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Exonerating Manuel I Komnenos: Byzantine Foreign Policy (1143-1180)

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EXONERATING MANUEL I KOMNENOS:
BYZANTINE FOREIGN POLICY (1143-1180)

by

DARRYL KEITH GENTRY II

(Under the Direction of Vernon O Egger)

ABSTRACT

Manuel I of Byzantium (1143-80) has been unfairly judged as misguided, reckless, and, ultimately, as a failure. This work endeavors to refute the claims that Manuel's imperial policy lacked any coherent strategy, and that Byzantium simply reacted to external stimuli. The most ambitious aim of this thesis is to present a cogent analysis of Manuel's imperial policy to demonstrate the emperor's efficacy and strategic flexibility. The perception, generally accepted by historians, that Manuel left his empire exhausted and vulnerable to outside aggression is also seriously challenged. Regardless of Manuel's defeat at Myriokephalon in 1176, he could claim that the empire was stronger than it had been in over a century.

INDEX WORDS: Byzantine Empire, Manuel I Komnenos, Myriokephalon, Second Crusade.

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by

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AN INTRODUCTION TO BYZANTINE FOREIGN POLICY (1143-80)

Manuel I Komnenos (1143-80) inherited an impressive military and political machine from his grandfather Alexios I (1081-1118) and father John II (1118-43). At the apogee of Manuel's career, he acknowledged the vassalage of all the Crusader states, the Seljuks of Rûm, the Hungarians, and the Serbs. He also established a significant presence in Italy to counter growing German influence. Soon after his death, however, the Byzantine court was almost paralyzed by plots and chaos, and within a quarter of a century it could not prevent the crusaders of 1204 from brutally sacking Constantinople, the city's first such catastrophe in its nine-hundred-year history. For over eight centuries, historians have attempted to explain how this dramatic turn of events could have occurred. Many argue that Manuel I squandered the resources of his empire in order to complete an imperial policy that was increasingly unrealistic and overly ambitious. The purpose of this work is to refute those claims.

To answer the question of whether or not Manuel's foreign policy was unrealistic and perhaps even pernicious to the empire, it is necessary to examine his career. However, this examination must be conducted independent of the horrors of 1204. How did Manuel justify his foreign policy and how did his contemporaries view him? Manuel was exceptionally active given the limitations of his empire and was quick to adapt to the changing political landscape, including his setbacks. This work will detail each of the decades of Manuel's reign, discussing the emperor's objectives and measuring his successes and failures. The conclusion will offer an overall judgment of Manuel's reign.

In order to accomplish this aim, it is necessary to discuss what has been said about Manuel Komnenos's foreign policy and to adequately place this work within the historiography. There are two primary sources contemporary to the reign of Manuel I. The first of these was the panegyric writer John Kinnamos who, as imperial secretary (*gramatikos*), was present for many of the emperor's later campaigns. His narrative is presented in a very matter-of-fact manner with occasional tangents and little analysis. Kinnamos's firsthand knowledge permitted him to furnish rich detail regarding the emperor's military campaigns that are simply not present in other accounts. Unfortunately, his narrative breaks off in the spring of 1176 just before the disaster at Myriokephalon, thus preventing an analysis of these events or of Manuel's rule in summary.

The second source is the more critical Nicetas Choniates. Choniates wrote his twenty-one book narrative after the 1204 fall of Constantinople from the safety of Nicaea. Choniates' work is often religious and righteous in tone and one cannot escape the notion of Divine Providence as an explanation for the fall of the imperial capital—the Byzantines had strayed from God's path and were being punished. Choniates is quite critical of Manuel and his policies. However, the author's attitude was mostly likely influenced by political circumstances. The broken Komneni dynasty was a convenient scapegoat for the horrors of 1204. The Angeloi family had established an "empire" based in Nicaea from the remains of Byzantium. The Angeloi claimed dominion of a large swathe of the western Anatolian littoral, which included Choniates' ancestral home of Chonai. Perhaps naturally, Choniates joined the Angeloi imperial service and sought to elevate the standing of the new dynasty at the expense of the Komnenoi, especially Manuel. He admonished Manuel for what he perceived as wasteful spending, pointless intrigue in Italy, and sabotaging the efforts of the

Second Crusade in 1147. Choniates gives special attention to the emperor's personal conduct. For him, Manuel's fascination with astrology and his various sexual indiscretions are indicative of the declining morality that prompted divine retribution. Choniates, in his summation of Manuel's reign, gives a stinging rebuke: "He had achieved nothing very notable for the empire and had made no provisions or arrangements for events following his death because he in no way would accept that death was near."¹

Modern historians have cited Choniates' unflattering assessment of Manuel's rule to portray the emperor in a distinctly negative manner. One of the first modern historians to discuss the reign of Manuel Komnenos was Edward Gibbon. A paragon of Enlightenment rationalism, Gibbon describes the Byzantines as foolish and mystical cowards.² Regarding Manuel I, Gibbon is scathing in his criticism of Manuel's handling of the Second Crusade. The German emperor made arrangements for safe passage through Byzantium and supplies to support his troops, "but every engagement was violated by [Manuel's] treachery and injustice; and the complaints of the Latins are attested by the honest confession of a Greek historian." The "honest" historian Gibbon is referring to is Nicetas Choniates. Gibbon continues by suggesting that Manuel conspired with the Seljuk Turks to destroy the armies of Louis VII of France and Conrad of the German Empire.³

During the late nineteenth century, a romantic form of Hellenism developed in tandem with the Greek War of Independence. The writers of this period included George

¹ Niketas Choniates, *O City of Byzantium, Annals of Niketas Choniates*, Trans. H. G. Magoulias (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 124.

² Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1996), 3: 560-74.

³ *Ibid.*, 3: 620-5.

Finlay and Constantine Papanregopoulos. While their arguments varied, they shared sentiments of uncritical Greek nationalism. In regards to Manuel Komnenos's foreign policy, Papanregopoulos argues that the emperor's relationship with the crusader states weakened the Byzantine state and that coexistence between the Latins and the Greeks was impossible.⁴ Finlay regarded the reign of the Komneni, especially Manuel, as dangerous in that it allowed insidious Latin influences to corrupt the empire.⁵ Perhaps the most prolific historian of the period, Frédéric Chalandon, sums up the emperor's reign with the judgment that "the decline of the empire ... began with Manuel."⁶

It is worth noting that the veracity of Greek nationalism obscures that fact that Manuel did not have a viable alternative to collusion with the crusaders. Direct annexation would have been exceedingly expensive and dangerous. Byzantine possession of Jerusalem, for instance, would have soured cordial relations with the various atabegs of Syria. Manuel's alliance with the crusaders is indicative of the pragmatism of his imperial policy. Manuel sought to insulate his empire with friendly buffer states. Manuel hoped that the crusaders could keep his rivals on the eastern flank at bay. While the crusaders ultimately failed to do this, alliance with the crusaders was his best option. Manuel's position vis-à-vis the crusaders was noted by the papacy with approval and permitted Byzantium to remain at peace with the Aleppo and Damascus.

⁴ Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 15.

⁵ George Finlay, *A History of Greece from the Roman Conquest to the Present Time, B.C. 146 to A.D. 1864* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1877), 3: 145-58.

⁶ Ferdinand Chalandon, *Les Comnène: Études sur l'Empire byzantin aux XIe et XIIIe siècles, ii: Jean II Comnène (1118-43) et Manuel I Comnène (1143-80)* (New York: Burt Franklin Research and Source Works, 1971), 2:607.

Chalandon's assessment of Manuel's place in the Komneni revival remains the standard in Byzantine political historiography and has been cited by numerous historians of the twentieth century. French historian Louis Bréhier continues Chalandon's assessment: "The error of Manuel was that he believed that circumstances allowed for him to return the empire to its ancient power ... however his grand style of policy extended his forces so greatly that he could never achieve anything but partial and limited success."⁷ The Yugoslavian Byzantinist George Ostrogorsky concludes that the entire imperial program was unsound: "It was useless for him to triumph over the Latin states in the East to achieve brilliant successes in Hungary, and for a time even occupy extensive territory in Italy; to maintain his position in all these fields and to pursue an active and indeed an aggressive policy in European and Near Eastern spheres of influence was clearly impossible."⁸ The Russian historian A. A. Vasiliev argues that while the real decline of Byzantium began in 1025 with Basil II, "the first two Comneni, Alexius and John, succeeded in retarding the progress of the decline, but they failed to stop it. The erroneous policy of Manuel led the Empire again into the path of decline and this time into definite decadence."⁹

If the imperial policy of the empire was structurally unsound, then the battle of Myriokephalon in 1176 was the event that brought down the proverbial house of cards. Vasiliev suggests that it "definitely destroyed Byzantium's last hope of expelling the Turks

⁷ Louis Bréhier, *Le monde byzantin* (Paris: le Grand livre du mois, 1998), 1:328-9.

⁸ George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*. 2nd ed. Trans. Joan Hussey (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1969), 391.

⁹ A. A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire*. 2nd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1952), 2:432.

from Asia Minor.”¹⁰ Kugler declares that “the battle of Myriokephalon decided forever the destiny of the whole East.”¹¹ The great historian of the Crusades, Steven Runciman, provides a somber portrait of the military situation of Byzantium after the battle: “There were troops enough left to defend the frontiers and even win a few petty victories in the next three years. But nevermore would the Emperor be able to march into Syria and dictate his will at Antioch.”¹²

The past two decades have witnessed a change in perspective regarding both Manuel’s foreign policy and the implications of the battle of Myriokephalon. German historian R. J. Lilie began this trend by noting that the battle had limited direct consequences and that the greatest effect was a loss of prestige for the emperor. For Lilie, it was “questionable whether, apart from any gain in prestige, success at Myriokephalon would indeed have allowed Manuel to reach his objectives.”¹³ Prestige was an important component of medieval power mechanics and diplomacy and is essentially a testament of the power and honor of a political entity. An increase of Byzantine prestige made vassalage more attractive for minor powers, alliance more attractive for powers that were worthy, and conflict less so for Byzantium’s rivals. This was certainly an ideal worth fighting for in a medieval state in search of glory.

¹⁰ Ibid., 2:429.

¹¹ Bernhard Kugler, *Studien zur Geschichte des zweiten Kruuzzuges* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1973), 222.

¹² Steven Runciman, *The Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Frankish East 1100-1187*, Vol. 2, *A History of the Crusades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 413-4.

¹³ Ralph-Johannes Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States (1096-1204)*. Trans. J. C. Morris and Jean E. Ridings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 214-5.

Lilie also argues that Manuel was quite successful in his dealings with the Crusader states and used them to support his agenda. The Scottish historian Michael Angold states that, "The defeat at Myriokephalon therefore appears not to have been a major disaster. Almost nothing was lost and the Byzantines proved quite capable of meeting Turkish pressure on their Anatolian frontier." Angold argues that Manuel's policy did become increasingly unrealistic, but the "underlying concept was extremely perceptive." Manuel's failure was placing influence among the Latins above the immediate interests of his empire.¹⁴ The British historian Paul Magdalino further develops this trend by stating that Myriokephalon was not a defeat on the scale of Manzikert. In fact, Manuel failed to meet the generous conditions set down by Kiliç Arslan after the battle and destroyed the army that Arslan sent to enforce them. Manuel also managed to inflict a number of other stinging defeats on the Seljuks, leading several of these campaigns himself. Magdalino concludes by arguing that Manuel's foreign policy was complex and adaptive to political and military circumstances.¹⁵

However, the argument that Myriokephalon was an unmitigated disaster persists. The recent edition of Timothy Gregory's survey of Byzantine history states that "The Battle of Myriokephalon was a disaster on a level with that of Mantzikert a century earlier. Despite his earlier successes, Manuel's foreign policy completely disintegrated after 1176, especially in the face of obvious success of the Turks in Asia Minor." Gregory summarizes Manuel's rule: "In the end, Manuel's involvement in western affairs stretched the military

¹⁴ Michael Angold, *The Byzantine Empire: 1025-1204*. 2nd ed. (London: Longman Publishers, 1997), 224.

¹⁵ Magdalino, 98-9, 104-5.

and diplomatic resources of the empire beyond what they could bear and led to a weakening of the central state.”¹⁶

This is the context in which this work is placed. It continues the work of Angold and Magdalino but seeks to extend the argument against claims that Manuel’s imperial policy was unrealistic. Additionally, it seeks to continue the work of Lilie by arguing that the Anatolian expedition of the 1170s was the culmination of the Byzantine crusading ethic that Manuel used to solidify ties to the West. The setback Manuel experienced at Myriokephalon was rendered permanent only because of the emperor’s illness and subsequent death not long thereafter. Manuel I Komnenos was indeed shamelessly nepotistic, brutally autocratic, and a political opportunist, as many historians have argued. However, he was also a brave and cunning warrior emperor who fought his opponents skillfully with sword and diplomacy and brought renewed vigor and vision to a war machine created by his grandfather and father.

The chapters in this thesis are organized by decade and will detail the emperor’s foreign activity throughout his different spheres of influence. Chapter 1 addresses Manuel’s rise to power and his major trials of the 1140s. It focuses primarily on his handling of the Second Crusade, but also treats some minor engagements with the Armenians, Antioch, and Ikonion. Manuel was, in fact, at least partially responsible for the French failure in the Second Crusade; he intentionally torpedoed the expedition because the presence of Louis VII in Outremer represented a direct challenge to his authority, especially in Antioch. The Second Crusade represents a major development in the

¹⁶ Timothy Gregory, *A History of Byzantium* 2nd. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 307-8.

emperor's foreign policy. From 1147 until his death, Manuel Komnenos believed the West was a vital tool for the success of his empire. Manuel attempted to harness the power of the West by maintaining feudal ties to the Crusader states. If they recognized Manuel as their lord, the Crusaders would be obliged to provide support for his military campaigns. Additionally, they could expect Manuel to come to their aid if needed. While this was mutually beneficial to both parties, it was the Byzantines who stood to gain prestige from this arrangement.

Chapter 2 examines the 1150s, which were heavily influenced by Manuel's preoccupation with Italy. Because of the considerable resources that he devoted to creating a Byzantine protectorate in southern Italy and destabilizing Sicily, Manuel enacted a strategy of diplomatic containment everywhere else. The relative neglect of frontier zones such as Cilicia and Antioch eventually gave the Byzantines trouble, but the emperor was determined to see the Italian campaign to its end. The exception to this policy was in the Balkans where, because of its proximity, the emperor was obliged to settle any conflagration there immediately. This period is significant because Manuel experienced the first stings of failure and necessarily modified his strategy. After the death of Emperor Conrad, the German Empire under Frederic Barbarossa was decidedly cold in its dealings with Byzantium. This change in attitude, combined with Venetian intransigence and Byzantine blunders, resulted in the failure of the Italian campaign after the Battle of Brindisi in 1158. However, Manuel responded to this failure by adapting his foreign policy and sought to salvage resources previously spent. The emperor largely abandoned his goal of controlling Italy outright and instead sought to forge an alliance with Sicily to counter rising German influence.

Chapter 3 covers the period from 1160 until 1168, the pinnacle of the Komneni revival and the height of political activity. Freed of the heavy burden of Italian operations, Manuel was able to respond to any challenge to his authority within his sphere of influence. During this period, the emperor sought to maintain his prestige and authority in the face of challenges. The first such challenge came in the form of increased raiding from nomadic Turkomen raiders, *ghazi*, along the northern Anatolian littoral. A punitive expedition to Ikonion, in which Antiochene auxiliaries were used, trounced the Seljuks in 1162, forcing Kiliç Arslan to sue for peace and come to Manuel as a suppliant. Although the Seljuks remained a continuous thorn in Manuel's side, they accepted client status. The second punitive campaign was Manuel's expedition directed towards the Balkans, where the Hungarians continued to be a disruption. In 1167, at Sirmium, Manuel achieved his greatest victory. This expedition quieted the Hungarians for the rest of his reign.

Chapter 4 addresses the final period of Manuel I's reign and life, 1169-1180. For many historians, the value of Manuel's contributions to his empire is determined here. Shortly after his death, the Komneni political system collapsed, and all that he and his grandfather and father had worked for were largely erased. Rather than being "chancy ventures" that "were proof of how unrealistic his foreign policy was becoming", the Egyptian and Anatolian campaigns during this period were indicative of the considerable strength of the military and political machine created since Manzikert and provided an idea as to how Manuel envisioned reconquering territories that had been lost to Byzantium in the past.¹⁷

¹⁷ Angold, 225.

The first of these campaigns was the ill-fated adventure to Egypt in 1169. This was, in theory, a joint venture between Amalric of Jerusalem and the Byzantines for the dismantling of the ailing Fatimid Caliphate before the forces of Nur ad-Din were able to gain a foothold in the area. If they had been able to pull this off, it would have brought great prestige to Manuel and returned some of the most lucrative areas of Egypt's Mediterranean coast to Constantinople. However, Amalric appears to have resented Byzantine involvement and believed he could handle the situation himself. His actions sabotaged Manuel's plans, and Manuel can hardly be faulted for this failure.

In the mid-1170s, Manuel realized that he had given the Seljuks too much of a free hand in Anatolia for too long. Although nominally a client state for the past decade, Kiliç Arslan violated the terms of his agreement by attacking another group of Turks, the Danishmendids, without turning over the conquered lands to Manuel. Whether or not Manuel expected this to actually happen is a matter of debate, but it certainly gave the emperor a pretext for war. In this case, Manuel did not just plan a punitive raid but rather the complete subjugation of Arslan and the capture of his capital at Ikonion. He styled this campaign along the Western ideals of crusading. While a single campaign would not have been enough to erase a century of Seljuk migration into Anatolia, it would have increased Manuel's authority and prestige both in the east and west to unparalleled heights.

It is difficult to look at Manuel's failure at Myriokephalon and not assume that it is indicative of an entirely flawed strategy. Regardless of how much attention has been paid to this single engagement, however, Myriokephalon was a moderate setback. Ikonion did not, as some historians have argued, simply fail to follow up their great victory with further

conquests. Manuel took the opportunity away from them. Indeed, the Byzantine army inflicted a serious defeat on the Seljuks along the River Meander shortly afterwards. The strength of the Komneni military machine rendered Myriokephalon irrelevant. Had Manuel lived long enough to try again, or had the political system not collapsed after his death, another attempt to take Ikonion could have been made.

