.e., a Byzantine official who must have kept a close eye on them. The Empire assumed responsibility for their upkeep and comfort. For a maximum of six months²⁴ they received a monthly allowance of grain, bread, wine, meat, fish, and fruit. They could take as many baths as they pleased—an important fringe benefit for a people who began the tradition of the Scandinavian sauna. Finally, in preparation for their return journey, ample provisions were made available as well as everything they required for their ships.²⁵

²⁰ *Das Eparchenbuch Leons des Weisen*, ed., tr., annot. J. Koder (Vienna 1991), ch. 20, p. 132–35.

²¹ G. G. Litavrin, "Die Kiever Rus' und Byzanz im 9. und 10. Jahrhundert," *BF* 18 (1992), 43–59; J. Shepard, "Constantinople—Gateway to the North: The Russians," in C. Mango & G. Dagron (eds.), *Constantinople and its Hinterland*, (Aldershot 1995), 243–60. For the place of their sojourn, in the suburb of the quarter of S. Mamas, see R. Janin, *Constantinople byzantine. Développement urbain et répertoire topographique* (Paris 1964), 256–57. For the place where they conducted their business, see Th. Tomov, "Where Was the Russian Embolos in Constantinople?," *Conférence Scientifique Internationale. Le Centenaire de La Naissance Du Prof. Ivan Dujčev 2007 = Annuaire du Centre des Recherches Slavo-Byzantines « Ivan Dujčev »* 97/16 (Sofia 2011), 369–90.

²² *The Russian Primary Chronicle. Laurentian Text*, tr. S. H. Cross, O. P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor (Cambridge MA 1973, third printing), for the treaties of the years 904 and 911: p. 64–69; for that of the year 944: p. 73–78.

²³ This particular regulation is found in the trade agreement of 944 (p. 74) which notes that the previous system of verification through gold seals for agents, silver seals for merchants was now replaced by a written certificate by the Prince attesting to the number of ships that had been sent.

²⁴ This was a privilege. The usual stay of foreign merchants, prescribed in the *Book of the Eparch*, lasted a maximum of three months, cf. above, n. 20.

²⁵ *Russian Primary Chronicle*, for the years of 904–907 (p. 64–65).

The treaties as they are preserved in the Russian Primary Chronicle distinguish between Russian ‘agents,’ i.e., diplomats and actual ‘merchants,’ the diplomats being of higher status. Their authorization by the Prince of Kiev (up until the third treaty of 945) was in the form of a gold seal, while that of the merchants was in silver. Once in Constantinople, the ‘agents’ receive provisions of better quality and in larger amounts than the ‘merchants.’

Here we observe a similarly close connection between diplomacy, trade, and espionage, as in the case of Liudprand. The Russian diplomats shared with the traders the dangers of the journey, they were assigned to the same hostel in Constantinople, and both groups were treated as potential spies. An additional concern was, of course, the protection of the imperial monopoly for the production of manufactured silk products and especially of purple-dyed silks, purple being the color reserved for the emperor alone. This monopoly was jealously guarded: when Liudprand was about to depart from Constantinople, a thorough search of his baggage by imperial officers (who had obviously been alerted to this fact) produced five garments of this ‘forbidden’ kind. He was ordered leave them behind, but not without reimbursement for this loss. Liudprand was clearly embarrassed to have been caught red-handed with these highly desirable luxury items, but brushed this aside by the dismissive remark that “back home” it is the “third rate whores and parasites” who wear clothes of such bright color.²⁶

Among the visitors to Constantinople we have so far encountered are traders such as the Russians and diplomats (and potential spies) such as Liudprand of Cremona. A further group who resided in the capital for a limited period of time were the prisoners of war. Because they are neglected in modern scholarship, I would like to submit a few observations on the remarkable role and status of Arab prisoners of war in Constantinople. High-ranking prisoners of war, I am inclined to think, were treated in much the same way as the hostages that were often exchanged to confirm a treaty. Their status resembled that of diplomats rather than of prisoners. Their sojourn in the capital was limited in time; eventually, hostages returned to their countries and prisoners of war were ransomed or exchanged. Their presence offered a unique opportunity for the government to impress future foreign leaders, whether they ended up as allies or enemies, with the cultural and political superiority of Byzantium.²⁷ By the same token, it allowed these foreigners to acquire an intimate knowledge of Byzantine government, and to experience for themselves the life and lores of its people.

