



## *Byzantine-Latin Relations on the Eve of the Crusades: A Historical Approach to Political and Ecclesiastical Transformations from Détente to Confrontation (1000-1095)*

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### *Abstract :*

*This article examines the complex trajectory of relations between the Byzantine Empire and Latin Western Europe during the eleventh century, a period that witnessed a dramatic shift from relative coexistence to open ecclesial rupture and political confrontation. Through critical analysis of Latin and Greek sources, including the chronicles of Radulf Glaber, the correspondence of Pope Leo IX and Patriarch Michael Keroularios, and the Alexiad of Anna Komnene, this study argues that the deterioration of Byzantine-Latin relations resulted not from a single cataclysmic event such as the so-called "Great Schism" of 1054, but rather from the cumulative effect of intersecting political, ecclesiastical, and cultural factors. These included the Norman conquest of Byzantine Italy, competing ecclesiological visions of papal primacy versus pentarchic order, the radicalization of polemical discourse by figures such as Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida, and the progressive erosion of the Byzantine ideological framework that imagined a unified Christian commonwealth under emperor and pope. The article concludes by examining how these pre-existing tensions shaped the problematic encounter between Emperor Alexios I Komnenos and the armies of the First Crusade, setting the stage for the mutual suspicion that would characterize subsequent crusading relations.*

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## Introduction

At the dawn of the eleventh century, the Byzantine Empire stood at the apex of its medieval power. Under the formidable Basil II (r. 976-1025), imperial armies had shattered the Bulgarian state, extended Byzantine authority into the Caucasus, and secured the eastern frontiers against Fatimid expansion. The Mediterranean, as Donald Nicol observed, "was cleared of pirates and policed by the Byzantine fleet," while imperial prestige extended far beyond the empire's borders, most notably through the conversion of Vladimir of Kiev to Orthodox Christianity in 989.<sup>1</sup> To Byzantine observers, their empire appeared as God's chosen instrument for ordering the world—the terrestrial image of the Kingdom of Heaven, with the emperor in Constantinople serving as the divinely ordained regent on earth.<sup>2</sup>

Yet within seventy years of Basil's death, this apparently unshakeable edifice had experienced military catastrophe, civil strife, and permanent ecclesiastical rupture with the Latin West. By 1081, when Alexios I Komnenos seized the imperial throne, the Normans had conquered Byzantine Italy, Seljuk Turks had overrun Anatolia, and relations with the papacy and Western powers had descended into mutual suspicion and polemical warfare. The arrival of the First Crusade at the empire's gates in 1096 would reveal the depth of the chasm that had opened between Greek East and Latin West—a chasm whose origins lay not in the crusading movement itself, but in the transformative decades preceding it.

This article examines the trajectory of Byzantine-Latin relations between approximately 1000 and 1095, arguing that this period witnessed a fundamental reconfiguration of the political and ecclesiastical frameworks that had traditionally governed intercourse between Constantinople and the West. The analysis proceeds in five sections. Section one establishes the ideological parameters within which Byzantine-Latin relations operated at the millennium's turn, examining the Byzantine theory of universal empire and its implications for relations with Rome and the Western powers. Section two traces the progressive deterioration of Byzantine political influence in Italy, focusing on the Norman conquest of southern Italy and the collapse of long-standing imperial claims to Apulian and Calabrian territories. Section three analyzes the ecclesiastical controversies that culminated in the mutual excommunications of 1054, paying particular attention to the roles of Patriarch Michael Keroularios and Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida in transforming theological differences into irreconcilable ecclesial positions. Section four examines the pontificate of Gregory VII (1073-1085) and the emergence of a newly assertive papacy that claimed universal jurisdiction over both Eastern and Western Christendom. Finally, section five considers the reign of Alexios I Komnenos and the complex diplomatic prelude to the First Crusade, including the problematic evidence for Alexios's letters to the West and the fundamental misunderstandings that characterized Byzantine and Latin expectations of the crusading enterprise.

The chronological boundaries of this study—from approximately 1000 to 1095—are deliberately chosen. The opening date marks the apogee of Basil II's reign and the high-water mark of Byzantine influence in the West; the closing date corresponds to Pope Urban II's sermon at Clermont, which inaugurated the crusading movement and initiated a new phase in Byzantine-Latin relations. The intervening decades, while frequently examined through the lens of ecclesiastical history, merit renewed attention as a period in which political, military, and cultural transformations intersected with religious controversy to produce lasting estrangement between the two halves of Christendom.