CHAPTER ONE: THE ASCENSION OF MANUEL I KOMNENOS AND HIS FIRST TRIALS

Manuel was clad in the purple mantle at a time when the empire was at a crossroads. His father John had nearly succeeded in wresting control of Antioch from the Crusaders, and Byzantine control of Anatolia was its strongest in decades. However, after Manuel came to power in 1143, the enemies of the empire rose to challenge Byzantium along every border. The first of these challengers was the recalcitrant Raymond of Antioch (1115-49). In 1144, Raymond demanded the cession of several towns and forts in Byzantine Cilicia. In 1146, Masud I (1116-56), the sultan of Rûm, embarked on a campaign of aggressive raids along his western and Cilician borders. In 1147, Manuel I contended with the arrival of the Second Crusade, which consisted of two vast armies, one under French King Louis VII (1137-80) and the other under German Emperor Conrad III (1138-52). Concurrently, Roger II (1095-1154) of Sicily took advantage of Manuel's preoccupation with the crusaders and launched a series of devastating attacks on Corfu, Thebes, and Corinth. In 1148, Manuel repulsed a Cuman raid in the heart of the empire and, in 1149, launched a punitive expedition against the Serbs. Manuel was exceptionally busy during the first decade of his reign.

This period is essentially a test of the will and capability of the new emperor. By the end of 1149, Manuel had passed the tests presented by his challengers. Also, he gained a reputation of being an active and capable general and began to develop his own imperial program. This program was quite different from his father's and grandfather's, but it kept with the Komneni tradition of pragmatism and far-sightedness.

Manuel and Raymond of Antioch: the vengeance of the Komneni

The Normans of southern Italy posed a serious threat to the Byzantine western frontier. In 1081, Alexios I was humiliated by Robert Guiscard, duke of Calabria and Apulia, at the battle of Dyrrhachium.¹⁸ The Normans were evicted from the Adriatic coast only with great difficulty. Robert's son, Bohemond I, illegally annexed Antioch during the First Crusade in 1098. The Treaty of Devol, signed in 1108, should have brought the matter to a close, as it stated that Antioch would return to Constantinople as a protectorate after Bohemond's death.¹⁹ Bohemond's nephew Tancred, however, failed to honor the conditions of the treaty and ruled in his uncle's place after 1111, much to the consternation of Alexios. Tancred even expanded the borders of Antioch at the expense of Byzantine Cilicia. The Komneni were not in a position to retaliate against the Normans in Outremer until the 1130s under John II. John humbled Raymond of Antioch in 1138 but could not attain complete victory because of the intervention of Joscelin II of Edessa. John planned to return to Outremer for a decisive campaign against all of the crusader states but died in 1143. Raymond viewed the death of John II and the advent of Manuel, seemingly pro-Western, as a fortuitous turn of events. Manuel would shatter Raymond's optimism.

Kinnamos states that one of Manuel's first actions after securing the throne was to punish Raymond for crimes against his father.²⁰ Choniates glosses over the Antioch expedition with a confused chronology, placing an expedition against Ikonion before the attack on Raymond. He agrees with Kinnamos that the expedition was punitive in nature

¹⁸ Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*. Trans. E. R. A. Sewter (London: Penguin Classics, 1969), 139-150.

¹⁹ Magdalino, 29.

²⁰ John Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*. Trans. Charles M. Brand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 35.

but concludes the event with Manuel simply shoring up his defense in Cilicia. Most likely, Choniates confuses the Antiochene expedition with an effort to fortify Bithynia (the region of Anatolia just across the Bosphorus from Constantinople).²¹

In 1144, Manuel sent a large force to attack Raymond on land and sea. The Antiochene hold on Cilicia withered in the face of a superior Byzantine force. Manuel's generals then won a series of dashing victories in Antioch. Kinnamos believes that "these disasters constrained Raymond to travel the road to Byzantium."²² However, he overlooks the fact that Raymond's journey to pay homage to Manuel and accept vassalage occurred just months after the crusader's disheartening loss of Edessa to the atabeg of Aleppo and Mosul, Zengi, in December of 1144. Raymond could not resist the growing menace to his east while making trouble for Byzantium.

Manuel may have wished to complete Raymond's humiliation and outright conquer Antioch or even push further south towards Jerusalem, but his current situation forbade it. Zengi was too powerful. Any protracted action in Outremer by Manuel would invite him to press his gains. The emperor achieved a two-fold victory in accepting the vassalage of Raymond. First, he avenged the tremendous insults of the Normans by forcing Raymond to approach him as a suppliant. Second, he intended to harness the power of the Normans and reap the benefits of prestige without the dangers associated with direct annexation. Furthermore, this was an ideal solution, as it brought matters in Outremer to a quick conclusion. Manuel answered a long standing affront to Byzantine honor and created a largely unified bloc in the face of Zengi's aggression.

²¹ Choniates, 31.

²² Kinnamos, 36.

Manuel rides against Ikonion

The Seljuks of Rûm posed a particular danger to the Byzantines because of their extensive frontier and a chronic Byzantine difficulty in adapting to Turkish warfare. While the Komneni managed to recover the Anatolian littoral and even a significant portion in the west, the Seljuks were still firmly in control of the interior of Anatolia. Masud I (1116-56) capitalized on Manuel's inability to adequately defend such a long frontier and conducted numerous raids. Additionally, frequent *ghazu* raids by nomadic Turks were becoming especially damaging, and Manuel sought to limit their effectiveness. After settling matters in Antioch, Manuel turned his attention to Ikonion.

In 1146, the emperor planned a punitive raid against the Seljuks. Kinnamos provides an exchange between Manuel and Masud in which the emperor politely addresses Masud and lists his grievances.²³ Manuel identifies the Seljuks' occupation of Prakana, frequent raids, and fighting the Danishmendids – a Byzantine ally in northeast Anatolia. The sultan responded by, in effect, daring Manuel to invade. In Kinnamos's account of the subsequent war, the emperor nearly single-handedly defeated the entire Seljuk force, and Masud scampered back to his capital in terror. At Ikonion, Masud was saved from Manuel's siege by the arrival of an allied force, whereupon Manuel was forced to retreat. Kinnamos provides a lengthy description of the Byzantine retreat and Manuel's personal bravery and prowess.²⁴ Choniates simply writes that Manuel charged off to Ikonion and, after reaching

²³ Ibid., 39-40.

²⁴ Ibid., 45-56.

the walls quite easily, simply turned around. On his return trip, he was ambushed a number of times and retreated to Constantinople with difficulty.²⁵

It appears that the emperor simply bungled the assault on Masud. However, Kinnamos provides some additional insight into the emperor's thinking at the time. Manuel had recently concluded marriage negotiations with the Germans and wedded Bertha of Sulzbach, the daughter of a German count. The new husband was keen to impress his Latin observers and envisioned himself a crusader champion. This attack on Masud was, in essence, a demonstration for the West. In regards to the emperor's action, Kinnamos cites the need to the emperor for personal glory: "The one army of Romans was already suffering difficulties around the camp, but the emperor, impelled by his youth, and having not long since wedded a wife, himself desired to achieve something in battle, according to their custom. For the Latin who has just taken a wife, not to appear noble brings no common disgrace."²⁶

Kinnamos continues by criticizing the efforts of the Byzantine soldiers who acted cowardly in the face of adversity.²⁷ When describing Manuel's conflict with the Seljuks, Kinnamos clearly portrays the emperor as a superior general leading an inferior, if not unwilling, army. According to Choniates, the emperor received word in the summer of 1146 that another crusader force was preparing to avenge the loss of Edessa.²⁸ Kinnamos does not introduce word of the Second Crusade until after the Seljuks sued for peace in the

²⁵ Choniates, 32.

²⁶ Kinnamos, 44.

²⁷ Ibid., 43-4, 50.

²⁸ Choniates, 36.

face of a massive campaign planned by the emperor.²⁹ It is unclear whether or not Manuel was aware of this before he retreated from the walls of Ikonion, but the potential arrival of a large crusading army would certainly explain the pace of his haphazard withdrawal. The crusaders of 1098-9 had been a dangerous and disruptive force that threatened the security of Byzantium. Manuel had to prepare the empire to deal with another such expedition of Franks. The confusion with the timeline notwithstanding, Manuel extracted his forces from Anatolia without loss to his prestige and also enhanced his own personal honor in the eyes of the West by establishing his role as an active crusader.³⁰ Perhaps most importantly, he ended hostilities with Masud quickly, allowing him to devote his attention to the threat to his west.

The Second Crusade

Manuel received word sometime in late 1146 or early 1147 that the massive host, later known as the Second Crusade, was bound for Outremer and that it would pass through his lands. In many ways, the First Crusade had been a nightmare for the Byzantines. The Norman crusaders raided imperial lands, established a network of Latin states in violation of oaths they swore to Emperor Alexios, and even dared to attack the walls of the great city itself. If there was any doubt in the emperor's mind as to the severity of the situation, his aunt Anna Komnene could remind him, for she was present for the First Crusade and wrote

²⁹ Kinnamos, 58.

³⁰ Magdalino, 42, 510. See Magnate "patrons" under Manuel named in verse collections. Specifically, Manganeios Prodromos No. 25.

about it extensively in her *Alexiad*.³¹ Manuel, like his grandfather, believed he could harness the power of the crusaders but would not allow them to disrupt his plans.

Both Choniates and Kinnamos agree that Manuel tirelessly worked to ensure that his empire was ready for the coming threat. One of his first acts was to respond to the French proclamation to join the crusade by reminding the French monarch that Byzantium was the only major power fighting on behalf of the crusader states. Additionally, the emperor was quick to exact oaths of friendly intentions from both the Germans, led by Conrad III, and the French, led by Louis VII.³² The Germans were the first to travel into Byzantine lands, but relations between them and the Byzantines disintegrated quickly and disastrously. Choniates states that there was no cause for ill will until opportunistic Byzantine merchants began cheating German troops. The Germans, in response, started raiding poorly defended Byzantine towns for supplies. The situation came to a crisis when a kinsman of Conrad was murdered by thieves in Adrianople. Manuel's general, Prosuch, contained this incident before it escalated further, but there was considerable ill will on both sides.³³ Kinnamos, by contrast, blamed the advent of hostilities on Germans who were pillaging the countryside.³⁴

The rapid arrival of an army of 20,000 Germans was problematic for Manuel.³⁵ He did not have the time to prepare the vast resources required to adequately provision such a large army. In theory, the German and Byzantine empires were allied through marriage.

³¹ Comnena, 333-369.

³² Kinnamos, 58-62; Choniates, 36-7.

³³ Choniates, 37-8.

³⁴ Kinnamos, 63.

³⁵ Runciman, *The Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Frankish East 1100-1187*, 259.

However, Conrad did not approach Constantinople as a friend. First, there is no evidence that Conrad established any arrangement with Manuel prior to his entry into Byzantine lands. This was a surprising affront to Byzantine imperial authority. If Manuel had sufficient warning of the German advance, he could have positioned troops along the route to safeguard and monitor the German march. Also, both Louis and Conrad considered themselves as heirs of Charlemagne and thus, the emperors of Rome – an honor claimed by Byzantine emperors since the late fifth century. Conrad's claim was more threatening as he was Pope Eugenius III's (1145-53) most trusted ally in northern Italy.³⁶ Conrad likely intended for the crusade to strengthen his position as the preeminent Christian monarch. In fact, after 1148, Conrad began referring to himself as the *rex Romanorum augustus*.³⁷

Kinnamos details the German emperor's continued arrogance and belligerent attitude after suffering several humiliating defeats by the Byzantines on the road to Constantinople. Conrad's nephew, Frederick Barbarossa, further enflamed matters by launching an attack on the capital itself. Prosuch, again, saved the day and inflicted substantial casualties upon the Germans. Once Conrad was humbled before the gates of Constantinople, he and his army were quickly ferried across the Bosphorus.

Kinnamos states that Manuel sent the commander of the Varangian Guard (*akolouthos*) to offer Conrad an alliance. This alliance would naturally serve to ensure that any lands conquered would return to Byzantine hands. Conrad rejected these terms and was left to his own devices. The Germans foolishly charged headlong into a Seljuk scouting

³⁶ Werner Ohnsorge, *Abendland und Byzanz* (Weimar: Darmstadt, 1958), 364-86.

³⁷ Rudolf Hiestand, "'Kaiser" Konrad III," *Deutsches Archiv*, no. 35 (1979): 82-126.

force and were subsequently obliterated in a protracted battle at Doryleum.³⁸ Choniates is decidedly angry at Manuel for the Byzantine treatment of the Germans:

The emperor's purpose was neither in doubt nor was it cast in the shadow of the curtain of falsehood; he minted debased silver coinage which he offered to the Italian troops to pay for their needs. In short, every ill the emperor himself had contrived was present, and he commanded others to inflict such harm so that these things should be indelible memories for posterity, deterrents against attacking the Romans. It also occurred to the Turks to act similarly against the Germans once Manuel had stirred them up with letters and incited them to make war.³⁹

The German army was indeed destroyed, but Choniates' assumption that Manuel bears the responsibility for its defeat is misguided. First, Conrad was not in the vicinity of Constantinople long enough for Byzantium to inflict any great harm to his army; he engaged, and was defeated by, the Seljuks under Mamplanes almost immediately after crossing the Bosphorus.⁴⁰ Second, the Seljuks did not need any incentive or pressure to attack a Christian force marauding through Anatolia. The critical blow to Choniates' credibility is the manner in which he describes the defeat of the German army. Choniates details a successful German attack on the Turks in Phrygia and then that asserts the Germans were slaughtered along the River Meander – the fate associated with the French later in 1147.⁴¹ Finally, the circumstances simply do not correlate with Choniates' analysis. The speed of the German advance caught the Byzantines off guard. Manuel believed the best strategy was to transport the Germans across the Bosphorus as quickly as possible to limit the dangers of their presence.

³⁸ Kinnamos, 64-8.

³⁹ Choniates, 39.

⁴⁰ Kinnamos, 68.

⁴¹ Choniates, 39, 377.

After the German defeat at Doryleum, Conrad and the remnants of his army joined the French contingent at Nicaea. Late in 1147, Conrad fell ill, whereupon Manuel invited him to come to Constantinople to recover. The emperor personally tended the ailing German monarch and kept him in luxury while Louis made his way to Outremer. Conrad was impressed by Manuel's charms and hospitality. When Conrad was well enough, Manuel provided him with ships and a suitable escort to make the journey to the Holy Land.⁴² Furthermore, the two emperors spent several months together at the end of 1148 where they planned an alliance against Roger of Sicily.

Additionally, Conrad pledged southern Italy to Manuel as a dowry for Manuel's bride, Bertha.⁴³ Such an alliance would have been impossible if Conrad felt betrayed in the slightest by Manuel. The German historian, Otto of Freising, leaves no hint of Byzantine treachery in his simple analysis of the Second Crusade: "although it was not good for the enlargement of boundaries or for the advantage of bodies, yet it was good for the salvation of many souls."⁴⁴ Manuel not only neutralized the German threat, but also secured an ally on his western flank.

The passage of the French crusaders under Louis was significantly smoother. Manuel was able to adequately provision the towns along the road to Constantinople to prevent any of the issues experienced during the German march. Louis was lavishly entertained in Constantinople. Even the decidedly hostile Odo of Deuil was impressed by

⁴² Odo of Deuil, *De profectione Ludovici VII in orientem*. Trans. and ed. by V. G. Berry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), 109; Otto of Freising, *The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa*. Trans. C. C. Mierow (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), 106.

⁴³ Kinnamos, 71-2; Otto of Freising, 54-5. The exact details of the Italian dowry are not known.

⁴⁴ Otto of Freising, 105-6.

Byzantine generosity.⁴⁵ Once the French were ferried across the Bosphorus, however, the happy arrangement began to crumble. Manuel offered Louis the same terms he gave Conrad – essentially a Byzantine led-alliance. The French deemed this proposal insulting and dismissed it as such.⁴⁶

The French were in a far better position to advance towards Outremer than the Germans. The army of approximately 15,000 was intact, and its commanders were united in Christian zeal.⁴⁷ Also, because of Byzantine logistical support, the French were well provisioned. Precisely because of the strength of Louis's army, Manuel had to compromise the success of its expedition. Why would Manuel risk his prestige in the west to bring harm, even indirectly, to his fellow Christians? The answer represents the pinnacle of Komneni pragmatism.

Manuel hoped, like his grandfather before him, that he could use the French force to strike indirectly against Ikonion. If Louis had accepted this tenet, it is likely that he would have found Manuel considerably more accommodating. A French strike against Masud would have been ideal. If he succeeded, he would have been obliged to continue the pilgrimage toward Outremer, leaving Manuel in a position to follow up with his own victories. A French failure would bring no harm to the empire. Unfortunately for both Manuel and Louis, the French monarch was far too pious to allow any distraction from his

⁴⁵ Odo of Deuil, 66-7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 97-9.

⁴⁷ Odo of Deuil, 23; John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: the Decline and Fall* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 94-5. Figures for the French contingent vary wildly. By all accounts, the fighting force was smaller than the German army but was burdened by a large number of noncombatants.

ultimate objective – the successful completion of his journey to the holy land. Louis was determined to follow the path of the First Crusade half a century prior.

The French obsession with the Levant troubled Manuel. If a Latin force succeeded in capturing Edessa, or any other province, it was possible, if not certain, that it would establish yet another crusader state. This would have frustrated Manuel's plans for hegemony in Outremer. A potential change in vassalage represented the most serious threat to Manuel's power in the Latin east. The emperor had just recently cemented his hold upon Antioch, and the fall of Edessa forced all of Outremer to look towards Constantinople for defense. If Louis VII accepted the homage of Raymond of Antioch or King Baldwin III of Jerusalem, Manuel would no longer be able to legally intervene in Outremer. Therefore, Manuel was obliged to prevent Louis from arriving in force no matter the cost.

In the beginning of 1148, the French and the remaining German crusaders departed from Ephesus on the western coast of the Anatolian peninsula. As they progressed further away from Constantinople, food became more and more scarce. Also, Turkish attacks became more frequent, culminating in a devastating attack at the Cadmos Mountains. The raid was repulsed, but the French sustained heavy casualties.⁴⁸ The extent of the French losses and the shortage of supplies induced Louis to leave the army and travel to Outremer by ship. His men were left to fend for themselves. Nearly half the crusader force fell to deprivation or Turkish arrows. The puny force that made it to Antioch in March of 1148

⁴⁸ Odo of Deuil, 107-11.

was but a shadow of the impressive French army.⁴⁹ Louis exacerbated his ineffectiveness by falling into internecine crusader politics and a particularly nasty incident involving his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine.⁵⁰ The Second Crusade ended in a blaze of folly when the combined forces of France, Jerusalem, Antioch, and Tripoli launched a fruitless assault upon Damascus. The attack not only failed but also served to push Damascus into a reluctant alliance with Mosul and Aleppo.

The French blamed Manuel for their failure. There are numerous charges of Byzantine treachery against the French. Louis VII himself states that the disaster was because of “the treachery of the Emperor and also our own fault.”⁵¹ Kinnamos suspiciously glosses over the French campaign in Anatolia. Choniates lambastes Manuel for his betrayal of the common Christian good, and portrays Louis VII in a distinctly positive light.⁵² Odo of Deuil is overtly hostile towards Manuel. Specifically, he accuses Manuel of not supplying the French with enough food, conspiring with his merchants to cheat the French, and not providing ample transportation to Outremer after the battle at Cadmos. His most serious charge is that Manuel allied with the Turks to fight his fellow Christians.⁵³

Steven Runciman notes that it would have been impossible for a medieval state to provision two large armies on such a short notice; the shortage of food caused a steep

⁴⁹ Ibid., 133-7.