This oscillating aspect of the status of diplomats and prisoners of war is borne out by the structure of the imperial administration. The portfolio of the foreign minister of the Byzantine Empire, the *logothetes tou dromou* (Logothete of the Course), extended to both visiting diplomats as well as captured enemies. Within the foreign ministry, there was one officer called the *barbaros*. The seals of some of these officials in the ninth century have survived. Although our sources do not provide detailed information about this office, we may safely surmise that the duties of the *barbaros* included defraying the expenses of visiting ambassadors from foreign countries and the monitoring of all foreigners in the capital.²⁸

²⁶ Liudprand of Cremona, *Relatio de legatione constantinopolitana*, ch. 55, p. 205, 2–3.

²⁷ On this aspect, see H. Hunger, “Der Kaiserpalast zu Konstantinopel. Seine Funktionen in der byzantinischen Außen- und Innenpolitik,” *JÖB* 36 (1986), 1–11.

²⁸ J. B. Bury, *The Imperial Administrative System in the Ninth Century* (first published as *The British Academy Supplemental Papers I* [1911], repr. New York, s.a.), 93. The *barbaros* is mentioned among

Our most important source for the treatment of high-ranking foreign prisoners is the *Book of Ceremonies*, a tenth century compilation of the protocol observed by the Emperor and his court on specific occasions, both contemporary and of earlier date. Many passages show that the Logothete of the Course played an important role both at the solemn reception of foreigners in the imperial palace, as well as at the ceremonial display of captured enemies.²⁹ One striking example is provided by the descriptions of the victory celebrations which included the public humiliation of “Saracen”, i.e., Arab, prisoners of war in the Forum of Constantine. The highlight of this display was the moment when the Arab leader³⁰ prostrated himself on the ground before the Emperor, who then placed his right foot on the captive’s head and his sword on his neck as a gesture of victory. At the same instant as the Arab leader was symbolically crushed, the other Arab captives also fell to the ground, the Byzantine soldiers who were carrying the Arab weapons now turned them upside down, pointing them to the ground, and a choir erupted in singing “What God is great as our God?” In this carefully choreographed public ritual, the Logothete of the Course played the important ceremonial role of assisting the Emperor.³¹

Some scattered references about these and other Muslim prisoners of war in Constantinople both in Byzantine and in Arabic sources allow us to draw a thumbnail sketch.³² The passage from the *Book of Ceremonies* just cited is followed by the protocol to be observed when recent prisoners of war are paraded in the hippodrome. Although the origin of these men is not specified, the context allows us to identify them as Arabs. On this occasion, the ritual of the humiliation of the captured soldiers remained the same as before, but the venue was changed: It was now staged in front of the crowds who had gathered in the hippodrome to watch the public entertainment—all part of the victory celebrations. Contrary to our expectations, these captives were not removed as soon as they had fulfilled their role as ritual victims. Instead, with the Emperor’s permission, the prisoners were able to remain in the hippodrome and to watch the chariot-races. For this purpose, they were assigned places either in a separate location, by themselves, or together with previous prisoners of war.³³

This is truly remarkable. Prisoners of war, both those who had ended up in the capital after a previous campaign and those who had just suffered ritual humiliation, were allowed to be present at the chariot races in the hippodrome. After all, the hippodrome was the focal point of the political life of the capital. It was here that the emperor showed himself to the population. It was here, on the occasion of the chariot races, that he received acclamations by content citizens, or was subjected to derisory and critical chants by an angry mob. These were the occasions where the Byzantine polity constituted and celebrated itself, and to allow the presence of Muslim prisoners of war at these moments means to accord them

the court officials in the *Kletorologion* of Philotheos, ed. N. Oikonomides, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles* (Paris 1972), 133.

²⁹ On this office, see Bury, *The Imperial Administrative System*, 91–93.