## **I. The Byzantine Imperial Ideology and the Latin West at the Millennium's Turn**

To understand the trajectory of Byzantine-Latin relations in the eleventh century, one must first grasp the ideological framework through which Byzantine elites perceived the Western world. At the heart of Byzantine political theology lay the conviction that the Roman Empire, with its capital at Constantinople, constituted the sole legitimate Christian universal monarchy. This conviction, articulated most systematically in the sixth century by Justinian and subsequently elaborated by generations of Byzantine thinkers, rested upon a distinctive reading of providential history: the Roman Empire, having been Christianized under Constantine, represented God's chosen instrument for maintaining order in the world until the Second Coming.<sup>3</sup>

Within this framework, Western rulers occupied an ambiguous position. The Byzantine theory of the "family of princes" (*familia regum*), as analyzed by Franz Dölger, conceived of the world as a hierarchy of Christian rulers with the Byzantine emperor at its apex. Western kings—whether German, French, or English—were accorded honor as spiritual sons or brothers of the emperor, but this fraternal language implied no equality of status. The emperor alone ruled in Constantinople, the New Rome; Western rulers exercised authority only within their limited territorial domains.<sup>4</sup>

This ideological stance carried specific implications for Byzantine relations with the papacy. From the Byzantine perspective, the bishop of Rome, while honored as first among patriarchal sees, remained subject to imperial authority in matters touching the governance of the Church. The emperor, as Christ's vicegerent on earth, bore responsibility for maintaining orthodox doctrine and ecclesiastical unity; the pope's role, however venerable, was subordinate to this imperial stewardship. As Dölger demonstrated, Byzantine theorists consistently maintained that Rome's primacy was one of honor (*presbeia*), not jurisdiction (*exousia*), and that this honor flowed from the city's historical status as the original imperial capital—a status now transferred to Constantinople.<sup>5</sup>

The coronation of Charlemagne as Roman Emperor in 800 had posed an obvious challenge to this Byzantine worldview. Yet by the late tenth century, a *modus vivendi* had emerged. The Ottonian emperors, while assuming the imperial

title, generally acknowledged—at least implicitly—the superior prestige of the Byzantine court. Otto II's marriage to the Byzantine princess Theophano in 972 symbolized this accommodation, as did the continued use of Byzantine ceremonial forms at the German court. For their part, Byzantine emperors, while never formally recognizing the Western imperial title as legitimate, had learned to deal pragmatically with powerful Western rulers. The empire's continued possession of territories in southern Italy—Apulia, Calabria, and Sicily—provided a tangible basis for ongoing diplomatic and military interaction with the Latin world.

The reign of Basil II represented the high-water mark of Byzantine influence in the West. Basil's decisive defeat of the Bulgarians in 1014 eliminated a major threat to Byzantine control of the Balkans and secured imperial communications with southern Italy. The *Chronicle of Radulf Glaber* records that envoys from "the emperor of Constantinople" appeared at the court of the German emperor Henry II in 1024, proposing a marriage alliance that would have united the two imperial houses. While the proposal came to nothing, it testified to the continued prestige of the Byzantine court in Western eyes.<sup>6</sup>

Yet beneath the surface of diplomatic normalcy, tensions were accumulating. The ecclesiastical jurisdiction over southern Italy remained a point of friction. Since the eighth century, when the Iconoclastic emperors had transferred the dioceses of Illyricum, Calabria, and Sicily from papal to Constantinopolitan jurisdiction, the papacy had nursed a

grievance over this loss. While scholars debate the precise date of this transfer—V. Grumel suggested it occurred during the pontificate of Stephen II (752-757), while M. V. Anastos defended the traditional date of 732-733—its effect was to embed a structural tension between Rome and Constantinople within the Italian ecclesiastical landscape.<sup>7</sup> In the mixed Greek-Latin communities of Calabria and Apulia, questions of liturgical practice and ecclesiastical obedience provided recurrent occasions for friction.

The ideological assumptions of the two sides were thus poised for collision. The Byzantine worldview, confident in the unique and universal authority of the emperor in Constantinople, could accommodate Western rulers only as subordinate partners in a divinely ordered hierarchy. The Latin West, by contrast, was developing its own claims to autonomous authority—claims that would find their most potent expression in the reform papacy of the eleventh century. As long as Byzantine power in Italy remained strong and papal prestige remained weak, these divergent worldviews could coexist. But the erosion of Byzantine political power and the simultaneous rise of papal ambition would transform latent tension into open conflict.