⁵⁰ Runciman, *The Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Frankish East 1100-1187*, 278-9.

⁵¹ Ibid., 274.

⁵² Choniates, 40.

⁵³ Odo of Deuil, 109-11.

increase in prices.⁵⁴ Christopher Tyerman asserts that western expectations were inflated at the onset of the enterprise:

The amount of effective assistance Manuel could provide, especially on and beyond the frontier regions of western Asia Minor, would always fall short of the westerners' expectations raised by Manuel's own promises, the awesome scale of his capital, the excessive dress of imperial servants and the deliberately intimidating but gorgeous court ritual and entertainment.⁵⁵

It was unreasonable for Odo of Deuil to expect the Byzantines to transport an entire army to Outremer from the small port of Attaleia (on the south-west coast) to Outremer in the middle of winter. Manuel did, in fact, maintain a peaceful relationship with Masud after his retreat from Ikonion in 1146. He did not trust either Masud or the crusaders. He attempted to establish a framework that would have allowed the crusaders to continue their journey under Byzantine direction. The uninvited crusaders disrespected his authority and disturbed his lands. Moreover, the Normans of Sicily were making trouble in the Aegean. Once Manuel's offer of an alliance was rebuffed, he saw no reason to break his peace with Ikonion. Odo of Deuil likely exaggerates when he states that Byzantine troops fought alongside the Turks, but some sort of Byzantine-Turkish collusion was very likely. Manuel's handling of the crusaders was rather ingenious. He neutralized the threat without directly acting against them. Conrad promised to be a valuable ally after he was humiliated at Doryleum. Manuel had no use for Louis and abandoned him to his fate.

Manuel had sought to prevent the embarrassment of the First Crusade from recurring by offering the French and German leaders of the Second Crusade two options –

⁵⁴ Runciman, *The Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Frankish East 1100-1187*, 274.

⁵⁵ Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2006), 318.

succeed under Byzantine auspices or suffer an ignominious defeat without them. Louis VII and Conrad III were both far too proud to accept the former. Manuel understood that while the Latin forces marched with pride, they would likely not accept any Byzantine counsel. He hoped that, after they had been humiliated enough and experienced some privation on the Anatolian frontier, they would be more receptive to an alliance. Neither side took the bait. The Germans were woefully unprepared and lacked an adequate understanding of the current situation in Anatolia or Outremer to accomplish anything of merit. They proved incapable of succeeding under their own power. The unmitigated disaster of the French expedition and the failed siege of Damascus proved to the Franks of Outremer that Byzantium was the only force capable of ensuring their protection and any further success.

Manuel perceptively applied the lessons learned from the First Crusade to his predicament with the French and German monarchs. He understood how dangerous the crusading spirit was and how quickly it could take a decidedly anti-Greek turn. Kinnamos notes that the greatest success of the emperor during the crusade was keeping Louis and Conrad separate almost throughout the entirety of the campaign.⁵⁶ Some historians have argued that the failure of the Second Crusade forever soured relations between Byzantium and the West and gave future justification for the crusaders of 1204 to brutally sack Constantinople. However, this assertion is problematic. First, the West did not need any incentive for further hatred or distrust of Byzantium. Leaders in the French camp called for an attack on Constantinople well before any alleged Byzantine impropriety. One of these leaders, Godfrey of Langres, cited John II's expedition against Antioch as justification for

⁵⁶ Kinnamos, 71.

such an attack on the city.⁵⁷ The friendly ties and intermarriage between the French and the Normans of Sicily ensured that many French nobles were accustomed to despising Byzantium well before the Second Crusade.

Second, the result of the crusade did not dramatically alter western perceptions of Byzantium. Constantinople was still “arrogant in her wealth, treacherous in her practices, corrupt in her faith; just as she fears everyone on account of her wealth, she is dreaded by everyone because of her treachery and faithlessness.”⁵⁸ While Odo of Deuil’s hysterical critique of Byzantium was the accepted norm in the West, this did not make the events of 1204 a natural reaction of the Second Crusade. Indeed, Tyerman notes that while the fleet of the Fourth Crusade sailed with warlike intentions towards Constantinople, Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) expressly forbade any attack on Constantinople.⁵⁹ Thus, it is unlikely that the Second Crusade altered Western attitudes to an extent to make the 1204 sack of Constantinople more likely. The belligerents had cast a greedy and malicious eye toward the Golden City well before Louis VII fled Attaleia in ignominy. Innocent threatened excommunication against the errant crusaders because, regardless of any past Orthodox transgressions, Christian unity was more important. His failure to deter the Fourth Crusade from Constantinople was a victory of greed and hatred over reason.

⁵⁷ Tyerman, 323; Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Letters of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. Bruno Scott James, 2nd ed. (London: Stroud, 1998), no. 393.

⁵⁸ Odo of Deuil, 89.

⁵⁹ Tyerman, 510-11; Robert of Clari, *The Conquest of Constantinople*, trans. Edgar Holmes McNeal (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 40.

Roger II and the Sicilian raids

While Manuel was busy preparing for the arrival of the armies of the Second Crusade, Roger II of Sicily took the opportunity to plunder the Aegean. The coastal regions of the Balkans were never adequately defended against maritime raids, and Manuel's removal of troops to guard the road into Constantinople left the coastal regions more vulnerable than ever.⁶⁰ In the summer of 1147, Roger captured Corfu and raided Thebes and Corinth. To add further insult, he abducted several of the wealthiest families from Corinth and Thebes and offered to return them for outrageous ransoms. Choniates describes the severity of the situation:

[Manuel] sought the counsel of every expert in military tactics and every popular orator whose words fell thicker than snowflakes. Many proposals were made, but one plan appeared the best and was approved by the emperor: to wage war on the Sicilians on both land and sea, for the contest did not hold out high hopes or suggest brief encounters, but rather promised to be a mighty conflict like those which had exhausted the Roman emperors of old.⁶¹

Choniates is exaggerating, but Roger's attack exposed weaknesses in Manuel's coastal defenses. Furthermore, this was more than an opportunistic raid; Roger kept Corfu, which gave him control over the entrance of the Adriatic and a base from which to launch further raids in the Peloponnese. After the crusader threat ended, Manuel planned a punitive expedition against Roger. He completed his preparations in the spring of 1148. The emperor could boast a large land force and a navy that included a strong Venetian presence.⁶² However, the war did not progress as planned.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 75.

⁶¹ Choniates, 45.

⁶² Kinnamos, 76; Choniates, 46.

Shortly after setting out from Constantinople, Manuel received word of a Cuman raid into the empire from across the Danube. Barbarian raids from the north were among the most devastating events in Byzantine history. While this raid may not have been quite as deadly as the Patzinak or Bulgar raids of past centuries, it had to be contained lest it bring harm to the most populous and productive parts of the empire – Thrace and Macedonia. Manuel launched a dashing raid towards the Danube, where he shattered the Cuman force. Angold states that this diversion of Byzantine forces from their original aim “achieved very little,” but it was exactly what the emperor needed.⁶³ He quickly and efficiently secured his northern flank. Manuel was now able to continue the march towards the Adriatic. Unfortunately, his fleet did not join him until nearly the end of 1148, which prevented Manuel from crossing into Italy until the following year. In the meantime, the emperor sent a force to recover Corfu and its citadel at Kekylla.

The Byzantine timeline for the conquest of Sicily suffered a second blow when the Byzantine commander (*doux*) in charge of the siege of Kekylla was killed in battle. Manuel was forced to personally take charge of this affair, which was already taking longer than he had hoped. The emperor managed to subdue the citadel by starvation by the summer of 1149 and even quelled a Venetian riot with diplomacy alone. Although the Venetians greatly frustrated him, Manuel understood that operational prudence forbade him from taking any directly confrontational action.⁶⁴ After the surrender of Kekylla, Manuel sent his naval force to Avlona (an Adriatic port in modern Albania sixty miles from Bari) to prepare

⁶³ Angold, 201.

⁶⁴ Kinnamos, 79-80; Choniates, 50-1. The emperor may have also bribed the Venetian commander.

for the invasion of Italy. Again, however, events in the north diverted his attention from Italy.

The Balkan interlude

In the summer of 1149, Manuel launched a punitive campaign against Serbia. Many historians have questioned the wisdom of such a campaign when Manuel was clearly preoccupied with punishing Roger II of Sicily. There are two reasons for his new campaigns. First, Manuel stood more to lose in the Balkans if a challenge were left unanswered or, worse yet, if his enemies were able to successfully plunder the heartland of his empire. Roger II of Sicily doubtless annoyed him greatly, but he was not able to seriously damage the empire. Honor was satisfied when Manuel regained Corfu, and a subsequent Sicilian naval raiding force was obliterated when it attempted an attack on the suburbs of Constantinople.⁶⁵ Second, Manuel could count on the Germans to act as a check to Sicily: Roger had been able to attack Byzantine interests in the Aegean prior to the Second Crusade because the nature of the Byzantine-German alliance was still unclear. At that time, Conrad's attention had been towards the east. He was not concerned with Italian affairs. Thus, Roger's northern flank was secure. In 1149, Roger's circumstances were vastly different. Conrad and Manuel were allies, and Conrad had even pledged to support a campaign in southern Italy. It was unlikely that Sicily would move against Byzantium again with a potential German threat on its northern border.

⁶⁵ Kinnamos, 81-2.

Choniates states that the Serbs were “unduly emboldened” by the emperor’s difficulties in Corfu and began to raid Byzantine lands.⁶⁶ Kinnamos adds that the Serbs were allied with the Hungarians and the Germans, and that even the Turks under Yaghi-Basan joined with Ikonion to raid Anatolia.⁶⁷ This is likely an exaggeration, but it appears that the Serb *župan* was indeed supported by the Hungarians.⁶⁸ The emperor achieved a number of victories against the Serbs and subdued every major fort under the *župan*’s control. The main Serb force, however, withdrew into the mountain passes where Manuel was unable to dislodge it.

The 1140s in summary

When Manuel returned to Constantinople on Christmas Day in 1149, he received a glorious welcome from the city. The hero emperor was rewarded with lofty praise from the senate and the populace and was entertained by horse races and other spectacles.⁶⁹ The accolades were well deserved. He quelled every serious challenge to his authority. One of his most serious crises was the arrival of Conrad and Louis, who aspired to gain power in Outremer at Manuel’s expense. Their arrogance and their ignorance of Anatolian power relations caused them to self-destruct, saving Manuel the awkwardness of having to use force against them. Also, Manuel found an opportunity in Conrad’s misfortune. The exhausted German monarch acquiesced to Byzantine claims toward southern Italy and promised to fight against Roger of Sicily.

⁶⁶ Choniates, 53.

⁶⁷ Kinnamos, 82.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁶⁹ Choniates, 53.

Manuel's activity during this period can be described as containment actions. The Seljuks of Rûm began harassing Byzantine interests in Anatolia immediately after the death of John II in 1143. Manuel responded with a dashing campaign that was designed to impress both his new wife and Western onlookers. He wanted to be seen as an active combatant in the holy war against the barbarians and Christianity's finest general. Although he had to withdraw from Ikonion because of rumors of the coming crusade and Sicilian attacks in the Aegean, the expedition served its purpose, nonetheless. In a letter written to the pope, Manuel referred to his current campaign against the Seljuks and welcomed the coming crusade as reinforcements in the battle.⁷⁰

The Norman invasion from Sicily was more serious because imperial lands were taken. Also, it fanned the flames of hatred between the Komneni and the Normans, who had been at odds for over a century. The emperor personally led the siege to retake the citadel of Kekylla at Corfu and also led two punitive campaigns into the Balkans to secure his northern border.

Manuel's perceptive strategy enhanced the Byzantine position in Outremer, especially Syria. He also demonstrated to his enemies that he was just as capable, if not more so, than his father. Manuel secured the throne in an empire where succession was not always guaranteed and was extremely dangerous. Finally, he maintained progress in recovering the prestige as well as political and military power lost after Manzikert seven decades earlier.

⁷⁰ Franz J. Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches von 565-1453, ii: Regesten von 1025-1204* (Munich: Gerstenberg, 1976), 1349 (Aug. 1146).

CHAPTER TWO: THE ITALIAN ADVENTURE

Compared to the 1140s, the 1150s were a difficult decade for Manuel's imperial strategy. His primary goal was to punish Roger II and to regain the former Byzantine possessions that Roger's ancestors had captured in southern Italy during the eleventh century. If Conrad were to fulfill his promise to join such a campaign, success would seem assured. His efforts to reduce Sicily, however, were frustrated by the need to quell Hungarian unrest four times before 1156. Moreover, the political landscape of the Byzantine sphere of influence changed considerably. In 1152, Conrad died and was succeeded by Frederick Barbarossa (1152-90); the ascension of Barbarossa marks a period of steady deterioration in German-Byzantine relations. Then, in 1154, Manuel's arch-nemesis, Roger II, died and was succeeded by his son William I (1154-66). By 1155, the situation on the Byzantine western flank was secure enough to invade Italy. This campaign did not achieve its original goal, but Manuel displayed a remarkable ability to adapt to changing circumstances and was able to make the most of a less than ideal situation.

Manuel was aware that fighting protracted conflicts on two fronts was beyond the capability of his empire. Because of this, he was forced to accept temporary setbacks in the east while he was occupied in Italy. He attempted to contain the ambitions of the lords of Cilicia and Antioch through diplomacy but was unsuccessful. Once matters were settled in Italy in 1158, the emperor devoted his full attention to the east and achieved great success. Antioch was brought to heel permanently in 1159, and Manuel extended his influence into the kingdom of Jerusalem. His relations with the Seljuks of Rûm continued to warm and he was even able to call on the sultan for assistance, albeit with only moderate success. Cilicia

proved difficult to control permanently because of the dogged persistence and bellicose nature of the Armenians.

Hungary vies for power in the Balkans

The 1150s began with alarming news from the north. The Hungarians were attempting to spread their influence throughout the Balkans, but especially along the Dalmatian coast.⁷¹ The Hungarian king, Géza II (1141-62), directly challenged Manuel's authority in the region by supporting Serb resistance. This was further troubling, as it appears to have been a scheme by Roger II to force Manuel into a two-front war.⁷² Roger was certain Manuel would not dare to cross the Adriatic as long as his northern flank was not secure. Thus, he conspired with Géza to ensure Manuel's preoccupation in the north.

Manuel undertook an offensive against Hungary and Serbia in 1150. He succeeded in bringing Župan Uros II (1145-62) into submission and even received from him a contribution of two thousand soldiers for future military service.⁷³ Manuel also defeated the Hungarians, but they continued to resist. In the subsequent campaign next year, Manuel severely defeated Géza and brought him to terms.⁷⁴ The Hungarians were quiescent for the next few years until they were inspired to treachery by Manuel's cousin, Andronicus, who promised to hand over the fortresses of Belgrade and Braničevo.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Kinnamos, 84; Choniates, 53.

⁷² Magdalino, 54, 510. See Theodore Prodromos, ed. W. Hörander, *Theodoros Prodromos, historische Gedichte*, Wiener Byzantinische Studien, 11 (Vienna, 1974), No. 30. 194-204.

⁷³ Kinnamos, 90.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁷⁵ Kinnamos, 100-5; Choniates, 59.

Manuel discovered the plot sufficiently in advance to prepare for the attack, but the Hungarians would not be deterred. The invasion of 1155 was the most ambitious project the Hungarians ever dared. Géza conspired to break the Byzantine influence far to the north in Kiev and use his soon-to-be acquired fortresses on the Danube to raid Macedonia. Furious at the Hungarians' faithlessness, Manuel shattered the invasion force and followed this victory with another campaign in 1156, after which Géza accepted client status. The death of Roger in 1154, combined with the failure of their grand scheme to take the most important cities along the Danube in 1155, was enough to quell further Hungarian hostility.

Some of Manuel's critics claim that the fact that he had to fight the Hungarians in four campaigns between 1150 and 1155 demonstrates weakness in his strategy and command. To the contrary, it reveals his awareness of his strategic challenges. Manuel envisioned a rather quick victory against Sicily once the Germans entered the fray as Conrad promised in 1148. Thus, he needed to keep the bulk of his force prepared for a rapid deployment across the Adriatic. Any action in the north, by necessity, was limited to breaking Hungarian aggression to prevent the possibility of a two-front war while engaged with Roger.

The death of Emperor Conrad in 1152 threatened the plan for a joint offensive against Sicily. His successor, Frederick Barbarossa, was one of Conrad's most outspoken commanders in asserting his anti-Byzantine sentiment. Manuel, however, demonstrated his recognition of the need to maintain a strategic alliance with Germany by cultivating good relations with Frederick, who never broke definitively with Manuel. Fortunately, the death of Roger in 1154 removed the threat of a two-front war, as his successor William

chose not to become involved in Balkan affairs. Finally, Manuel was able to turn his attention towards Italy.

Italy, Germany, and Byzantium

The war against Sicily did not wait for Manuel to quell the conflicts in the Balkans. Byzantine and Sicilian navies fought each other with minor successes on both sides.⁷⁶ The imperial navy was trounced in 1154, but maritime victories were ultimately irrelevant unless they were followed by successes on land, which the Normans were unable to accomplish.⁷⁷ Roger's death presented a grand opportunity, and the emperor could not allow it to pass. However, he had to act very carefully lest he insult the honor of the Germans. Frederick was obliged to fulfill the oath made by Conrad of conducting an offensive against Sicily's possessions in southern Italy. Additionally, Conrad promised southern Italy to Constantinople during the marriage negotiations between Manuel and Bertha Sulzbach. A unilateral attack on Sicily by Byzantium would insult German pride by not allowing them sufficient time to fulfill their oath.

Manuel appears to have been successful in drawing Frederick Barbarossa into the field in 1154. Barbarossa invaded Lombardy with the intention of driving further south to punish Sicily. The Germans quickly subdued the major cities of northern Italy before proceeding to Rome, where Pope Adrian IV (1154-59) crowned Frederick the Holy Roman Emperor. Frederick left Rome in the summer of 1155, but disease and deprivation halted his advance against Sicily.⁷⁸ Byzantine officials arrived in Italy in time to see the German

⁷⁶ Kinnamos, 82, 95-6; Magdalino, 57, 510.

⁷⁷ Kinnamos, 96; Choniates, 56.

⁷⁸ Kinnamos, 106-7; Magdalino, 59.

army head north. It was not until Manuel was convinced that Germany was no longer interested in Italy that his forces crossed the Adriatic and began to plan an offensive.