³⁰ The text refers to him as ‘Amer’, i.e. ‘Amr’: *De ceremoniis aulae byzantinae*, ed. J. Reiske (Bonn 1829), II 19, p. 610, 17, tr. A. Moffatt & M. Tall, *Constantine Porphyrogenetos. The Book of Ceremonies*, 2 vols. (Canberra 2012), vol. 2, 610.

³¹ Op. cit., p. 609, 18–611, 11, tr. Moffatt & Tall, vol. 2, 609–11.

³² A. Miquel, *La géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu’au milieu du 11e siècle* (Paris 1975), 470–72.

³³ *De ceremoniis* II 20, Reiske, p. 615, 1–15, tr. Moffatt & Tall, vol. 2, 615.

a place, however marginal, in the ‘democratic process’, as we would perhaps call it nowadays.³⁴

There is further evidence for the privileged treatment of Arab prisoners of war in the *Book of Ceremonies*.³⁵ The guest list for the Easter banquet in the imperial palace included among the imperial officials of lesser rank, “18 of the Agarene [i.e. Arab] prisoners in the great Praetorium.” Their distinct status was expressed by their costume: they were wearing simple white cloaks, without a belt, but with shoes on their feet.³⁶ In this manner, they enjoyed the privilege of being invited to join the imperial household on the highest feast day of the Orthodox Church.

The Praetorium where they were imprisoned was located in the vicinity of the imperial palace.³⁷ The earliest attestation for this Muslim prison comes from the reign of Leo VI (886–912), who persuaded one of its inmates to send a false message to Syria. The prisoners were certainly not treated as criminals: Not only could they watch the chariot races and were invited to banquets in the palace, as we have already seen, but their facility also included a mosque. By the mid-tenth century, a legend was circulated by both Byzantine and Arab authors, which attributed the foundation of this mosque to a request made by the Arab general Maslama during his year-long siege of Constantinople in 717–18.³⁸

This mosque was not only used by the prisoners of war in the city. Muslim traders and diplomats, who conducted their business in the capital since the ninth century, must have also frequented it.³⁹ The tenth century Arab geographer al-Muqaddasi explains the importance of including a description of Constantinople in his work:

“[...] because the Muslims have a mosque there, where they gather and worship freely. [...] It is necessary to describe the routes to Constantinople because it is of use to the Muslims for the ransom of prisoners, for embassies, for warfare, and for trade.”⁴⁰

³⁴ Another possibility would be to interpret their presence as the functional equivalent of the ‘indoctrination’ of foreign diplomats through grand displays, as we have seen with Liudprand. However, the latter never once mentions the hippodrome.

³⁵ The event whose ritual is here described probably took place after the peace with the Bulgarian Tzar Peter in 927, since “Bulgarian friends” are also named as participants in the celebrations. On this episode, see also L. Simeonova, “In the Depths of Tenth-Century Byzantine Ceremonial: The Treatment of Arab Prisoners of War at Imperial Banquets,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 22 (1998), 75–104, repr. in J. Haldon (ed.), *Byzantine Warfare* (Aldershot, 2007), 549–78.

³⁶ *De ceremoniis* II 52, Reiske, p. 767, 16–768, 12, tr. Moffatt & Tall, vol. 2, 767–68.

³⁷ The Muslims were probably its only inhabitants. The early tenth-century author Ibn Rosteh mentions a “prison of the Muslims” in the vicinity of the imperial palace: Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, 170, quoting the *Kitab al-a’laq al-nafisa*, ed. Goeje, *Bibliotheca geographorum arabicum*, VII (Leyden 1892), 120–21.

³⁸ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De administrando imperio* 21, l.111–114, ed. G. Moravcsik, tr. R. J. H. Jenkins (partially online at <http://faculty.washington.edu/dwaugh/rus/texts/constp.html>, last visited 2018-10-01) (Washington D.C. 1967), 92. Cf. M. Canard, “Les expéditions des Arabes contre Constantinople,” *Journal asiatique* 208 (1926), 61–121, here 94–99.

³⁹ For the presence of Muslims in Constantinople, see Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, 257–59; S. W. Reinert, “The Muslim Presence in Constantinople, 9th–15th Centuries: Some Preliminary Observations,” in H. Ahrweiler & A. E. Laiou (eds.), *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire* (Washington D.C. 1998), 125–50; K. Durak, “Through an Eastern Window: Muslims in Constantinople and Constantinople in Early Islamic Sources,” in K. Durak (ed.), *From Byzantium to Istanbul: 8000 Years of a Capital* (Istanbul 2010), 102–11.

⁴⁰ Cited after D. Sturm, “Die Darstellungen der byzantinisch-arabischen Verhältnisse bei den arabischen Geographen des 10. Jahrhunderts,” *BF* 18 (1992), 147–66, 158–59.

In subsequent centuries, the mosque sometimes became an object of negotiation with Muslim rulers. Byzantine Emperors would promise them that their names be mentioned in Friday prayers and demanded in return certain favors for the Christian population under Muslim rule.⁴¹ This first mosque was destroyed in 1201 in a riot, but another one was erected soon thereafter. The second mosque, we are told, was located in the quarter of the Muslim merchants, not far from the Church of St. Irene of Perama. This is, incidentally, the first time we hear of a Muslim residential quarter in Constantinople. The second mosque was destroyed by Pisan and Venetian Crusaders in 1204, despite the joint resistance of Byzantines and Muslims.⁴² A Muslim quarter continued to exist after the reconquest of the capital by Michael VIII Palaeologus in 1261, when it was apparently moved to the western part of the city. It had some long-term residents. One of them, 'Abd Allah b. Muhammad, a merchant from Sinjar, lived for twelve years in Constantinople, until, in 1293, he came to Damascus and shared his experience with the father of the Arab historian al-Jazari, who preserves a record of this conversation: 'Abd Allah described a quarter especially for Muslims that was as large as two thirds of Damascus. It was located next to the Jewish quarter, was surrounded by a wall, and had a gate that was closed at night, at the same time as the city gates.⁴³ A century after al-Jazari, the Muslim quarter had gained even further prominence. In 1398 the Emperor Manuel II Palaeologus had to enter into negotiations with the Ottoman sultan Beyazit I who was besieging Constantinople. Beyazit demanded greater legal autonomy for the Muslims who were laborers in the harbors of Constantinople or who had come to the city to conduct business. The Emperor was asked to cede his judicial authority and to allow the appointment of a *qadi* to administer justice to the Muslims who would thus be living under their own law.⁴⁴

Since the early tenth century, Muslims are thus attested as a permanent presence in the capital. They are recognized as such by the construction of a mosque and the assignment of a particular quarter of residence, which is attested since the end of the twelfth century. We know very little about their daily lives, but it is clear that the Byzantine authorities showed a surprising degree of respect for their religion, and for the high-ranking prisoners of war who were treated rather like foreign diplomats and were invited to join in the social and political life of the city and of the palace.

The case of the Italian diplomat, the Russian traders, and the Muslim prisoners of war illustrate the way in which the treatment of foreigners who were present in Constantinople for a limited time was dictated by political and economic considerations. But what about outsiders who did not represent a foreign power? Who were outsiders because of their religion, but otherwise had no country to call their own, and who were long-term residents of the capital? Here, of course, I am

⁴¹ See the entries under the relevant years in F. Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches von 565–1453*, 1. Teil: Regesten von 565–1025 (Munich and Berlin, 1924, second, revised edition by A. Müller & A. Beihammer, Munich 2003), 98–99; in 987, it was ordered that prayers be said every Friday in the mosque of Constantinople for the Fatimid Caliph of Egypt. This order was renewed in 1027, cf. F. Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches von 565–1453*, 2. Teil: Regesten von 1025–1204 (Munich and Berlin, 1925, second, revised edition by P. Wirth, Munich 1995), 1; and in 1050, prayers were promised in the mosque of Constantinople on behalf of Togrul-Beg, cf. Dölger, *op. cit.*, 9.

⁴² *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, ed. J. A. van Dieten, 2 vols. (Berlin & New York 1975), p. 525, 20–21, tr. H. Magulias, *O City of Byzantium. Annals of Niketas Choniates* (Detroit 1984), 288.