The Byzantines were largely successful in their first forays into Italy. Manuel sent Michael Palaiologos and John Doukas, two of his highest ranking nobles (*sebastoi*) with large sums of money, originally intended to convince Barbarossa to renew his offensive against Sicily. The German emperor, however, was obliged to tend to affairs in his court, which were quickly deteriorating. Barbarossa was more interested in quelling the internecine civil wars within his empire than dealing with Sicily.⁷⁹ After they were rebuffed by the Germans, Palaiologos and Doukas were introduced to a disaffected nephew of the late Roger II, Robert of Bassonville. Bassonville, apparently, already had motives to revolt against William, so Byzantine money made him all the more willing.⁸⁰ Almost immediately afterwards, Palaiologos hired a sizable force of mercenaries, including Venetian lancers.⁸¹ He was able to acquire the town of Viesti by treaty while Doukas reduced a well-defended fortress, prompting the city of Flaviano to surrender. At the beginning of 1156, the Byzantines captured Bari and could claim control of the entire Apulia region.

The forces of Palaiologos and Doukas continued to win over towns and forts to their cause and soundly defeated a relief force under William of Sicily's chancellor. However, Byzantine fortunes changed after Palaiologos died in the spring, leaving Doukas in sole

⁷⁹ Otto of Freising, 158-162.

⁸⁰ Kinnamos, 107.

⁸¹ Choniates, 53.

command.⁸² Doukas continued the fight against William but was captured, along with reinforcements under Alexios Komnenos, in a defeat at Brindisi. Kinnamos clearly blames

Doukas and Komnenos:

To this end the folly of Komnenos and Doukas brought their earlier renown. So present-day men are: some survive entirely bereft of military science and bring affairs to ruin, others perchance know a part of military science but are wrong about the more important part. For strategy is an art, and one who practices it must be supple and cunning and know how to make a timely alteration at every turn of it. For there is a time when it is not shameful to flee, if occasion follows, and again to pursue relentlessly, each according to one's advantage; where success would seem more by cunning than by force, risking everything is to be deprecated.⁸³

His analysis is remarkably perceptive. The evidence is clear that the Byzantines continued the siege of Brindisi even while a very large Norman force was on its way.⁸⁴ The emperor, however, was quick to respond to this unfortunate turn of events. He dispatched Alexios Axouchos to Italy with enough money to raise another mercenary force, this time based further to the north in Ancona as a check to growing Venetian power and influence.⁸⁵

The conflict against Sicily came to an abrupt end in the spring of 1158 when Manuel and William declared peace. Kinnamos states that Axouchos came close to bringing the entirety of Italy under Byzantine sway, but Doukas and Komnenos, while in captivity, made promises to William that they were not authorized to make – forcing Manuel to accept peace when he was prepared to continue the fight.⁸⁶ This is highly unlikely, as Manuel would have been in no way obliged to accept any treaty negotiated by the captive

⁸² Kinnamos, 117; Choniates, 55.

⁸³ Kinnamos, 129-30.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁸⁶ Kinnamos, 132.

Byzantine commanders. In this instance, Choniates provides a better understanding of the situation:

Alexios [Axouchos], an energetic man expert in military science, with a tongue sharp as his mind and dignified in appearance, put his hands to the task of realizing the emperor's stratagems upon his arrival. He immediately set about to enlist troops so as to shake the king's resolve with such news; he collected a large cavalry force to give the impression he was preparing to invade Calabria.⁸⁷

Axouchos's mission was to ensure the best possible terms from William, and he accomplished this by bluffing a second invasion. But why would the Byzantines settle for peace now? The defeat at Brindisi was indeed an embarrassment, but it was not decisive. The bulk of the casualties were mercenaries that Axouchos had no difficulty in replacing. And why would William agree to peace after the Byzantines inspired almost all of southern Italy to rise up against him? To answer this, it is necessary to examine developments in the rest of the empire.

The relationship between Manuel and Barbarossa did not break with the Byzantine invasion of Apulia in 1155, as historians have suggested. Frederick was likely concerned with the breadth of Manuel's initial success, but there is little evidence of hostility. If Barbarossa was hostile to the Byzantine presence in Italy, it is doubtful that Palaiologos and Doukas would have initiated military operations.⁸⁸ In 1156, the German emperor did break off negotiations to marry Manuel's niece, Maria, but this was not because of any ill will towards Manuel – it was a necessary power move in the internal politics of the empire.

⁸⁷ Choniates, 56.

⁸⁸ Otto of Freising, 165-7. Otto conveniently describes the German emperor as surprised and disgusted at the treachery of the Greeks for taking the Italian towns, but chose not to punish them because of internal matters.

Barbarossa married Beatrice of Burgundy to obtain her vast inheritance. Manuel was nonetheless disappointed, but not alienated.⁸⁹

The issue that made good relations impossible between the two emperors was that both Manuel and Barbarossa considered themselves to be the emperors of Rome. While this appears minor, it was enough to make Manuel uneasy about the German alliance. After Barbarossa's coronation as the Holy Roman Empire in 1155, he increasingly saw himself as the successor to Constantine the Great and began to interfere in traditionally Byzantine spheres of influence. Barbarossa would address Manuel as the king of the Greeks, which doubtless bruised the imperial ego.⁹⁰ Barbarossa also began to foster a relationship with the Hungarian kingdom. He began to express displeasure with any Byzantine influence in northern Italy and made that fact clear to Axouchos when he moved against Axouchos at Ancona, located midway on the Italian Adriatic coast, in 1158.⁹¹ He was unsuccessful because Axouchos was firmly entrenched and enjoyed near universal support there, but the damage was done. Germany was becoming too powerful for Manuel's comfort. It is symbolic that Manuel's German wife, Bertha-Eirene, died at the end of 1159 – now there were no longer any formal ties between Byzantium and Germany.

After the death of Pope Adrian IV in 1159, Barbarossa intervened in the disputed papal elections, which prompted a schism that lasted nearly two decades. Although the Byzantine emperors had lost the right to nominate the successor to the throne of Saint Peter centuries earlier, for a German emperor to do so was a tremendous insult to imperial

⁸⁹ Magdalino, 62.

⁹⁰ Angold, 210.

⁹¹ Magdalino, 63, 510.

honor.⁹² It was the papal schism that gave Manuel the pretext to move against Germany. Barbarossa placed Victor IV in Rome, while nearly all of Christendom supported the claim of Alexander III. Manuel chose to back Alexander. This policy would define his relations with the west for the rest of his life. Peace with William of Sicily was necessary for both Sicily and Byzantium to curb the growing influence of Barbarossa. Additionally, matters in the east required Manuel's personal and undivided attention.

Before moving on, it is important to note that the peace with Sicily in 1158 was a dramatic realignment of Byzantine relations.⁹³ For decades, opposition to the Normans had been a staple of Komneni dealings in the west. Making peace with them was not a move Manuel made lightly, and he would not have made it unless he expected some sort of benefit. The year 1158 also marks a change in imperial strategy. It would have been nearly impossible for the Byzantines to directly occupy all of southern Italy. It was also useless for Manuel to capture town after town in Italy, or anywhere else on the frontier as his enemies would simply retake them after the army disbanded or departed. Thus, the emperor conspired to defeat his enemies by surrounding himself with friends. This policy typically cost considerably less than war did and did not entail the dangers of overexposing his forces. Friendship with Sicily gave Manuel security in the Aegean and an ally to use against Barbarossa. A successful alliance with Sicily, and later the crusader states, brought the empire most of the benefits of control without the dangers.

One of Manuel's most important diplomatic victories was the acquisition of Genoa as an ally. In 1155, a Byzantine agent secured an agreement with the city, which extended

⁹² Kinnamos, 173.

⁹³ Angold, 204.

trade rights to Genoese interests in the empire and gave Manuel another significant base of operations.⁹⁴ However, the alliance was not without difficulty. Genoa lay in a precarious situation. As a burgeoning power, it was unable to adequately defend against its rivals, specifically Venice and Pisa. Additionally, Genoa faced danger from the Normans of Sicily and the German empire. It is not surprising that both Pisa and Genoa refused to sign definitively with Byzantium for fear of retribution. Italian relations at this juncture were, at best, complicated. Genoa and Pisa were allied and indeed vassals of Byzantium. However, the two maritime trading powers chose to remain neutral in the conflict between Germany and Byzantium.⁹⁵

The situation became further convoluted as Germany sought to extend its influence into northern Italy. The maritime republics banded together to resist Germany, yet remained unwilling to commit to Byzantium in a military alliance for fear of upsetting the German emperor. While it may appear that Manuel simply failed to provide ample encouragement to bring Genoa and Pisa into a solid alliance, such an alliance was unlikely. The two city states were quite vulnerable and could not afford to break definitively with the Germans, even as they were fighting Barbarossa to maintain their independence. Manuel had to settle for a less-than-perfect relationship with the Italian maritime states. They were loyal to Byzantium, especially Genoa, and acted as an effective balance against Venetian power. The benefits of this arrangement allowed Manuel to break with Venice

⁹⁴ Gerald W. Day, "Manuel and the Genoese: A Reappraisal of Byzantine Commercial Policy in the Late Twelfth Century," *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 37, no. 2 (June, 1977): 289-301.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

during the 1160s and 1170s. They could not, however, risk fighting alongside Manuel against Sicily for fear of upsetting Barbarossa.⁹⁶

Frustration in the east

Byzantium was in an advantageous position in the aftermath of the Second Crusade. It was obvious that Manuel was the only viable candidate to be a benefactor for the crusader states, and he capitalized on this. Rather than taking a confrontational stance with the Franks as his father did, Manuel took great pains to display his magnanimity. In 1150, Manuel purchased the remnants of the county of Edessa from the wife of the captive Joscelin II. It is unlikely that Manuel seriously believed he could hold Edessa from Zengi's successor, Nur ad-Din (1146-74). In fact, the area was lost to him within a year.⁹⁷ However, the act further enhanced his legal claim to the region and demonstrated a general concern for the welfare of the Frankish states.⁹⁸

Manuel's next diplomatic move was an attempt to acquire Antioch by marriage. Raymond of Antioch had met his end in 1149 in battle against Zengi, leaving his widow Constance to care for the city and his child heir, Bohemond. The emperor dispatched John Roger to seek the hand of Constance. He was an ideal choice because he was a high-ranking official in the government, and his Norman lineage would make him appear less foreign than a Greek suitor.⁹⁹ Unfortunately, he was rebuffed by Constance because of his age.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*. Trans. E. A. Babcock and A. C. Krey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 2: 208-9.

⁹⁸ Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States (1096-1204)*, 165.

⁹⁹ Kinnamos, 96-7, 136.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 98. In fact, John Roger died shortly after returning to Constantinople.

However, the proposal was certainly worth the attempt. A successful marriage would essentially be a Byzantine annexation of Antioch.

The situation in Byzantine Cilicia deteriorated rapidly after the Second Crusade, prompting the emperor to send his wildly unreliable cousin, Andronicus, to assume command. An Armenian named Thoros (1145-69) had managed to capture nearly every major town in Cilicia.¹⁰¹ Kinnamos states that Andronicus seriously mismanaged the campaign: "And he would have speedily accomplished something noble and have gotten the rebel into his hands with great ease, except that he devoted himself to indolence and sports in his tent, and thus the Romans' affairs collapsed."¹⁰² Andronicus was relieved of command after his defeat at the hands of Thoros. Afterwards, Manuel inexplicably gave him a command in the Balkans, providing him with the opportunity to perpetrate treachery at a later date.¹⁰³

Manuel still thought that diplomacy could contain the situation. In 1153, he convinced the sultan of Rûm to attack Thoros. But Masud merely subdued him and did not obtain the release of Byzantine lands as Manuel had requested. The emperor made a similar overture to the new lord of Antioch, Reynald de Châtillon (1153-60), who attacked Thoros but, again, did not gain the release of the territories the emperor requested. In 1156, Reynald betrayed Manuel by allying with Thoros and conducting a devastating raid on Cyprus.¹⁰⁴ Manuel was furious. His policy of containment in the east had failed. After

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 96.

¹⁰² Ibid., 98.

¹⁰³ See page 32.

¹⁰⁴ Kinnamos, 136-7; William of Tyre, 2: 253-4.

the emperor concluded the Italian campaign, he sought to exact his vengeance upon both Thoros and Reynald.

Manuel gathered a large army and marched through Anatolia. He stopped briefly to attack the Turks to ensure they would not intervene. The emperor kept the movements of his army a secret, and Thoros and Reynald assumed that the emperor was conducting a protracted campaign against Ikonion – until Manuel appeared in Cilicia.¹⁰⁵ The emperor successfully captured Byzantine Cilicia in a short period. The presence of such a vast host attracted emissaries from all the crusader states and even from Nur ad-Din.¹⁰⁶ Both Reynald and Thoros made pitiable displays of penance and were forgiven by the emperor.

The emperor was, however, able to solidify his relationship with Jerusalem through marriage. The king of Jerusalem had two problems in the mid-1150s – he was exceptionally broke and did not have a wife to give him an heir. After lengthy discussions, Baldwin sent an envoy to Constantinople to ask for the hand of a Komneni daughter.¹⁰⁷ Manuel was happy to oblige. He sent his niece Theodora to Jerusalem along with an extravagant dowry and enough funds to pay for the celebrations.¹⁰⁸ The details of their alliance were not made public, but Baldwin probably promised to support Manuel in his effort to bring Reynald and Thoros to heel in exchange for Manuel not exerting direct control over Antioch. The treaty also ensured that the crusaders now had an ally to watch

¹⁰⁵ Kinnamos, 137.

¹⁰⁶ Kinnamos, 138-9; William of Tyre, 2: 275-80.

¹⁰⁷ William of Tyre, 2: 273-4.

¹⁰⁸ Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States (1096-1204)*, 175.

over them. Such security was desperately needed in light of the continued success of Nur ad-Din, who was ruler over Aleppo and Damascus.

It is in Manuel's dealings with Cilicia and Antioch that it is possible to see a new phase of Byzantine imperial strategy. His experiences in Italy had taught the emperor that direct control of contested areas of the frontier was difficult to maintain. Instead, Manuel sought to exert his influence through feudal dominion. This policy would be especially helpful in his dealings in the West because he would be seen as the protector of Christian interests. The prestige of receiving homage from other nations would be helpful in countering the influence of the German emperor and would also impress the Byzantine-supported claimant to the papacy. Thus, Manuel not only forgave the two obstinate figures but allowed them to keep their territories. Antioch became a Byzantine fief. Reynald was obliged to provide military support at Manuel's will and install an Orthodox patriarch. Manuel relieved Thoros of the Cilician plain but allowed him to keep the mountain passes and recognized him as ruler of Armenia.¹⁰⁹

The emperor spent the winter in Cilicia improving his defenses in the area lest Thoros forget his oaths. Early in 1159, Manuel made a triumphal procession through Antioch. Kinnamos details the splendor:

Then there met him the holy bishop of the city garbed in a priestly robe, with the whole order of priests. They held in their hands crosses, and bore the Holy Scriptures, so that the entire foreign and outland [populace] was astonished, observing in addition to these things Reynald and the notables of Antioch running on foot around the imperial horse, and Baldwin, a crowned man, parading a long way behind on horseback, but without insignia. The Antiochenes exhibited so much

¹⁰⁹ Kinnamos, 142; Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States (1096-1204)*, 179.

servility to him that, while he dwelt at Raynald's palace, none of those who had disputes had the case judged by compatriots, but by Romans.¹¹⁰

This spectacle was meant to impress all of Outremer – and it worked. Manuel spent the next few days with elegant festivities, rich banquets, and a tournament where he dazzled onlookers with personal displays of martial prowess. This was a demonstration of the power and wealth of the empire as well as a stunt to put Antiochene fears of a Byzantine takeover to rest.

Afterwards, Manuel and his crusader allies sallied against Nur ad-Din. However, before the expedition came to blows, an envoy of Nur ad-Din arrived, promising to release thousands of captives from the Second Crusade, including numerous notable persons. The emperor was satisfied with the arrangement and returned to Constantinople. He had demonstrated the might of the empire and achieved a humanitarian victory in the release of so many Christians. Nur ad-Din also promised to assist Byzantine interests in Anatolia against Ikonion.¹¹¹

There are hints in the sources that other factors were in play to encourage Manuel to end his stay in Outremer and return to his capital. Kinnamos states that the emperor considered breaking the treaty with Nur ad-Din and attacking Aleppo, but that “some rumors from the west, which reported that matters were in an uproar there, hindered him from the undertaking.”¹¹² It is unknown what “uproar” Kinnamos is referring to, but in light of Byzantine history, there certainly may well have been a conspiracy against Manuel in the capital. Manuel does seem to have been in a hurry to get back to Constantinople: he

¹¹⁰ Kinnamos, 142-3; Choniates, 61-3.

¹¹¹ Kinnamos, 144.

¹¹² Ibid., 144-5

failed to inform the Seljuks that he would pass through their territory, thereby provoking an unnecessary fight that led to casualties among his troops. Whether or not the attack on Aleppo was actually planned and then abandoned, Lillie points out that leaving Nur ad-Din in place served Manuel's interests better:

He knew very well that Byzantine influence in the crusader states could be maintained only if those states were under heavy pressure from outside. It was once more demonstrated that Frankish and Byzantine interests could not be the same. Why should Manuel put his army at risk by attacking Aleppo, possibly in vain? That would have been in the interest of the Franks but would have done nothing for Byzantium, rather the contrary.¹¹³

Manuel's treatment towards Ikonion is curious. He assembled one of the largest Byzantine armies to ever march into Anatolia, yet he chose not to use that army against the Seljuks. Why? A likely explanation for his disinterest is that the death of Masud I in 1156 changed the Seljuk political landscape. Turkish Asia Minor was no longer united under a single leader. Manuel believed he could take advantage of this fact diplomatically. If he played the various Seljuks potentates against each other, their power would diminish. Manuel would then be in a substantially more advantageous position to strike against Ikonion. This strategy of divide and conquer increases the value of Nur ad Din's pledge to support Byzantium against Ikonion. The Seljuks were surrounded by hostile powers and were obliged to seek favor with Manuel. Twenty years later, Manuel may have wished that he had destroyed Ikonion. However, at this juncture, Manuel believed that Ikonion could be contained with a mixture of diplomacy and force. This was less dangerous and less expensive than a fight to the death. The unannounced march of Byzantine forces through

¹¹³ Lillie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States (1096-1204)*, 182.

Seljuk territory was reckless; however, it gave Manuel the pretext to act against Ikonion later.

The 1150s in summary

Towards the end of 1159, Manuel was able to rest comfortably in his capital. He had met his objectives both in the west and east. In the west, Manuel began the decade with the prospect of a massive expedition against the Normans of Sicily. The wily Roger II, however, ensured that the Byzantines were distracted in the Balkans for some time. Ironically, the delay was fortunate for Manuel, as it gave the Germans ample time to fulfill the oath Conrad made in 1148 in the aftermath of the Second Crusade. It was fortuitous that the final subjugation of the Hungarians and Serbs in 1155 coincided with an abortive attempt by Conrad's successor, Frederick Barbarossa, to punish Sicily. Manuel was free to move against the Normans, now under William I, without insulting German honor.