⁴³ M. Izeddin, "Un texte arabe inédit sur Constantinople byzantine," *Journal asiatique* 246 (1958), 453–57, here 454–55.

⁴⁴ Ducas, *Istoria Turco-Bizantina (1341–1462)*, ed. V. Grecu (Bucarest 1958), XIII 5, p. 77, 20–28.

talking about the Jews, who were part of the population of Constantinople throughout its history.⁴⁵ They are an excellent test case to scrutinize and fine-tune our views of what it meant to be a Byzantine ‘citizen’. We have seen above that Muslim prisoners were allowed to participate in the ‘democratic process’ by attending the races in the hippodrome. The Jews of Constantinople certainly did that and much else: they participated in riots and they helped to defend the city walls during enemy sieges. They were permanent residents of the capital and owned property—another important privilege of citizenship. Whether they were subject to a special tax, and if so, during which periods of the Byzantine Empire, remains a debated question.⁴⁶ Quite a few of Constantinople’s Jews held prominent positions as court interpreters or as the Emperor’s personal physicians. This tradition would be continued by the Ottoman Emperors: Mehmet the Conqueror had a Jewish physician, just like his father. There are even some cases of intermarriage (which was prohibited by canon law) between Jews and Christians in Byzantium, but the bulk of evidence for that comes, to the best of my knowledge, from documents in the Cairo Genizah and pertains to the Jews of Thessaloniki.⁴⁷ Their worship was respected and protected. The destruction of synagogues was prohibited by law (but the erection of new ones was forbidden) and Jews could not be cited before a legal court on the Sabbath.

But this favorable impression is only part of the picture. At various moments in the history of the Byzantium, Emperors ordered the forced conversion of Jews. Such measures often met with resistance from Christian ecclesiastics who argued that the administration of baptism against someone’s will was a perversion of this institution. Jews were barred from the army, from the civil service, and from teaching at universities, and a great economic handicap was imposed on them in the prohibition to own or trade in Christian slaves. In other ways, too, they did not enjoy the same legal status as Christians: if a Christian was the victim of theft, the thief would make restitution in the value of three to four times his damages, while a Jewish victim would only receive two times the value. Moreover, a Christian who was accused before a court of law was free to reject a Jewish witness.⁴⁸

It is impossible to say how long these restrictions were valid and how strictly they were enforced. If some generalization should be attempted, it seems that since the thirteenth century, the Jews of Byzantium enjoyed greater security and stability than ever before. The growing economic potential of the Jewish communities had become difficult to overlook, and the Byzantine Emperors took recourse to the principle of *oikonomia* which allowed them to harmonize practical exigencies with more abstract concepts. Another factor played a role in this: From the late eleventh century, Byzantine society became much more permeable by outsiders. This was the period when the Empire was in desperate need for military help against the Normans in the West and the Turks in the East and thus was forced to look for allies among the maritime republics of Italy. The price for such assistance was an ever greater influx of Italian capital and manpower into the Empire. Improving

⁴⁵ Especially relevant are the monographs by J. Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire, 641–1204* (Athens 1939); S. Bowman, *The Jews of Byzantium, 1204–1453* (Tuscaloosa AL 1985); J. Holo, *Byzantine Jewry in the Mediterranean Economy* (Cambridge & New York 2009), and the articles in ed. R. Bonfil et al. (eds.), *Jews in Byzantium: Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures* (Leiden & Boston 2012).

⁴⁶ Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire*, 11–17; Bowman, *The Jews of Byzantium*, 41–48.

⁴⁷ Paper by S. Bowman, delivered at the Byzantine Studies Conference, Princeton 1993.

⁴⁸ Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire*, 20.

the lot of the Byzantine Jews, who represented an important economic force, went some way to redress the balance.