The Byzantine campaign in Italy met with great success initially, but after the failure at Brindisi in 1156, Manuel largely abandoned his plans for direct control on the frontiers of the empire. The emperor felt that Byzantine interests were best served by surrounding the empire with a ring of friendly client states. The friendship formed with Sicily lasted over a decade and served as a formidable counterweight to German influence. The Serbs and Hungarians were silent after accepting client status in 1156 and even supplied soldiers for Manuel's march to Cilicia in 1158. Only the death of Géza II in the next decade prompted the end of this satisfactory arrangement.

Affairs in the east vexed the emperor while he was campaigning in Italy. However, he could not directly intervene because he was well aware that fighting a protracted

conflict on two fronts was beyond the resources of his empire. Indeed, the apparent rumors of conspiracy in Constantinople in 1159 demonstrate the danger of the emperor's campaigning so far away from the capital. Once he concluded the Italian expedition, he was able to put things in order rather quickly. With relatively little effort, he established a friendly and lasting relationship with Antioch and Jerusalem. He even developed a respectful relationship with Aleppo that would have been productive for the crusader states had Baldwin not attacked Nur ad-Din almost immediately after Manuel's withdrawal.¹¹⁴ The story of crusaders sabotaging the diplomatic successes of the emperor would be a feature of the rest of Manuel's reign. The only area of Byzantine influence that was left unsettled was in Ikonion, and this was largely the emperor's doing by rushing through Seljuk lands.

The difficulty with Byzantium not exerting direct control over the frontier regions is best illustrated by the summation of the Italian campaign by Choniates: "Such was the outcome of Emperor Manuel's struggles in Sicily and Calabria that the lavish and huge sums of money poured into them served no useful purpose to the Romans, nor did they bring lasting benefits to succeeding emperors."¹¹⁵ The benefits of an ally in Sicily as a counter to German power are difficult to accept as a suitable reward for the cost, as it produced no tangible effects. However, Manuel's policies were extremely perceptive in that he realized the limitations of his empire and how to maximize his influence with minimal risk. He understood that conquest invited only further troubles, and the empire already had enough of those.

¹¹⁴ William of Tyre, 2: 282.

¹¹⁵ Choniates, 58.

CHAPTER THREE: THE APOGEE OF THE KOMNENI REVIVAL

During the 1160s, Byzantium became stronger than it had been in over a century. The empire was insulated by a ring of mostly friendly client states, and the emperor was secure in the capital. In the east, Manuel continued to foster cordial relations amongst the crusaders and even cemented his claim to Antioch through a politically savvy marriage. In 1164, Nur ad-Din trounced the crusaders at the battle of Harim. Manuel dispatched a large force to deter him from taking Antioch. During Manuel's Anatolian campaigns, he was able to call upon Antioch and Armenia to supply auxiliaries that were quite helpful against the Seljuks. After he defeated the Seljuks, they accepted client status and remained on good terms with Constantinople although they never quite fulfilled their part of the alliance.

In the west, Manuel was obliged to campaign in the Balkans a number of times. In 1165, the situation was especially dangerous, as the Hungarians allied with Serbia, Germany, and the Russian principalities of Kiev and Gallich. However, Manuel systematically stripped Hungary of its allies and then destroyed its army. Hungary was broken and would never raise the sword against Manuel again. Indeed, after 1167 Hungary proved to be a most faithful ally.

Manuel engaged in his most ambitious foray with the Papacy. By 1167, there was a real possibility that the schism between Rome and Constantinople would come to an end and the pope would recognize the authority of a sole Roman emperor – Manuel. All his efforts in Italy were to ensure that this dream would become a reality.

Entente with Ikonion

The indefatigable Masud I died in 1156. He divided his empire among his son, Kiliç Arslan II (1156-92), and two of his sons-in-law, Yaghi-Basan and Dhū'l Nūn. Arslan, naturally, received the lion's share of the territory which included the capital at Ikonion.¹¹⁶ Manuel watched with satisfaction as the three heirs of Masud fought over their inheritances. The emperor sent letters to both Arslan and the stronger of the other two, Yaghi-Basan, and encouraged both of them to continue the fight and promised the support of the empire. Manuel was on good terms with both men until Arslan and Manuel came to blows after the latter's speedy withdrawal from northern Syria.

Late in 1159, the emperor prepared for a large assault on the Seljuks as well as the bands of marauding Turks that were becoming a serious nuisance to the Byzantines and the Seljuks alike.¹¹⁷ He ordered his governors in Asia to prepare for coordinated assaults along the frontier. Early in 1160, and again in 1161, Manuel personally led his forces to victory against the Seljuks. He rejected pleas from Seljuk ambassadors for peace and continued to raid Cappadocia and Bithynia (central and north-central Anatolia). The coup de grace came in 1161. Manuel gathered a sizable army that included auxiliaries from Serbia, Antioch and, Armenia. Additionally, he incited Yaghi-Basan and Arslan's brother, Shāhan-Shāh, to make war-like gestures to incite the fear in the sultan that his eastern flank was vulnerable.¹¹⁸ Arslan immediately made peace overtures, but Manuel did not respond. The Byzantine position in Anatolia was further strengthened when the Byzantine army of

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 66.

¹¹⁷ Kinnamos, 147-8; Choniates, 66.

¹¹⁸ Kinnamos, 151.

Cilicia, combined with the crusader auxiliaries from Antioch, was surprised by a large Seljuk force. In spite of the Seljuks' tactical advantage, the Turks were soundly defeated. Arslan begged Manuel for mercy and promised to be a most faithful vassal. The emperor accepted the terms and departed.¹¹⁹

The next spring, Arslan made a personal appearance in Constantinople to request the emperor's assistance against Yaghi-Basan. Both Kinnamos and Choniates describe amazing scenes of opulence whilst the emperor entertained Arslan.¹²⁰ The reduction of the Seljuks was an amazing opportunity, and the emperor was to make the most of it. Kinnamos notes that Arslan was chronically short of funds, and thus the demonstration was meant to show Arslan the benefits associated with friendship with the empire.¹²¹ Choniates aptly describes the emperor's intentions:

Receiving him graciously, the emperor heaped honors upon him so that he was gladdened at the lavishness of the hospitality. Manuel had high hopes of satisfactorily disposing of the issues in the East, thanks to the sultan's presence, and of charming the money-loving barbarian with gratifying entertainment, but he also believed that this circumstance would bring glory to the empire.¹²²

Choniates continues by stating that Arslan immediately violated the terms of the alliance. Arslan had agreed to return and capture to Manuel the town of Sebasteia, a former Byzantine possession, from Yaghi-Basan. Arslan captured it, but kept it rather than turning it over to Manuel. Even this brazen act did not break the new relationship established by Manuel and Arslan. Choniates states that the sultan conducted a number of raids against

¹¹⁹ Kinnamos, 152-3.

¹²⁰ Kinnamos, 156-8; Choniates, 67-8.

¹²¹ Kinnamos, 148.

¹²² Choniates, 67.

Byzantine lands after Arslan accepted client status. This claim is misleading, because the raids were conducted by nomadic bands of Turks that the sultan could not control. In fact, the marauders attacked the Seljuks as well. At best, the raiders could be contained. The emperor accomplished this by fortifying the frontier zones.¹²³ After Arslan departed Constantinople in 1162, the rulers maintained an exceptionally warm relationship. In fact, Manuel adopted Arslan as his own son, and the sultan addressed Manuel as father. This does not mean that relations between the two men were not strained, but the cozy relationship would have soured abruptly if Manuel had felt betrayed.

Arslan was not yet in a position to act in a directly hostile manner towards Manuel. Yaghi-Basan died in 1165 and the sultan was able to capitalize on this quickly: he annexed his domains and then stripped Dhū'l Nūn of his lands in 1168. Later, he exiled Shāhan-Shāh.¹²⁴ However, Arslan still faced a strong Byzantine presence to his west and south. The crusaders were firmly allied with Byzantium and could threaten him from the south-east. Perhaps most dangerous of all, Nur ad-Din dominated his eastern frontier and was quite hostile. In fact, the exiled Dhū'l Nūn and Shāhan-Shāh alternated between the courts of Manuel and Nur ad-Din, seeking support.¹²⁵

For many historians, Manuel made a grievous strategic error in not quashing the power of Kiliç Arslan. The emperor, however, was not in a condition to do that for several reasons. First, Balkan affairs after 1164 required Manuel's immediate attention. Byzantium remained incapable of fighting two extended conflicts simultaneously, so the

¹²³ Ibid., 85.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 66, 380.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 380-1.

emperor had to be content with Arslan's oath of friendship. Finally, Manuel, at this juncture, knew that Arslan could not act against him because he was completely surrounded by hostile nations allied to Constantinople. If Manuel pressed his gains against Arslan, then he would have risked destabilizing the Anatolian frontier when he was needed elsewhere. Choniates condemns the peace between Ikonion and Constantinople from the safety of hindsight.

The lord of Outremer

The Byzantine position in the crusader states was exceptionally strong. As Lilie states, "In Asia Minor the Empire had become the dominant power; in Syria the Emperor's will was law."¹²⁶ Manuel succeeded in strengthening his position everywhere except in Cilicia, where the Armenians successfully challenged Byzantine rule. By 1167, Manuel was in a position to dream of a large-scale coordinated effort with the crusader states.

One of Manuel's first acts was to find a new bride to replace Bertha-Eirene. Initially, the emperor left the decision to Baldwin of Jerusalem, who suggested Melisende of Tripoli.¹²⁷ However, circumstances provided Manuel with a unique opportunity. Nur ad-Din's forces captured Reynald of Antioch, leaving the city without a ruler. Manuel found it more advantageous to marry the princess of a city without a ruler rather than a sister to a living count.¹²⁸ Baldwin and Raymond II of Tripoli were upset, but there was little they could do.¹²⁹ Manuel married the beautiful Maria of Antioch in December of 1161, thereby

¹²⁶ Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States (1096-1204)*, 183.

¹²⁷ William of Tyre, 2: 287-90.

¹²⁸ Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States (1096-1204)*, 185.

¹²⁹ William of Tyre, 2: 291-2.

increasing his influence over Antioch. Manuel did not bother to ransom Reynald from Nur ad-Din, leaving him to suffer for seventeen years in captivity. Maria's mother, Constance ruled Antioch as regent.¹³⁰

In Cilicia, the news was not so pleasant. Since 1158, Manuel had allowed the Armenian prince Thoros II limited powers in Cilicia while sovereignty belonged to the Byzantine governor. In 1163, however, the governor treacherously murdered Thoros's brother Stephen. Thoros and his younger brother Mleh took swift and terrible vengeance on the Byzantine garrisons and towns of Cilicia.¹³¹ The crisis was contained when the new king of Jerusalem, Amalric, intervened. Manuel removed the governor and replaced him with Constantine Kalamanos with the goal of soothing Armenian rage.¹³² His work was cut short by a major invasion of northern Syria by Nur ad-Din.

In April of 1164, Nur ad-Din besieged the great fortress of Harim, on the route between Antioch and Aleppo. Kalamanos managed to persuade Thoros and Mleh to join the Byzantine army against their common foe. They linked up with the crusader forces and broke the siege. However, the coalition's forces lost their discipline and chased after Nur ad-Din's army. The Zengids then counter-attacked, slaughtering large numbers of the allied troops. Many of the nobles, including Kalamanos, Raymond of Tripoli, and Bohemond of Antioch were captured. Antioch was in serious danger, and only the timely intercession of the emperor's army saved the city. Additionally, Manuel secured the release of Kalamanos

¹³⁰ Kinnamos, 160.

¹³¹ Michael Syrus, *Chronique*. Ed. And Trans. J. -B. Chabot (Paris: Roger Pearse, 1906), 3: 349.

¹³² William of Tyre, 2: 306-7.

and Bohemond from captivity.¹³³ Manuel dispatched a large army to Antioch and evicted Nur ad-Din from western Syria.¹³⁴

The battle of Harim was a disaster. Outremer lost a significant number of knights and fighting men – exacerbating a shortage of manpower. Ibn al-Athīr reports that ten thousand crusaders fell in battle and the leaders of Tripoli, Antioch, and Edessa were captured.¹³⁵ Manuel, however, fulfilled his duty as a feudal lord and came to the rescue of his vassals. Additionally, he demonstrated his dominance in the Syrian littoral and an unwillingness to tolerate outside intervention. Nur ad-Din’s withdrawal in 1165 is indicative of the atabeg’s respect for Byzantine strength.

Byzantine control over Cilicia remained tenuous. In fact, after 1168, Byzantium effectively lost the region to Thoros after his cousin Andronicus mismanaged affairs there. Manuel did, however, strengthen his hand in Jerusalem. Baldwin III died in 1163 and was succeeded by Amalric, who sent an embassy to Constantinople to request the hand of a Komnene daughter just as his brother did nine years earlier. In 1167, Amalric married a niece of Manuel’s, the thirteen-year-old Maria.

Amalric reportedly made the same oaths as his brother did and renounced any right to dictate affairs in Antioch.¹³⁶ It is likely that Amalric and Manuel also discussed a possible expedition against the ailing Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt. Just four months after the

¹³³ Kinnamos, 164; William of Tyre, 2: 306-10. William of Tyre is conspicuously silent regarding Byzantine assistance in the matter.

¹³⁴ Kinnamos, 172.

¹³⁵ Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades Through the Arab Eyes*. Trans. Jon Rothschild (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), 163.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

wedding celebrations, Byzantine diplomats were in Jerusalem discussing terms for Byzantine involvement in the affair.¹³⁷

By 1168, the Byzantine position in Outremer was at its highest since the early eleventh century under Basil II. Manuel saved the crusader states from almost certain doom after the appalling loss at Harim in 1164, which served to increase his prestige in the West and reinforced his authority in Outremer. The Frankish East was more or less secure as long as Manuel could prevent any further incursions across the frontier with Nur ad-Din. The only viable area for activity was Egypt, which was eyed greedily by all the eastern powers.

The pacification of the Balkans

Byzantine strategy in the Balkans during the 1160s was complicated by the death of Géza II in 1162. Before his death, the king nominated his son as his successor in violation of Hungarian law, which demanded that the throne pass to the eldest brother.¹³⁸ Both of Géza's brothers had fled to Constantinople years earlier, and one of them, Stephen, married into the Komneni household. Naturally, Manuel supported the claim of Stephen so that he could install a puppet of the Hungarian throne. However, the Hungarians rejected him outright to prevent an indirect rule from Constantinople.¹³⁹

Manuel led an army to the Danube in support of Stephen's candidacy, forcing Géza's son, Stephen III (1162-72), to abdicate. The Hungarians still rejected the elder Stephen and instead chose Géza's younger brother, Lazlo, as the king. However, Lazlo's early death in

¹³⁷ Kinnamos, 208; Choniates, 91; William of Tyre, 2: 345-8.

¹³⁸ Kinnamos, 154-5.

¹³⁹ Choniates, 72.

1163 prompted a return of Stephen III.¹⁴⁰ Manuel recognized that the elder Stephen would likely never acquire the throne and thus switched his support to Géza's youngest son, Béla. In 1164, Stephen III signed a treaty with Manuel, which recognized Béla as the heir to the Hungarian crown in exchange for his gesture. Béla was widely popular amongst the Hungarians and thus was an ideal candidate to take the throne after Stephen III. Additionally, Stephen gave Béla Dalmatia and Croatia as an appanage and allowed the emperor to raise him as a son in Constantinople.¹⁴¹ The emperor married him to his daughter in 1164. Béla would prove useful to him in later years.

In the meantime, Stephen gathered an alliance to fight against Byzantium. He hoped a decisive victory against Manuel would allow him to name his own son as heir in violation of the recent treaty. He conspired with Germany for support and had already won over the Serbs, the Russian principalities of Gallich and Kiev, and even the Czech king. For the moment, the situation in the Balkans was critical. Some minor military engagements accomplished nothing for either side. The elder Stephen continued to press his claims to the throne but ran out of time and friends. Early in 1165, he was poisoned by an aide, and his base, a Byzantine fortress, at Zevgminon on the Danube fell to King Stephen. Manuel declared war to avenge the murder and recover his important fortress.¹⁴²

Manuel successfully stripped Stephen of his Russian support by diplomacy late in 1164. The emperor then moved against Stephen's Serb allies and brought the entire Dalmatian coast under his dominion. The Serbian *župan*, Desa, swore to uphold his

¹⁴⁰ Choniates, 73, 380.

¹⁴¹ Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, 387-8.

¹⁴² Choniates, 73.

previous oaths and become a faithful vassal. However, Manuel sent him to Constantinople to spend the rest of his days in captivity.¹⁴³ German support eroded as Barbarossa devoted more of his attention to his Italian possessions. Manuel was now free to do as he wished in Hungary. In 1165, Manuel recaptured all the forts along the Danube lost to the Hungarians earlier.

Stephen begged for peace after the loss of Zevgminon and promised not to cross the Danube again. Manuel accepted Stephen's peace overtures but remained vigilant. Stephen attempted to reclaim several forts on the Danube in 1166, but was repulsed. In response, Manuel launched a large assault that devastated Stephen's lands. Stephen made a successful counter-attack, prompting a grand Byzantine campaign in 1167. Manuel launched a three-pronged attack and achieved a tremendous victory over a large Hungarian force under Dionysius at Sirmium.¹⁴⁴

Hungary was humiliated in the subsequent treaty. The Hungarian king was considered an appointee of the emperor, the Hungarian church was brought under the dominion of Constantinople, and Manuel claimed all of Dalmatia and the Danube.¹⁴⁵ Serbia needed an additional reminder to maintain positive behavior in 1168, but the Balkans remained quiescent for the rest of Manuel's reign. The subjugation of Hungary was Manuel's greatest victory, militarily and politically.

¹⁴³ Kinnamos, 162.

¹⁴⁴ Kinnamos, 208; Choniates, 89.

¹⁴⁵ Michael "Anchialos", "A New Source on Byzantine-Hungarian Relations in the Twelfth Century: the Inaugural Lecture of Michael Β τον Ἀγχιάλον as ὑπατος τῶν φιλοσόφων" Ed. Robert Browning. *Balkan Studies*, no. 2 (1961): 173-214.

Manuel was determined to capitalize on the circumstances resulting from the death of Géza II in 1162. Géza's choice to nominate his son as heir had created a chaotic political atmosphere where several men now had a legitimate claim to the Hungarian throne. Manuel exacerbated this chaos by supporting a rival claimant. He hoped that the low-key strategy of supporting the elder Stephen would pay off. When this failed, he systematically isolated King Stephen and destroyed him. Additionally, he adopted Stephen's younger brother, Béla, for use in his long-term strategy. After Sirmium, both Hungary and Serbia ceased to pose a threat to Byzantine interests. Indeed, Hungary under Stephen became a dutiful vassal. This was especially true after Stephen's death in 1172, when the Hungarian nobility requested the emperor to send Béla to them as king.

Manuel and Barbarossa vie for Italy

During the early 1160s, Pope Alexander III (1159-81) sent an embassy to Manuel requesting aid against the German Empire. Alexander was struggling in his bid to hold the papacy against the German-supported anti-pope, Victor IV. In 1162, Alexander was forced to flee Rome after he was briefly arrested by supporters of Victor IV. Desperate, Alexander sought a new ally in Byzantium. The embattled pope promised Manuel "the vanities of vanities, which he had not expected."¹⁴⁶ Alexander's letter piqued Manuel's interest.

To understand what this could have meant to Manuel, it is necessary to briefly describe the schism between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. There were theological issues that divided the two churches, including the metaphysical nature of Christ, the role

¹⁴⁶ F. Güterbock, "Le lettere del notario imperiale Burcardo intorno all'ay politica del Barbarossa nello scisma ed alla distruzione di Milano," *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo*, no. 11 (1949): 57.

of the Holy Trinity, and the Eucharist. Politically and ecclesiastically, the question of the primacy of Rome, the universal authority of the pope, and the role of the emperor in the church caused a further rift between Rome and Constantinople. These were difficult issues to contend with – some still exist today.

Manuel's negotiations with the papacy represent one of the most serious components in the charge that Byzantine imperial policy was beyond the capability of his empire. Worse yet, many historians view Manuel's policy in the West as pernicious to Byzantine interests. However, Manuel needed to limit the growing power of Barbarossa. Kinnamos states that there were serious concerns of a German invasion of Byzantium: "Therefore the emperor Manuel himself became concerned as to how he could check his advance, lest his unexpected success should turn against the Romans' land, at which from a long time back he had cast a greedy eye."¹⁴⁷ This was especially troubling given the diplomatic overtures between the Germans and Hungarians. If Manuel could create enough trouble for Frederick on his Italian frontier, it would relieve the pressure on the Byzantine northwestern frontier.

To this end, the emperor devoted considerable resources to curbing German expansion in Italy. He continued the diplomatic exchanges with the papacy.¹⁴⁸ He also created a vast array of allies in the west to counter the influence of Barbarossa. Manuel continued his alliance with Sicily after the death of William I in 1166 and offered his

¹⁴⁷ Kinnamos, 172

¹⁴⁸ Angold, 212.

successor, William II, the hand of his daughter Maria.¹⁴⁹ In 1162, when the great city of Milan fell to Barbarossa, Manuel dispatched several agents to shore up the defenses of the other Italian city-states. Byzantine agents created and funded a defensive pact of northern Italian city-states later known as the League of Verona. Choniates states that, "There were no cities in Italy or even in more distant regions where the emperor did not have someone sworn to be faithful to his cause. Indeed, these men reported to the emperor whatever mischief and intrigue the enemies of the Romans contrived behind closed doors."¹⁵⁰

The fall of Milan had induced Alexander to flee Italy for the safety of France, whereupon Barbarossa installed his pretender, Paschal III (1164-68), who crowned Barbarossa as the emperor of Rome.¹⁵¹ The papacy was in serious trouble. To all appearances, an agreement between Manuel and Alexander seemed feasible. Manuel was willing to acquiesce to Alexander in almost all of the politically dividing issues. He interpreted the Donation of Constantine, the document that supposedly transferred Roman imperial authority to the papacy, in a manner that accepted the spiritual supremacy of Rome and maintained the imperial seat in Constantinople.¹⁵² The pope would gain dominion over the eastern churches and Manuel could claim hegemony over the Italian city-states.

¹⁴⁹ Choniates, 97. The same Maria recently married to Béla of Hungary. Manuel's new wife, also Maria, bore the emperor a son in 1168~9, which limited Béla's usefulness as an heir. Therefore, the emperor had the marriage annulled so that his daughter could be used for a more advantageous alliance.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 114.

¹⁵¹ Kinnamos, 172, 254.

¹⁵² J. Darrouzès, "Les documents byzantins du XIIe siècle sur la primauté romaine", *Revue des études byzantines*, no. 23 (1956): 76.

However, in 1167, the negotiations stalled. Both the Latin and Greek sources are in agreement that the negotiations did not produce an alliance because the Pope did not fulfill his side of the bargain. Specifically, Kinnamos claims that an agreement was not reached because Alexander believed that it was impossible to separate the imperial and religious nature of Rome.¹⁵³

A more likely reason was that Alexander no longer needed Manuel's support. In the summer of 1167, Barbarossa's army was ravaged by disease and forced to withdraw from the Italian frontier.¹⁵⁴ If Manuel was successful in the east because Nur ad-Din kept the crusaders in fear, he failed in the west because he was unable to take advantage of Barbarossa's threat before it receded. However, the opportunity was too great not to try. A union with Rome would have been a strong check to the expansion of Barbarossa's power in Italy. Manuel envisioned himself as a feudal overlord of the Italian provinces. They would swear fealty to him for assured protection against the Germans, and papal blessings would legitimize the Byzantine presence.

The potential alliance with Alexander was important enough for the emperor to personally intervene in a doctrinal controversy during this period. He ensured that the resolution of the controversy gave the impression that the Byzantines were not overtly hostile to Catholic ideology.¹⁵⁵ All of Manuel's diplomatic guile was utilized in order to bring this alliance to fruition. The recognition of Byzantium as the sole legitimate Christian

¹⁵³ Kinnamos, 197. For the Latin interpretation, Cardinal Boso, *Life of Alexander III*. Trans. G. M. Elis. (Chicago: Blackwell Publishers, 1973), 415-20; Antoine Dondaine, "Huges Ethérien et Léon Toscan", *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age*, 19 (1952), 126-29.

¹⁵⁴ Magdalino, 84.

¹⁵⁵ Kinnamos, 189-93.

empire would have brought boundless prestige and influence to Manuel. Additionally, a strong alliance consisting of the northern Italian city-states, the papacy, and Byzantium would have effectively ended German expansion across the Alps.

1160-1168 in summary

By the end of 1168, the Byzantine Empire had made considerable progress in reversing the disaster of Manzikert, which had occurred just a century earlier. Manuel was the undisputed master of Outremer. Komnene daughters were married to the rulers of Antioch and Jerusalem. Antioch was essentially a fief of the empire, regardless of any blustering of its prince. Manuel's authority was challenged only in Cilicia, and this occurred because of several diplomatic blunders which had greatly angered the Armenians. Manuel would later regain the Cilician plain, but the Armenian kingdom was quite hostile to Byzantine interests for the foreseeable future.

Manuel had pacified the Seljuks at Ikonion. The emperor won a number of significant victories against the sultan early in the decade, forcing him to accept vassalage. For several years thereafter, Kiliç Arslan played the role of a faithful client. He supplied troops for Byzantine campaigns in 1166 and 1167 and routinely attacked marauding Turkoman hordes. Arslan was encouraged to maintain friendly relations with Manuel by the presence of Byzantine allies along his frontiers. As long as the sultan was surrounded by powerful foes, the emperor could be assured of his correct conduct.

Byzantium permanently defeated the Hungarians with the glorious victory at Sirmium in 1167. Manuel had a unique opportunity to control the Hungarian throne after the death of Géza. The emperor was unable to do this peacefully and created a much bigger

problem in the process. The young Hungarian king was able to create a sizable coalition to combat Byzantium. However, Manuel skillfully dismantled Stephen's diplomatic apparatus and destroyed Hungarian power. Additionally, he broke Serb resistance and permanently gained control of the Balkans up to the Danube and westward to Dalmatia. The extent of the Byzantine victory in 1167 cannot be overstated. The guarantee of the empire's northern border gave Manuel the luxury of planning larger expeditions, such as his Egyptian campaign of 1169.

The emperor's final activity during this period was his diplomatic maneuvering with the papacy and the Italian cities in opposition to Barbarossa. Manuel was largely successful in this area because he did safeguard Italy against the Germans. The League of Verona was bankrolled almost exclusively by Manuel and would have collapsed without his support. Indeed, it was Byzantine funds that helped to rebuild Milan after it was sacked in 1162.¹⁵⁶ Angold correctly states that "support throughout Italy was necessary if negotiations with the papacy over the imperial office were to have any chance of success."¹⁵⁷ By 1169, Byzantine influence was exceptionally strong throughout Italy. While Manuel was unsuccessful in wooing Alexander III, he would continue the attempt into the next decade. This political setback notwithstanding, Alexander was obliged to maintain his cordial relationship with Manuel. Barbarossa had left Italy, but would soon return. The emperor's grand efforts and his persistence are indicative of the perceived rich rewards if he were successful, and Manuel clearly thought it was possible.

¹⁵⁶ Choniates, 113.

¹⁵⁷ Angold, 213.

CHAPTER FOUR: FAILURE AND THE END OF THE KOMNENI REVIVAL

During the final eleven years of Manuel's reign, the emperor experienced three major setbacks: the abject failure of the Egyptian campaign, his defeat at Myriokephalon, and the collapse of his political intrigue in the west. Historians are often critical of Manuel for his handling or even involvement in these affairs. However, these activities were not only indicative of a perceptive imperial strategy, but were also essential to continued Byzantine success in the applicable spheres of influence. By 1169, the Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt was severely weakened. It was merely a determination of who would acquire the caliphate's vast wealth. Thus, Manuel conspired with King Amalric of Jerusalem (1163-74) not only to acquire a portion of this area, but also to deny access to Nur ad-Din.

By 1174, it was clear that the peaceful coexistence between Manuel and Kiliç Arslan of Ikonion was no longer possible. Manuel fortified the frontier zones and moved against the recalcitrant sultan. However, he was soundly defeated and forced to come to terms with the sultan. According to his contemporaries, this defeat drained the emperor of his spirit, and Manuel sank into a depression that slowly ended his life.

Manuel continued his political machinations in Italy. It appeared that the Byzantine interests were at an impasse: Manuel could seek an alliance with either the papacy or with Germany. Alexander had demonstrated an unwillingness to formalize relations with Constantinople, but the prospect of a Byzantine-papal alliance was enough to induce the Germans to talk peace. Thus, Henry the Lion of Saxony, one of Barbarossa's most trusted men, personally negotiated a truce between the two emperors. However, Frederick

Barbarossa outmaneuvered Manuel and worked to remove Byzantine influence from the Italian scene.

The Egyptian campaign

Steven Runciman perceptively states that the “existence of the Latin states depended...on disunion amongst their Moslem neighbors. Moslem Syria was now united: but so long as Egypt was at enmity with Nur ad-Din, the situation was not desperate.”¹⁵⁸ During the 1150s, the Fatimid Caliphate of Egypt was wracked by a series of assassinations and coups d'état that severely weakened the grip of the central government. In 1163, the new king of Jerusalem made the conquest of Egypt his primary goal. He invaded Egypt under the pretext of the Egyptians not paying the yearly tribute of 160,000 dinars promised to Baldwin III in 1160.¹⁵⁹ Amalric was forced to withdraw when Nur ad-Din launched a major invasion of northern Syria in his absence.

The situation was further complicated when Shawar, the ex-vizier, escaped Egypt and appeared in Nur ad-Din's court. He promised to pay for the army's expenses if Nur ad-Din would send an army to Cairo to help him reclaim power.¹⁶⁰ Nur ad-Din hesitantly obliged and sent Shirkuh to Egypt. After Shawar was restored to power in May of 1164, he forsook his promise to Nur ad-Din and demanded that Shirkuh return to Syria. When Shirkuh refused, Shawar dispatched emissaries to Amalric to seek his help in evicting Nur ad-Din's general from his base at Bilbeis. Amalric invaded Egypt and came close to capturing Bilbeis and Shirkuh. However, the disaster at Harim forced him to hasten to

¹⁵⁸ Runciman, *The Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Frankish East 1100-1187*, 365.

¹⁵⁹ William of Tyre, 2: 302.

¹⁶⁰ Maalouf, 161-2.

Syria and allow Shirkuh to return to Nur-ad Din. The Frankish and Syrian armies marched along parallel routes from Egypt.

For the next several years, Amalric had to repulse several raids from both Nur ad-Din and Shirkuh. In 1167, Shirkuh obtained permission to launch another invasion of Egypt. Shirkuh even convinced the caliph in Baghdad to declare jihad against the heretical Shia caliphate.¹⁶¹ Shawar immediately called upon Amalric for assistance. Shirkuh and Amalric again fought each other to a standstill. Amalric likely could have pressed further against Shirkuh, but he was nervous about the safety of his realm in his absence. In August of 1167, both the Syrian and Frankish armies left Egypt. For Amalric, it was now clear that he would need outside assistance to conquer Egypt.

In 1168, Amalric concluded negotiations with the Byzantines for a joint venture against Egypt. The exact details of these negotiations are unknown, but it is clear that there would be some sort of sharing of the spoils.¹⁶² Before Byzantine assistance arrived, however, Amalric was obliged by the Knights Hospitaller and his barons to launch an immediate assault lest Egypt fall to Nur ad-Din. Amalric invaded Egypt in October of 1168. The expedition came very close to capturing Cairo; however, indiscriminate Frankish violence ruined the opportunity. Not only did Amalric lose the element of surprise, but he unified Egypt against the Franks by slaughtering many Copts and Muslims in Bilbeis. Ibn al-Athīr notes that “if the Franj had acted differently in Bilbays, they could have taken Cairo

¹⁶¹ William of Tyre, 2: 313; Maalouf, 165-6. Nur ad-Din was deeply religious. Shirkuh’s success in gaining the declaration of jihad against Egypt was a tremendous political victory and gave Nur ad-Din the necessary legitimacy to attack the Fatimids.

¹⁶² Kinnamos, 208; Choniates, William of Tyre, 2: 348-9.

with the greatest of ease, for the city's notables were prepared to surrender it. But when they heard of the massacres perpetrated in Bilbays, people decided to resist regardless."¹⁶³ Amalric retired from Egypt after the vizier, Shawar, promised several large payments. However, Amalric later learned that Nur ad-Din dispatched his general Shirkuh to Egypt at Shawar's invitation.¹⁶⁴ Amalric had been duped.

Shirkuh arrived in Egypt in the spring of 1169 and quickly eliminated the unpopular vizier. The crusaders' worst nightmare was dangerously close to reality: Nur ad-Din was nominally in control of a vast tract of land from Egypt to Aleppo. The crusaders were surrounded. It is, therefore, not surprising that Amalric appeared distracted during the joint campaign with Byzantium. The assumption of the Greek historians that Amalric vacillated purely out of greed is unfair and betrays a lack of understanding as to the severity of the loss of Egypt.¹⁶⁵ The fact that the crusaders now faced a two-front war against a united enemy was not lost upon Amalric. This does not, however, excuse the king's indecision.

The Byzantine commander, Andronikos Kontostephanos, attempted to work with the increasingly taciturn Amalric. Amalric was hesitant to launch the invasion and believed that Egypt was already lost. It was not until the end of September that Kontostephanos convinced the king to begin the invasion beginning with a siege against Damietta along the mouth of the Nile. Once in Egypt, things went from bad to worse. Amalric's delay was unfortunate for two reasons. First, Choniates notes that the Byzantine force was only

¹⁶³ Maalouf, 168-9. *Franj* is a medieval Arabic term to describe Western crusaders.

¹⁶⁴ William of Tyre, 2: 354-5; Maalouf, 169-72.

¹⁶⁵ Kinnamos, 208-9; Choniates, 91.

provisioned long enough for a three-month-long campaign. Kontostephanos was unable to resupply in Cyprus or in Acre, and his Frankish allies were largely unwilling to help – the Byzantine mission was running out of time.¹⁶⁶ Second, Salah ad-Din, Shirkuh's nephew and successor, received ample warning of the approaching Christian force and prepared the best he could.

As Byzantine forces ran out of food and supplies, Amalric lost heart in the face of the impressive fortifications of Damietta. It is unclear whether Amalric or Kontostephanos made the first peace overtures, but before the end of 1169, the Christians were burning the siege equipment. The Byzantine expedition ended in disaster when a large portion of the Byzantine fleet was lost during the return voyage home.¹⁶⁷ Manuel was doubtless disgusted by Kontostephanos's report in the spring of 1170, but the emperor did not abandon his alliance with the crusaders. Amalric attempted to salvage the situation by submitting his crown to the vassalage of Constantinople.¹⁶⁸

The Egyptian campaign was a great opportunity for both Byzantium and the crusader states. For Byzantium, a successful venture would have further heightened the perception that Manuel was the leading Christian general. The campaign also would have represented a limited return of former Byzantine lands. It is no accident that both Choniates and Kinnamos mention the great revenue that used to flow from Egypt as well as the bountiful harvest of grain and rice when making the case for invasion. Even the prospect of seizing a portion of Egypt was very tempting for Manuel. Aside from the

¹⁶⁶ Choniates, 92.

¹⁶⁷ Kinnamos, 209; Choniates, 95-6.

¹⁶⁸ Kinnamos, 209.

material gain, the single largest reason Amalric needed to move against Egypt was the danger associated with inaction. It is unlikely that Amalric would have intentionally torpedoed the expedition just to spite Manuel. The safeguarding of his western flank was surely worth a Byzantine presence along the coast. The trouble was convincing his barons of this. Amalric attempted to placate both the barons and Manuel, all while pressing forward against Egypt. His indecisiveness spoiled the campaign and sealed the eventual fate of the Frankish east. Outremer was now surrounded by a largely unified and determined enemy.

Barbarossa outmaneuvers Manuel

Manuel continued to pursue an alliance with Rome at the expense of the German emperor after Barbarossa was forced to retreat from Rome in 1167. In 1169, Manuel strengthened his ties to Otto Frangipani, Alexander III's most influential backer in Rome by sending him a Komnene bride with a substantial dowry.¹⁶⁹ Although Barbarossa's anti-pope had crowned him emperor of the Romans in 1167, Alexander remained hostile and decried the affair as a sham. Barbarossa was concerned that continued Byzantine-papal relations could indeed result in some sort of union. Thus, the marriage was disturbing enough to Barbarossa to send his imperial chancellor, Christian of Mainz, to Constantinople to begin a peaceable dialogue.¹⁷⁰ Here is the crux of Manuel's strategy in regards to the west: If he could not accomplish a union with the papacy (which he sought in order to curb German expansion in Italy and for the glory it would bring to the empire), then Manuel would use the prospect

¹⁶⁹ Magdalino, 84.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 92; Ohnsorge, 456-86.

of such an alliance to end hostilities with Barbarossa. Manuel intended to withdraw his support for Alexander III if Barbarossa would acquiesce to a Byzantine presence in Italy.