The history of the Jewish community in Constantinople confirms the extent to which their fate depended on imperial decisions and was intertwined with the general political situation. On the whole, the community was rather wealthy. Most of its members engaged in business, and many specialized in working with textiles or leather. Some owned houses in the city, where they lived with their families or which they rented out. In the mid-fifth century, a synagogue was constructed in the quarter of the coppersmiths, the Chalkoprateia, in the immediate vicinity of the palace and other public areas. This happened in 442, while the emperor Theodosius II was absent on campaign.⁴⁹ On his return in the following year, he ordered that the building be converted into a church. There are no further references specifically to a synagogue, but it is safe to assume that where there was a community of Jews, such places of worship also existed. We have to wait for half a millennium until the next attestation of a Jewish quarter in Constantinople. In the tenth century, the so-called 'Judaica' is located on the northern shore of the peninsula, in the same general area with access to harbor facilities as the colonies of Italian traders from Venice, Amalfi, Pisa and Genoa. But not long thereafter, and certainly before the 1160s, when the Spanish Jew Benjamin of Tudela visited these parts (and commented on the absence of Jews from the city proper), the Jews had been moved outside the city of Constantinople, across the Golden Horn, into the quarter of Galata, or Pera, as it was then known, where they also had a cemetery. This community seems to have been dispersed for good in the upheavals of the capture of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade in 1204. In the year 1267, not long after the re-establishment of Byzantine rule, the whole area of Pera was given to the Genoese and the Jews disappear from the record in this suburb until the fourteenth century, when the new settlers that arrived there from various areas of the Byzantine Empire, especially from those under Genoese control such as Trapezunt and the Crimea, also included Jews.

Constantinople after the crusaders

After Michael VIII Palaeologus had wrested Constantinople from the Crusaders in 1261, he made every effort to revitalize the city. It is very likely that the Jews of Constantinople were also included in this strategy and that they were at that time assigned their area of residence in the Vlanga quarter, on the Propontis. The Arab merchant from Sinjar who provided al-Jazari with information about the Muslim quarter of Constantinople in the 1280s also indicates the existence of a Jewish settlement in its vicinity.⁵⁰ This Jewish quarter of Vlanga continued to exist until the fall of the city to the Ottomans in 1453. According to the account of this tragic event by the Italian Nicolo Barbaro, it was in this area that the Ottomans first gained entry into the city. They descended on the "Zudeca, per poder meio robar, per esser li assai riqueza in caixa de queli Zudei a masima de zoie" (Jewish quarter,

⁴⁹ On this and the following, see D. Jacoby, "Les quartiers juifs de Constantinople à l'époque byzantine," *Byzantion* 37 (1967), 167–227, repr. in his *Société et démographie à Byzance et en Romanie latine* (London 1975), and "The Jews of Constantinople and their Demographic Hinterland," in C. Mango & G. Dagron (eds.), *Constantinople and its Hinterland* (Aldershot 1995), 221–32, repr. in his *Byzantium, Latin Romania and the Mediterranean* (Aldershot 2001).

⁵⁰ See above, n. 43.

in order to make greater booty, for there were significant riches in the houses of these Jews and a large amount of silks[?]).⁵¹ After Mehmet the Conqueror had taken over the city, he pursued a deliberate policy of openness and repopulation. He attracted a massive influx of Jews to Constantinople, so that by the time of the census of 1477, there were 1500 Jewish houses inside the city, so that they constituted an estimated 10% of the population.⁵²

Under Byzantine rule in the twelfth century, by contrast, it seems that the Jews made up about 2% of the population of Constantinople.⁵³ On his visit to the capital in the early 1160s, the Jewish merchant from Spain Benjamin of Tudela was impressed to encounter in the suburb of Pera the largest Jewish community outside Baghdad. As is known from a variety of sources, the Jews in Constantinople were since the ninth century involved in the production and sale of silks, i.e., luxury fabrics, in addition to the fabrication of leather, as tanners.⁵⁴ According to Benjamin's account, which was probably significantly revised by a medieval editor, this community consisted of 80% of Rabbanite Jews, but also had a substantial group of Karaite Jews, numbering 500 (presumably) households, who were separated from the former by a fence.⁵⁵ They specialized in the preparation of leather goods. This occupation was particularly loathsome because of the smell of the chemicals it involved. Benjamin writes:

[...] there is much hatred against them, which is fostered by the tanners, who throw out their dirty water in the streets before the doors of the Jewish houses and defile the Jews' quarter. So the Greeks hate the Jews, good and bad alike, and subject them to great oppression, and beat them in the streets, and in every way treat them with rigor. Yet the Jews are rich and good, kindly and charitable, and bear their lot with cheerfulness.⁵⁶

Competition over the business of tanning and preparing skins brought about a very interesting incident that involved Jews and resulted in a veritable diplomatic crisis between Byzantium and Venice. This incident also throws some light on the definition of Jewish versus Byzantine or—in this case—Venetian 'identity'; and finally, it illustrates the administrative flexibility of Venice in its overseas possessions. The events occurred in 1319 and 1320.⁵⁷ By that time, the Venetians had lived in the area immediately adjacent to the Jewish quarter of Vlanga for a good 50 years.⁵⁸ A treaty in 1277 had granted the *bailo* of the Venetian community

⁵¹ Nicolo Barbaro, *Giornale dell'assedio di Costantinopoli*, 1453, ed. E. Cornet (Vienna 1856), 56, quoted in Jacoby, "Quartiers juifs," 195, n. 1.

⁵² Bowman, *The Jews of Byzantium*, 194.

⁵³ A. Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry from Justinian to the Fourth Crusade* (London 1971), 3.

⁵⁴ *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela* (Malibu CA 1987, second printing), 69–72. D. Jacoby, "Benjamin of Tudela and his 'Book of Travels,'" in K. Herbers & F. Schmieder (eds.), *Venezia incrocio di culture. Percezioni di viaggiatori europei e non europei a confronto. Atti del convegno Venezia, 26–27 gennaio 2006* (Rome 2008), repr. in id., *Travellers, Merchants and Settlers in the Eastern Mediterranean, 11th–14th Centuries* (Farnham 2014); id. "The Jews and the Silk Industry of Constantinople," in his *Byzantium, Latin Romania and the Mediterranean* (Aldershot 2001), XI. Although the Jewish involvement in the silk trade is mentioned in the *Book of the Eparch* of the early tenth century, Jacoby argues convincingly that they did not belong to any of the guilds of Constantinople.

⁵⁵ On the Karaites, see Bowman, *The Jews of Byzantium*, 107–109, 113, 139–146, 189–190, 198.

⁵⁶ *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, 72.

⁵⁷ D. Jacoby, "Quartiers Juifs," 196–205 and "Venice and the Venetian Jews in the Eastern Mediterranean," in G. Cozzi (ed.), *Gli Ebrei e Venezia, secoli XIV–XVIII* (Milan 1987). Cf. also Bowman, *The Jews of Byzantium*, 20–25.

⁵⁸ For the topography of the Venetian quarter, see Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, 247–49; D. Jacoby, "Houses and Urban Layout in the Venetian Quarter of Constantinople: Twelfth and Thirteenth

the right to bestow Venetian status at his will. This process usually involved two witnesses to vouch for the worthiness of the applicant, and the payment of fees to various Venetian officials. The Venetians enjoyed considerable economic privileges, not least the far-reaching exemption from most tax obligations to the Empire, including customs duties. Little wonder, then, that Venetian status was eagerly sought after and provided a convenient way for the Venetian community to increase its numbers.

This is where the Jews come in. Back in Italy during this time, Venice pursued a very restrictive policy with regard to the Jews. They were not allowed as permanent residents in the city (until the establishment of the Ghetto in 1516), but those who lived on the Terraferma could obtain a *condotto* that permitted them to engage in specific business for a stated amount of time. In Constantinople, however, the rules were much more relaxed. The Venetian quarter soon housed a large number of Jews. Obviously, these cannot have been ‘native’ Venetians, but were Romaniote Jews from the Byzantine Empire who had successfully petitioned for Venetian status. Another illustration of the flexibility of the Venetians abroad is the fact that from 1397, Jews who entered Venice were stigmatized by the requirement to wear a yellow badge, but the Jews of Venetian status in Constantinople were not subjected to such treatment.⁵⁹ Unlike their Byzantine counterparts, the Jews of Venetian status were, however, subject to higher taxation than non-Jews within the Venetian community: On certain days of the year, prescribed sums had to be paid to certain Venetian officials (these were used to finance the celebration of Christian festivals), and boots and brooms of a certain value had to be delivered to the *bailo*’s palace on particular occasions.