Diplomatic feelers continued from the German court to Constantinople after 1170. Manuel even offered the hand of his daughter, Maria, to Barbarossa's son while negotiating with Henry the Lion of Saxony in 1172.¹⁷¹ This was problematic as Maria was currently engaged to William II of Sicily. Romauld of Salerno states that William waited in vain for the arrival of his Byzantine bride and only learned of Manuel's negotiations with the Germans in passing.¹⁷² William was furious. Manuel used the improved relations with Barbarossa to cement ties with Venice's primary rivals, Genoa and Pisa. Before 1172, the two maritime city-states were cautious in its dealings with Byzantium as a matter of deference to Barbarossa. The acquisition of these two trading partners, and rivals of Venice, allowed the emperor break with Venice by expelling the Venetians from Constantinople and confiscating their goods – punishment for long standing greed and corruption.¹⁷³

The attempt to re-establish relations with the German empire represents a dramatic reorientation of Manuel's policy. Since Conrad III's death in 1152, the cold war with Frederick Barbarossa was a staple of Byzantine western policy. The prospect of ending the feud with the Germans induced Manuel to insult William of Sicily and lash out against Venice. Why? First, the prospect of a strong partner in the west was extremely tempting. Second, by the end of 1172, it appeared that Barbarossa would guarantee Byzantine

¹⁷¹ Kinnamos, 214.

¹⁷² Romauld of Salerno, *Romauldi Salernitani chronicon*. Ed. C. A. Garufi (Bologna: RIS, 1929), 261.

¹⁷³ Kinnamos, 208-14; Choniates, 97.

hegemony in the Balkans and the Adriatic coastline of Italy as long as Manuel would give up his negotiations with Alexander III – whose promises proved false anyway.

Magdalino states that Manuel's primary interest in Italy had always been the eastern strip of the peninsula from Otranto to Ancona, or possibly as far north as Ravenna.¹⁷⁴ Cardinal Boso supports this statement by his acknowledgement that Manuel requested three coastal towns in Apulia from the pope and Barbarossa before his initial successes in Italy during the 1150s.¹⁷⁵ In 1158, Rahewin, Otto of Freising's secretary, describes Barbarossa's rage upon hearing that Byzantine agents were spreading Byzantine influence past Ancona.¹⁷⁶ However, he later reports that a German delegation sent to Constantinople in 1160 returned with "a request of the prince of Constantinople concerning the coasts of Pentapolis (Ancona and its environs) and Apulia."¹⁷⁷ Since Manuel had been in possession of Ancona since the late 1150s, Manuel was attempting to gain German acceptance of the Byzantine presence. The innocuous characterization of Manuel's request and the lack of a hostile both suggest that Barbarossa was not overtly hostile to some sort of Byzantine presence along the Italian Adriatic coast. During the 1160s, Manuel felt that Alexander was his best option for an ally in Italy, and thus aborted his negotiations with Barbarossa over Ancona and Apulia.

Given the decade-long rivalry with Barbarossa, why would Manuel expect Barbarossa to acquiesce to any Byzantine presence in Italy during the 1170s? Barbarossa

¹⁷⁴ Magdalino, 57.

¹⁷⁵ Boso, 394.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 196-8.

¹⁷⁷ Otto of Freising, 330.

likely intimated that he was ready to make territorial concessions in Italy that Alexander and William II had been unwilling to make. Magdalino states that for Manuel to snub William II, toss aside his alliance with Venice, and consider withdrawing his support from the papacy, Barbarossa must have offered Manuel something of vast importance.¹⁷⁸ Manuel carefully weighed his options and concluded that peace with Germany was within the empire's best interests.

The abandonment of Venice and Sicily was not a major risk. Sicily was a second-rate power. Manuel had accepted William II as an ally because he needed friends to counter the influence of Barbarossa. If Manuel and Barbarossa were on friendly terms, then William would be less useful as an ally. Venice was, at best, a troublesome ally. It had often extorted large sums of money from Byzantine officials, and its notorious unreliability disrupted more than one military operation. Rapprochement with Barbarossa had the added benefit of casting Venice aside and allying with its Italian maritime rivals, Genoa and Pisa.

However, this rapprochement with Germany proved to be illusory. Barbarossa had no intention of giving Manuel a free hand in Italy; rather, it appears that Barbarossa sought to weaken the Byzantine position. After Manuel abrogated the marriage contract with Sicily and ordered the arrest of all Venetians and the seizure of their goods, a large German force under Christian of Mainz attacked Ancona in concert with the Venetians. The Germans cited Byzantine activity in Lombardy as their justification for the attack. There were, indeed, Byzantine officials based in Ancona, midway on Italy's Adriatic coast. It

¹⁷⁸ Magdalino, 93.

appears that Manuel felt secure enough in his relations with Barbarossa to extend his influence north towards Ravenna. An Italian account states that the Byzantine mission was to “buy certain cities’ and citizens’ properties and return these to them in fief.”¹⁷⁹ Choniates does not specify what these officials’ exact mission was but states that when Barbarossa learned of it, he “flew into a rage and sent his troops to lay siege to Ancona.”¹⁸⁰

Manuel had miscalculated. The conflict with Barbarossa entered a new phase of open hostility. It appears that once Manuel broke with Sicily and Venice, Barbarossa abandoned the prospect of peace with Byzantium. In 1174, several Byzantine peace delegations were rebuffed without any response from the Germans. By 1175, it was clear that Manuel’s western policy was in peril. Magdalino states that “Manuel had been beaten at his own game of double bluff.”¹⁸¹ Manuel lost two allies in Sicily and Venice, both of which allied with Barbarossa against Byzantium. The emperor also gained a reputation for treachery.

However, the scale of Manuel’s diplomatic failure should not be overstated. Ancona survived the siege of 1173 without too much difficulty.¹⁸² Venice and Sicily were unable to do serious harm to the empire. Venice was restricted in its action because of Manuel’s friendship with Genoa and Pisa, which had survived Barbarossa’s double-cross. Therefore, any Venetian foray into Byzantine waters had to contend not only with the imperial fleet but also that of the other Italian city-states. Sicily, meanwhile, was rapidly

¹⁷⁹ Buoncompagno, *Buoncompagni liber de obsidione Anconae (a. 1173)*. Ed. G. C. Zimolo (Bologna: RIS, 1937), 34-7.

¹⁸⁰ Choniates, 114.

¹⁸¹ Magdalino, 94.

¹⁸² Choniates, 115.

declining in power after the death of Roger II in 1154. Neither William I nor his son William II was capable of matching the political and military prowess of Roger. Sicily was even less of a threat than Venice.

It is reasonable to state that, given the limited consequences of Manuel's scheming in the west, Byzantium had very little to lose in attempting a renewed alliance with Barbarossa of Germany. Conversely, Barbarossa lost a considerable number of men and material in forays into northern Italy from across the Alps. The heavy burden of Italian operations created discontent in the German court, especially among Henry the Lion and his supporters.

At this juncture, it is worth discussing what Manuel expected to gain as a result of his intrigue in Italy. Why would the Italian city-states swear loyalty to Byzantium while fighting German overlordship? The answer is quite practical – the wealthy Italian polities sought to exchange the nearby tyrant for a tyrant too far away to meddle in their affairs. Also, Manuel spoke in terms that were designed to make Byzantine dominion appear beneficial, if not profitable. The emperor promised to double the income of any Lombard city that supported him. Conversely, Barbarossa was viewed as fiscally oppressive and was quite unpopular amongst the wealthy Italian magnates.¹⁸³ Thus, Manuel stood to gain several rich Italian regions along with the support of the northern Italian city-states. They, in turn, would gain protection from Barbarossa at a large discount.

Sicily was more problematic as it was technically a papal fief. If Manuel had achieved an alliance with Barbarossa, he could pressure the papacy in simply allowing a

¹⁸³ Magdalino, 84, 90.

Byzantine annexation of Sicily. If Manuel's negotiations with Alexander bore fruit, then Sicily could not act against Manuel without raising the ire of the pope. The variety of options available to Manuel in regards to his Italian policy justify the importance he placed on receiving recognition from the papacy as the sole emperor of Rome. While political and economic considerations provided the Italian city-states with an incentive to support Byzantium, they needed something more – legitimacy. Papal recognition would serve this function quite well. Ostrogorsky notes that “according to Byzantine conceptions, some rulers held a higher and lower rank within the hierarchy of rulers. But the highest rank was held by the Roman emperor in Constantinople, as the bearer of the highest title of sovereign, as the head of the oldest Christian empire, and as the father of all Christian peoples and the head of the family of rulers.”¹⁸⁴

Therefore, it is likely that this was Manuel's long-term strategy. Papal recognition of Byzantine suzerainty in Italy would equate to a papal recognition of the Byzantine worldview. Even if Manuel made peace with Barbarossa, it would have been a temporary measure to pressure Alexander into giving Manuel what he wanted. Barbarossa saw the danger of an alliance between Byzantium and the papacy and moved to prevent it. However, Manuel's most effective tool for intrigue with the papacy was still very much intact – the crusader states. Events in the Anatolia were to allow the emperor another chance to demonstrate the power and efficacy of the empire. Success in both spheres of influence was now dependent on success against Ikonion.

¹⁸⁴ George Ostrogorsky, “The Byzantine Emperor and the Hierarchical World Order,” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 35 no. 84 (Dec., 1956): 1-14.

The Byzantine crusade

Choniates begins the sixth book of his narrative by stating that Manuel and Arslan were like two brothers constantly fighting at the slightest pretext. In his opinion, Arslan was effeminate but exercised great forethought, whereas Manuel was reckless and heroic.¹⁸⁵ The author probably overstates the scale of any animosity that may have existed between the two, but relations had certainly cooled but by the 1170s. Kinnamos states that Manuel was able to convince Arslan to desist in his plans to ally with Nur ad-Din and Mleh of Armenia in a joint venture against the crusader states and, possibly, Byzantium itself.¹⁸⁶ Arslan's reluctance to definitively break with Manuel is indicative of the fact that there was still considerable distrust between him and Nur ad-Din. However, this last obstacle to war cleared in 1174 when Nur ad-Din died.

It is possible that Manuel sought to break his ties with Ikonion earlier than 1174, but until this point there was no real reason to do so. The death of Nur ad-Din, however, greatly altered the political landscape of the east. Now Arslan had a free hand to do as he wished in Anatolia since he no longer needed to fear the Crusaders or the Zengids. The Crusaders were in political chaos following the death of Amalric. The leper king, Baldwin IV, was young and weak. In Syria, Salah ad-Din was consolidating his control over Syria and Egypt. He had no reason to quarrel with Ikonion. With his eastern frontier safe, Arslan now began to formally annex Danishmendid towns promised to Manuel.¹⁸⁷ Arslan's behavior combined with Manuel's necessity to achieve some sort of Christian victory to

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 99.

¹⁸⁶ Kinnamos, 216.

¹⁸⁷ Syrus, 3: 357.

repair his reputation and salvage his western strategy. Additionally, Magdalino states that a unified Seljuk entity in Anatolia could jeopardize the pilgrim road towards Outremer.¹⁸⁸ If Manuel could not ensure the Christian pilgrim route, what use was he as the protector of the crusaders?

Thus, Manuel envisioned a campaign that could satisfy the needs of his different spheres of influence. In Anatolia, it was vital that he check the growing power of Kiliç Arslan. In Jerusalem, Baldwin IV's regent courted the idea of requesting German assistance through William of Montferrat.¹⁸⁹ William came to Outremer in the mid-1170s to seek his fortunes amongst the crusaders. He was related to both Frederick Barbarossa and Louis VII. Many barons in the court at Jerusalem believed he could secure either German or French assistance. The likelihood of this possibility is ultimately irrelevant; Manuel felt that his entire eastern policy was in danger.

The emperor sought to demonstrate to Western Christians how effective a crusade could be if it were properly led. The emperor carefully, but quickly, fortified Anatolia. He rebuilt the fortresses of Dorylaion and Souvleon to command the northern and western approaches to Ikonion.¹⁹⁰ Manuel then sent a letter to Alexander III requesting aid for the venture. In turn, Alexander wrote to Peter, the cardinal of St. Crisogono, in January of 1176 and encouraged him to gather support for the Byzantine crusade:

¹⁸⁸ Magdalino, 95.

¹⁸⁹ Bernard Hamilton, *The Leper King and his Heirs: Baldwin IV and the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 101-11.

¹⁹⁰ Kinnamos, 218-20; Choniates, 99-100.

[Manuel] has constructed a certain great and populous city in the middle of the land of the Sultan of Iconium, where he has placed Latins and Greeks to defend it, and by this city he dominates a great region of the Turks, so much so that he has restored the road for all Christians, both Greeks and latins, to visit the Lord's Sepulchre.¹⁹¹

Manuel planned nothing less than the complete subjugation of Ikonion. Renewed peace would not have served Byzantine interests, and thus he rejected several missives from the sultan.¹⁹² Manuel did not accept Arslan's peace overtures for two reasons. First, he needed a significant victory. There would be no glory in simply checking the power of Ikonion. The successful capture of Ikonion, by contrast would be the most significant Christian victory since the liberation of Jerusalem in 1099. Second, if Manuel successfully took the Seljuk capital, it would seriously weaken Arslan's legitimacy. The Seljuks took great pride in their cosmopolitan cities, Ikonion especially. Ultimately, the Seljuks differed from the nomadic Turkomen only in their possession of a formidable base of central power at Ikonion. If Manuel took that base, the Seljuks might collapse into political chaos.

In the spring of 1176, after extensive planning and preparation, Manuel launched the crusade against Ikonion. The campaign began smoothly enough. Seljuk resistance in the western part of the sultanate evaporated in the face of such a tremendous Byzantine force. Manuel rejected yet another peace offering from the sultan before setting up camp at Chonai. The sultan was finally convinced that he could not talk his way out of the situation and prepared a series of ambushes around the pass of Tzivritzē, just past the ruined fortress of Myriokephalon.¹⁹³ According to Choniates, Manuel marched his army into the

¹⁹¹ Magdalino, 96.

¹⁹² Choniates, 98-101.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 101.

trap in spite of the protests of his senior generals on 17 September 1176.¹⁹⁴ The Byzantine right flank, consisting of Antiochene auxiliaries that were led by Manuel's brother-in-law Baldwin, was annihilated and fell to the man in a final blaze of glory.

Choniates varies wildly in his description of the battle. Manuel was, at times, a coward who had given in to despair and was cruelly mocked by his troops.¹⁹⁵ At other times, Manuel bravely fought through numerous attempts to capture him while displaying superhuman strength. During the battle of Myriokephalon, Manuel took a brief respite underneath a wild pear tree. He was exhausted, wounded, and his nerves were rattled.¹⁹⁶ During this moment of despair, the emperor's strength and bravery wavered, but only for a moment.

The critique of Manuel's personal behavior notwithstanding, the emperor was able to extricate the bulk of his forces from a very dangerous situation. The sultan was surprisingly generous in his terms: Manuel had to raze Souvleon and Dorylaion on the return trip home.¹⁹⁷ Manuel did indeed destroy the fort at Souvleon but chose not to honor the condition at Dorylaion. The sultan sent an army to force the issue, but Manuel easily defeated it.¹⁹⁸ Given these circumstances, why is the battle of Myriokephalon considered such a major disaster? Much of this is because of contemporary perceptions of the battle.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 102.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 105.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 104.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 107.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 108.

According to Choniates, the emperor sent word to the capital detailing the day's events. He compared himself to Romanus Diogenes, who had lost a large Roman army a century earlier at Manzikert.¹⁹⁹ William of Tyre supported that interpretation by portraying the emperor as a shattered man whose mental health was in question.²⁰⁰ By contrast, Manuel later wrote a letter to Henry II of England in which he implied that the battle was not so much a loss as a setback. He continues by stating that the pack animals carrying the siege engines had been killed making an assault on Ikonion unlikely. Therefore, Manuel graciously accepted the sultan's peace offering.²⁰¹

At Myriokephalon, Manuel lost a great opportunity to crush the power of the Seljuks and repair his damaged prestige. This is not to say that the expedition was doomed from its inception; Manuel was remarkably close to realizing his objectives. Aside from the considerable embarrassment of defeat, the only direct consequence of Myriokephalon was that the Byzantine army lost the opportunity to take Ikonion. The battle was Arslan's to lose – a loss here could have precipitated a Byzantine *reconquista*. Manuel's tactical blunder before the pass of Tzivritzē ended the possibility for the moment. However, the imperial war machine was more than capable of launching another assault. The Komneni revival did not end with Myriokephalon.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 108.

²⁰⁰ William of Tyre, 2: 415.

²⁰¹ Roger de Hoveden, *The Annals of Rogers de Hoveden: Comprising the History of England and of Other Counties in Europe from A.D. 732 to A.D. 1201*. Trans. Henry T Riley (London: H. G. Bohn, 1853), 1: 419-23.

The empire after Myriokephalon

Not long after Myriokephalon, the Byzantine position in Italy suffered a major setback. In May of 1176, Barbarossa had again invaded northern Italy. Manuel was unable to participate in the defense Italian city-states because of his preparations for the crusade against Ikonion. However, Barbarossa was decisively defeated, and nearly killed, in battle against the Lombard League (the former League of Verona) at Legnano. Alexander took advantage of Barbarossa's humiliation and forced him to come to terms. Manuel and his contributions were ignored. Alexander denied any knowledge of Byzantine activities in Ancona.²⁰² In the subsequent Treaty of Venice, signed in 1177, Barbarossa pledged his support to Alexander and allowed him to return to Rome. In exchange, Alexander recognized Barbarossa as the sole emperor of Rome. Byzantium was surprised by the papal volte-face. Kinnamos decries the affair as a "shabby and servile trick."²⁰³ Without papal support, Ancona and the Italian coastline fell to German influence without difficulty. For over thirty years, Byzantium had been a major factor in the Italian scene. After the rapprochement between Alexander and Barbarossa, Manuel became irrelevant.

Barbarossa began to intervene in Byzantine spheres of influence by sending emissaries to Kiliç Arslan and pledging to send an army to Outremer. Barbarossa rebuffed Manuel's outrage in a patronizing and disrespectful manner.²⁰⁴ Manuel's Italian strategy was in tatters. Undaunted, Manuel continued to seek allies in the west. The cold war between Barbarossa and Manuel appeared to enter a new phase. Both parties sought allies

²⁰² Letter of Alexander III, *Epistolae pontificum romanorum ineditae*, ed. S. Loewenfeld (Leipzig, 1885), 152-3.

²⁰³ Kinnamos, 167.

²⁰⁴ Magdalino, 98.

to counter the influence of the other, but both emperors continued to communicate regarding matters of Christian unity.²⁰⁵ Ultimately, as long as Manuel was willing to accept that Italy was lost to the empire, the conflict was largely quiet. For the moment, Manuel accepted this, as he desired to launch another offensive against Ikonion.

Manuel also continued to work for the security of the crusader states after Myriokephalon. The emperor sent a large fleet to Palestine to coincide with the arrival of Philip of Flanders in 1177. This Franco-Byzantine alliance was supposed to attack Egypt to relieve pressure on the crusaders' southern flank. The venture failed to produce any military victories, but Phillip stopped in Constantinople during his return trip and conducted negotiations with the emperor on behalf of Henry II of England and Louis VII of France. The culmination of these discussions brought a French princess, Agnes, to Constantinople to marry Manuel's young son and heir, Alexios.²⁰⁶ Manuel also secured the marriage of his daughter to the son of William of Montferrat.²⁰⁷ The extent of these negotiations reveals an energy that both Choniates and William of Tyre imply the emperor lost at Myriokephalon.

Manuel was active militarily as well as diplomatically after Myriokephalon. Choniates tells of at least one campaign in which the emperor heroically rode to the defense of Klaudiopolis against the Seljuks towards the end of 1179. Klaudiopolis was a long journey from the capital for an aging emperor who rode without his royal entourage or baggage and took very few breaks. The mere sight of the emperor induced the Seljuks to

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 103.

²⁰⁶ William of Tyre, 2: 449.

²⁰⁷ Choniates, 113. Maria's final marriage contract

abandon the siege.²⁰⁸ The archbishop of Thessalonica, Eustathios, implies that the emperor was even more active than Choniates admits.²⁰⁹ Moreover, William of Tyre's negative assessment of Manuel's health and energy can possibly be attributed to the fact that William met with the emperor early in 1180 as he started to show signs of illness. That was their first meeting since the battle of Myriokephalon.²¹⁰

The emperor became seriously ill in August of 1180. Choniates casts one last personal assault at the emperor, stating that Manuel surrounded himself with self-serving cronies who espoused absurd theories based in astrology and divination. They argued that Manuel would soon recover and conquer the known world. Because of this, Manuel made no arrangements for his death and therefore placed the empire in crisis after his death.²¹¹ While this assessment is false, for the first time since Alexios took the throne in 1081, Constantinople was without a strong, adult king.

1169-1180 in summary

On the surface, it appears that by 1180 the empire was in great danger. Frederick Barbarossa got the best of Manuel in Italy and severely damaged the Byzantine political apparatus – the fall of Ancona was particularly disheartening. The grand Byzantine crusade against Ikonion came to ruin at the pass of Tzivritzē, resulting in a great loss of life. However, what were the direct consequences of these failed campaigns for the empire? Furthermore, were these expeditions worthwhile or simply exercises in folly?

²⁰⁸ Choniates, 111.

²⁰⁹ Eustathios of Thessalonica, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*. Trans. J. R. Melville Jones (Canberra: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1988), 14.

²¹⁰ William of Tyre, 2: 449-50.

²¹¹ Choniates, 124-5.

The expedition to Egypt was both necessary and, at least on the Byzantine side, well-planned. The Fatimid Caliphate was dying, and Nur ad-Din eyed Cairo with anticipation and greed. Amalric of Jerusalem was quickly losing the opportunity to prevent a potential disaster. The expedition of 1169 was the last best hope the crusaders had to prevent an encirclement by Nur ad-Din. Manuel may not have truly needed the crusader states as an ally in the region; however, he was responsible for their safety in the eyes of the West. Byzantium was the most powerful Christian state in the East and, as the feudal lord of Outremer; he was obliged to support their existence.

Manuel's role as the protector of the crusaders was a powerful tool in his western policy. His involvement in the expedition was beneficial for the empire in two respects: First, if the invasion were successful, the empire stood to reclaim some of the most lucrative areas of the old empire. Second, Byzantine involvement would demonstrate to the west and the crusaders that Manuel took his role as the leading crusading general seriously. Failure, although embarrassing, would bring no direct harm to the empire. However, if the crusader states were annihilated by the resurgent forces of Islam under Manuel's watch, the West would never forgive him.

Barbarossa's political victory over Manuel was also embarrassing, but again, the direct consequences of this political defeat were limited. The cold war between Barbarossa and Manuel lessened in intensity to a minor rivalry. The papacy did not break with Constantinople, as revealed by the alliance with France: Manuel never could have secured the marriage between Agnes of France and Alexios II without Alexander's blessing. Italy was, indeed, lost to Byzantium forever. However, given the possible rewards –

reunification with Rome, a limited return of hegemony in Italy, thwarting Barbarossa's territorial ambitions – the risks were worth the effort. Manuel came very close to succeeding in his aims.

Myriokephalon was not a disaster on the scale of Manzikert. After Myriokephalon, the Byzantine frontier did not collapse. The army was mauled, but the majority of the losses were non-Greek auxiliaries. There was also no political collapse after the defeat. Manuel's objective – the capture of Ikonion – would not have erased the Seljuk threat in Anatolia, but it would have greatly harmed Kiliç Arslan's reputation and weakened his status as a leader of a legitimate regional power. Additionally, this would have represented the first successful crusade since the capture of Jerusalem in 1099. Manuel would have been the hero of all Christendom. Unfortunately, a single tactical – albeit major – blunder ruined the chance.

The severity of these three failures has, historically, been overstated. The empire was still strong at the time of Manuel's death in 1180. The Byzantine war machine was bruised but intact. Manuel continued to expand his diplomatic network, even to France. The crises that disrupted the empire came after the emperor's death. The death of Manuel I Komnenos on 24 September 1180 was a blow to the empire far worse than Myriokephalon. Eustathios bitterly notes that, "It seems that it was to be our fate, as it pleased God, that with the fall of the emperor Manuel Komnenos there collapsed at the same time everything that was firm among the Greeks, and that when like the sun he left us, a great darkness descended upon us."²¹² Even Choniates laments, "as events were to demonstrate after he

²¹² Eustathios, 14.

had departed this life, his thoughts and actions were both sound and reasonable; and shortly after this wise helmsman was cast overboard by circumstances, the ship of state sank.”²¹³

²¹³ Ibid., 115.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE REIGN OF MANUEL I KOMNENOS

As Manuel lay dying in September of 1180, he likely evaluated his thirty-seven-year rule in Constantinople. Manuel was one of the most active Byzantine emperors since Basil II (958-1025). His campaigns extended Byzantine influence from northern Italy to Egypt. Historians argue that, like Basil II, Manuel overextended the empire so that it was no longer capable of maintaining its extensive frontier zones. The argument of this essay is that the empire was not weakened by Manuel's activities and that his campaigns were part of a cohesive and flexible imperial strategy.

In Outremer, Manuel attempted to continue his father's plan of annexation of the crusader states. However, the arrival of the Second Crusade demonstrated that direct control was not feasible: Byzantine action against the Frankish states would surely invite western intervention. Manuel thus modified his strategy from hostility to benevolence. The emperor felt compelled to sabotage the French component of the Second Crusade in order to secure his position as feudal overlord. After the failures of Louis VII and Conrad III, it was apparent to the Frankish princes that no power other than Byzantium was capable of acting effectively on their behalf.

Manuel continued his policy of friendship with the crusader principalities in the 1150s, beginning with the purchase of the rump of Edessa from Joscelin II's widow. He was perturbed to learn that the new master of Antioch, Raymond, did not reciprocate Byzantine good will. The Armenians were also busy causing problems in Cilicia. Manuel chose not to crush the two recalcitrant vassals, because overlordship satisfied his aims better than annexation. After Manuel forgave Armenian and Antiochene intransigence, he further

demonstrated his goodwill by gathering all his vassals in Outremer for a march against Nur ad-Din, which resulted in the release of thousands of Christian prisoners. He was careful not to do too much to damage the sultan; his position depended in part on crusader fear of Syrian power.

The Byzantine position in Outremer continued to improve during the 1160s. Diplomatically, Manuel cemented his hold over Antioch with his marriage to Maria in 1161. He also enhanced his relations with Jerusalem by offering his daughter to Amalric. Manuel was given another opportunity to display his magnanimity when Nur ad-Din assaulted the crusader fortress of Harim. The relieving force was shattered. Manuel sent a force to deter Nur ad-Din from pressing his advantage and later personally marched to western Syria to guarantee the safe release of many notables, excluding Raymond of Antioch. Nur ad-Din's withdrawal and his release of the prisoners are a testament of his respect for and fear of Byzantine power. With the exception of Cilicia, Manuel was the master of all Outremer.

The emperor's grand scheme to use the crusaders' strength reached its apex in 1169 with the expedition against Egypt. Manuel envisioned a limited return of the rich Nile river delta to Byzantine control while helping to secure his ally's western flank. Rarely do generosity and gain combine so conveniently. However, Frankish greed, fear, and impatience worked against Manuel's success. The opportunity was great enough for Byzantium to make another effort against Egypt with crusader assistance in 1177. The emperor was able to count on crusader assistance for a number of such campaigns; the largest such effort came in 1176 for the crusade against Ikonion. Baldwin and his knights fought, and died, with zeal and typical Latin bravado.

Manuel was very successful in his dealings in Outremer. He avenged the previous injustices his father and grandfather suffered at the hands of the crusaders. His hold on Antioch was assured and unchallenged. The knights of Outremer faithfully followed his banner. There were, indeed, complications. In religious matters, the crusaders never truly accepted Orthodox authority. The patriarch installed in Antioch died in an earthquake in 1170, and the Latin patriarch returned in triumph.²¹⁴ An Orthodox patriarch was admitted in Jerusalem in the same year, but he also did not last long, as the city fell in 1187. The Armenians were also problematic. However, after the death of Mleh in 1174, Armenian power waned considerably. By 1180, Cilicia was restored to Byzantine control. These issues notwithstanding, the Byzantine position in Outremer was quite secure.

In the Balkans, Manuel enacted a policy of containment. This policy continued until the 1160s, when the Hungarians proved to be too much trouble. The emperor's first major encounter in the Balkans occurred while he was preparing for the assault on the Norman garrison at Kekyra and the subsequent invasion of Italy. His contemporaries, as well as modern historians, have questioned his motives in campaigning in the north. The answer is that the Balkans were not a distant frontier zone; rather, this was the heartland of the empire. Manuel could not tolerate any instability in this area and necessarily acted when the Hungarians and Serbs rose against him. However, Manuel conducted a limited operation to keep his forces ready for the planned punitive expedition against Roger II.

During the 1150s, Manuel was obliged to launch a number of forays across the Danube. Again, the scope of these campaigns was limited because Byzantium was

²¹⁴ Choniates, 96.

thoroughly engaged in Italy. Although the majority of the troops in Italy were mercenaries, Manuel would still not risk a potential war on two fronts. Therefore, the action in the Balkans during this period was restricted to quickly and efficiently crushing Hungarian, and sometimes Serbian, hostility so he could continue to focus on Italy.

The conclusion of Italian operations and the death of Hungarian King Géza II in 1162 presented the emperor with a unique opportunity. The Hungarians had been particularly annoying during the past decade. Now that Manuel had a free hand, he sought to eliminate the Hungarian threat. His attempt to control the Hungarian crown through diplomacy was ultimately unsuccessful. Worse yet, his scheming created a larger problem as the new Hungarian king sought to relieve himself of the Byzantine yoke. Manuel won the day by systematically dismantling the Hungarian diplomatic apparatus and destroying its army. The Balkans were peaceful for the rest of Manuel's reign after 1168. The emperor was even able to install his adopted son, Béla, on the Hungarian throne after 1172.

Manuel achieved his most significant and lasting victory in the Balkans. This is expected, for Manuel stood to lose the most from any defeat or instability here. The Hungarians were quite persistent; from 1148 until the final campaign in 1168, Manuel conducted no less than a dozen campaigns across the Danube. Byzantine preoccupation in Italy during the 1150s and the strength of the Hungarian crown prevented Manuel from decisively settling matters in the Balkans at the time. However, the emperor perceptively adapted his strategy after 1162. Regardless of his initial failures, Manuel won full control of the Hungarian crown.

Manuel demonstrated a remarkable ability to adapt to changing circumstances in Italy. His first encounter with the West was with Roger II of Sicily, who capitalized on the emperor's distraction with the Second Crusade by raiding several Byzantine islands in the Aegean. Manuel immediately planned a reprisal to end the Norman menace that had plagued Byzantium for over a century. His initial plan involved a joint effort with the Germans to crush the Normans. Manuel concluded the 1140s with the successful recapture of Corfu.

The deaths of Conrad III and Roger II in 1152 and 1154, respectively, complicated Byzantine aims for Italy. Frederick, the new German emperor, was considerably less friendly to Constantinople, and it appeared less likely that there would be a joint venture against Sicily. Therefore, Manuel aimed to attack Sicily by himself and used a disaffected member of its royal family to gain an aura of legitimacy in his involvement. Manuel's venture ultimately failed, forcing him again to modify his strategy. Given the coolness in German-Byzantine relations, Manuel believed that William of Sicily would be more beneficial as an ally and vassal rather than an enemy.

During the 1160s, Manuel's political intrigue in the west intensified as he sought new allies to counter the influence of Frederick Barbarossa. One method that he employed was to try to persuade the pope to recognize him as the emperor of Rome. To obtain that recognition, he was willing to acquiesce on a number of issues that divided Rome and Constantinople. Manuel failed in his negotiations precisely because he was so successful in curbing German influence and power. In 1167, the German army was unable to complete

its victory over the Italian city-states after it was ravaged by disease. The papacy no longer had any immediate need of a defender against the Germans.

Manuel did not give up his effort to curb German influence. He established a marriage alliance with one of the leading families in Rome. It was apparently enough to stir the Germans into action. After 1167, there was an exchange of diplomatic missives between Constantinople and the German court. Manuel was willing to end hostilities with the Germans. His alliance with Alexander III had not brought any glory to the empire. If Manuel established peace with Barbarossa, he could reach an agreement that would guarantee Byzantine hegemony in northern Italy and the Balkans. Barbarossa's double-cross was so intricate and well-developed that the Byzantines were utterly shocked when Alexander recognized Barbarossa as the legitimate emperor of Rome.

Manuel was ultimately unsuccessful in his dealings in Italy. However, the extent of this failure should not be overstated. The collapse of Byzantine influence in Italy was indeed unfortunate, but the Byzantine investment in Italy was relatively minor, especially compared to German losses. After the Treaty of Venice, Manuel accepted that Italy was lost for the moment. The loss at Myriokephalon and the subsequent instability on his eastern frontier necessitated his full attention.

Manuel is judged quite harshly regarding his policy towards the Seljuks of Rûm because of the contrast between the scale of his invasion in 1176 and the humiliation of his subsequent defeat at Myriokephalon. The Byzantine policy in Anatolia was complex because of the nature of the potentates involved. Manuel had to contend with not only the Seljuks, but also the marauding Turkomen of the steppe and the lesser principalities of the

northeast. Manuel's policy in this sphere of influence did not take form until the second decade of his reign. The emperor's assault on Ikonion in 1146 was largely a display to his western observers but also an answer to the challenge of his authority.

Anatolia was quiet for the first few years of the 1150s. Indeed, Manuel fostered a friendly relationship with Masud of Ikonion. He was even able to call upon the sultan for assistance against the Armenians. The political landscape and Manuel's imperial policy changed after the death of Masud I in 1156. His son and successor, Kiliç Arslan II, cast a greedy eye on his brothers' possessions in the east. Manuel developed a policy to ensure that the Turks remained fractured. He supported all of the brothers against the others in varying degrees of intensity. This policy was quite effective. Ikonion maintained a correct attitude vis-à-vis Constantinople for several years. The satisfactory arrangement ended because of the emperor's inappropriate march through Seljuk territory in 1159.

Manuel launched a series of dashing campaigns against Ikonion in the beginning of the 1160s and achieved great success. In 1162, Arslan accepted client status, and Manuel later adopted Arslan as a son. The emperor continued to support the sons of Masud against each other to ensure that Arslan would not become too powerful. Additionally, Manuel maintained cordial relations with Nur ad-Din so that he had an ally on Arslan's eastern flank. This policy worked to Byzantine advantage as long as the Danishmendid princes were able to survive Arslan's attacks. However, the death of Yaghi-Basan in 1165 and the exile of Dhū'l Nūn and Shāhan-Shāh in 1168 seriously disrupted Manuel's plans. Now, the only check to Arslan's power was Nur ad-Din to the east.

The death of Nur ad-Din in 1174 removed the final obstacle from open conflict between Ikonion and Constantinople. Manuel spent almost a year gathering his forces for his assault. He utilized his vassals from Outremer and the Balkans to create a large host. He even petitioned Alexander III for support from the west. The crusade against Ikonion was designed to legitimate his western policy as well as crush the power of the Seljuks. Manuel needed a grand Christian victory to restore the prestige lost after the failure of his expedition to Egypt, as well as the collapse of his efforts in Italy. Arslan was not prepared to deal with this force and desperately sought to come to terms with Manuel. Had Manuel not erred in his charge through the pass of Tzivritzē, Ikonion might well have been captured. Myriokephalon was a stunning defeat for the Byzantines, but not a catastrophe. The number of defeats that Manuel inflicted upon Arslan after Myriokephalon is indicative of the continued strength of the Byzantine army.

That Manuel's strategy was perceptive is evident in the events that transpired after his death. His concern about the threat that Egypt could pose was fulfilled when Salah ad-Din brought Egypt and Syria under his control and utilized his vast resources to declare jihad against the Franks. In 1187, he inflicted a devastating defeat upon the crusaders at Hattin, where the greatest army the crusaders ever assembled was obliterated. This began the slow death of Outremer. In response to the loss of Jerusalem, the West dispatched a Third Crusade. En route to the Holy Land, the crusaders sacked Ikonion in an offensive similar to 1176. The crusaders broke through the mountain passes that protected the Seljuk capital's western flank and shattered the sultan's army. Seljuk power never fully recovered. The death of Kiliç Arslan in 1192 precipitated a civil war that further weakened the sultanate. Rûm stagnated until its total collapse a century later in 1307.

Byzantium under the Komneni made significant progress in restoring the power and prestige lost after Manzikert. This was especially true under the leadership of Manuel I. He transformed the empire from an insular regional power to an empire worthy of the name of Rome. Because of his ability to adapt his strategy to changing circumstances, Manuel was able to achieve successes. He came closer than any other Byzantine emperor to reclaiming the greatness of antiquity without exhausting his empire's resources as Justinian or Basil II had. His only unmitigated failure was his lack of preparation for the succession of his son. He overestimated the security of his wife's position in Constantinople. Furthermore, she exacerbated her own unpopularity by engaging in a number of shocking affairs.²¹⁵

Manuel's daughter and her husband declared a holy war against the widowed empress Maria that tore the capital apart. In 1182, Manuel's cousin Andronicus returned to the capital and ushered in a period of chaos and bloodshed. Within a year, he murdered Manuel's wife, son, and daughter. Andronicus, in turn, met an ignominious end at the hands of the Constantinopolitan mob.²¹⁶ The empire never recovered from the collapse of the Komneni dynasty. The doom of Byzantium is found here in the fracturing of the Komneni political system after Manuel's reign, not during it.

²¹⁵ Choniates, 127, 152.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 147-55.

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