A number of these Jews of Venetian status lived, not in the Venetian quarter, but side by side with Byzantine Jews in the Vlanga quarter. Those who worked in the leather business had come to an agreement: The Venetian Jews would prepare the skins, and the Byzantine Jews would do the tanning. This kind of team-work, of course, was an open path to defraud the Imperial fisc: The work of Byzantine Jews could be passed off as that of Venetians and therefore claimed as tax-exempt. To eliminate this problem, the Emperor Andronikos II (1282–1328) simply prohibited all Byzantine Jews from engaging in the tanning business.⁶⁰ The Venetian Jews in the Vlanga seized this opportunity to take up by themselves the tanning work previously done by the Byzantine Jews. Andronikos retaliated by demanding of the Venetian *bailo*, Marco Minotto, that the Venetian Jews depart from ‘imperial territory’ in the Vlanga quarter and take up residence with the other Venetians. The *bailo* protested against this request, pointing out that under the current agreement (concluded in 1285 and renewed in 1310 for 12 years), anyone of Venetian status was at liberty to take up any profession of his choice and to settle wherever he chose, as long as he paid the required land tax.

The next step for the Byzantine Emperor was to make himself the spokesman of ‘his’ Byzantine Jews. He replied that the inhabitants of the Jewish quarter of Vlanga no longer wished to rent out their houses to Venetians. Venice in turn referred to the original agreement which allowed the presence of Venetian Jews in

Centuries,” in K. Belke et al. (eds.), *Byzantina Mediterranea. Festschrift für Johannes Koder zum 65. Geburtstag* (Vienna 2007), 269–82, repr. in id., *Travellers, Merchants and Settlers in the Eastern Mediterranean, 11th–14th Centuries* (Farnham 2014).

⁵⁹ By the fourteenth century, the Venetian Jews in the colonies, such as those in Constantinople, were called “white Venetians” (*Veneti albi*).

⁶⁰ There were, however, non-Jewish tanners in the city.

the Vlanga. The imperial displeasure at these developments soon took on a more concrete form: The *bailo*'s report to the Doge in Venice of March 1320 reveals the extent of the hostilities: He complained about arbitrary confiscations (skins had been burned or thrown into the sea), the imposition of taxes on furs brought by Venetians to Constantinople, and attempts to hinder the Venetians to go about their profession or to enter their houses. In short, the Venetian community had been hit where it hurt: Their profit margin was under assault. In response to these offenses, Venice made two requests: restitution of damages, which was granted in 1324, and the demand that the Venetian quarter be protected by a wall.⁶¹

This incident is revealing in many ways: It shows the tendency of Jews to live and work together, regardless of their political status as Byzantine or Venetian. In Constantinople, Byzantine Jews were accepted members of the community as taxpayers, participants in public life, and property owners. The biggest difference that set them apart was their religion. But, as the initiative of Andronikos II demonstrates, even that did not prevent the Emperor to take up their cause when the situation (and his self-interest) required such action. In short, this episode of the Jewish tanners is further confirmation of the remarkable flexibility and adjustment to change of which the Byzantine Empire was capable when this was required by the circumstances.

Over the thousand-year history of the Byzantine Empire, visitors and settlers from all over the world flocked to its capital in Constantinople in order to enjoy its religious and cultural attractions, to profit from its economic opportunities, or to conduct political negotiations. Only a small segment of these could be discussed here, but their treatment is nonetheless indicative of an imperial policy that took the presence of foreigners, and the character of the capital as a 'cosmopolis', for granted. The imperial administration continually sought to devise a variety of strategies to accommodate these visitors and to enable them to pursue the purpose of their presence, while asserting the government's need to exercise control over potentially harmful activities and, before all, the Emperor's desire to dazzle and impress the visitors with the display of power and grandeur. In other words, it was the principle of *oikonomia* that inspired the treatment of Italian diplomats, Russian merchants, Arab prisoners of war, and Jewish settlers alike.

⁶¹ About 20 years after this incident, by 1343, the Venetian Jews lived in a distinct area, called *Cafacalea* within the Venetian quarter.