## II. The Norman Conquest of Byzantine Italy and the Collapse of Imperial Power in the West

The single most important factor in the deterioration of Byzantine-Latin relations during the eleventh century was the Norman conquest of southern Italy. This conquest, which unfolded over

approximately four decades (c. 1017-1071), progressively eliminated Byzantine political authority in the Italian peninsula and brought the empire into direct military confrontation with a new and aggressive Western power. The Norman presence in Italy also fundamentally altered the papacy's strategic position, providing the popes with potential military allies while simultaneously threatening papal territorial interests. The complex triangular relationship that emerged among Byzantines, Normans, and the papacy would shape the diplomatic history of the Mediterranean for generations.

The first Norman adventurers appeared in southern Italy early in the eleventh century, probably as pilgrims returning from the Holy Land who hired their swords to local Lombard princes in revolt against Byzantine authority.<sup>8</sup> The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* of William of Apulia, composed around 1100, provides the most detailed Latin account of these early Norman activities, while the *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene offers a Greek perspective on the Norman threat. According to William, the Normans initially served as mercenaries in the service of the Lombard princes of Benevento and Capua, but quickly recognized the opportunities for independent conquest in the fragmented political landscape of southern Italy.<sup>9</sup>

The period of serious Byzantine-Norman confrontation began in the late 1030s. George Maniakes, one of the most capable Byzantine generals of the age, was dispatched to Italy in 1038 to recover territories lost to the Normans and their Lombard allies. Maniakes enjoyed

considerable initial success, reconquering much of Apulia and Calabria, and his campaigns demonstrated that the empire remained capable of projecting military power into Italy when properly resourced. However, Maniakes's recall to Constantinople in 1040—precipitated by court intrigue and the enmity of the emperor's minister, John the Orphanotrophos—allowed the Normans to recover their position. The rebellion of Maniakes himself in 1042, although quickly suppressed, further destabilized Byzantine authority in the region.<sup>10</sup>

The Normans consolidated their conquests under the leadership of the Hauteville brothers, particularly Robert Guiscard ("the Resourceful") and Roger. Robert's arrival in Italy around 1047 marked a turning point. By 1057, he had established himself as count of Apulia, and in 1059, he concluded a remarkable agreement with Pope Nicholas II at the Council of Melfi. By the Treaty of Melfi, Nicholas invested Robert as duke of Apulia, Calabria, and Sicily—territories largely still under Byzantine or Muslim control—in return for Robert's oath of fealty and his promise to defend papal interests. This agreement transformed the Normans from adventurers into legitimate rulers and aligned them with the reform papacy against common enemies: the Byzantines in the south and the German emperors in the north.<sup>11</sup>

The Treaty of Melfi represented a catastrophic diplomatic defeat for Byzantium. Not only did it legitimize Norman seizures of imperial territory, but it also signaled that the reformed papacy was prepared to assert its own authority

over southern Italy—a region that Byzantium had governed for centuries and that its emperors continued to regard as an integral part of the Roman Empire. The papacy's claim to dispose of Byzantine territories reflected the growing confidence of the reform movement and its willingness to challenge Byzantine prerogatives in the peninsula.

The final act of the Byzantine loss of Italy occurred in 1071, a year that ranks among the most disastrous in the empire's long history. In April, after a prolonged siege, Robert Guiscard captured Bari, the last Byzantine stronghold in Italy. The fall of Bari ended five centuries of Byzantine presence in the Italian peninsula and marked the definitive extinction of imperial political authority in the West. Later that same year, at Manzikert in eastern Anatolia, the Seljuk Turks destroyed the Byzantine field army and captured the emperor Romanos IV Diogenes. The coincidence of these two catastrophes underscored the empire's strategic overstretch and its inability to defend its possessions on two fronts.<sup>12</sup>

The Norman conquest of Italy had profound implications for Byzantine-Latin relations beyond the mere loss of territory. First, it created a new and aggressive Western power with a direct interest in attacking Byzantine possessions. Robert Guiscard's invasion of the Balkans in 1081-1085, which brought Norman armies to the walls of Dyrrachium (modern Durrës in Albania), demonstrated that Norman ambitions extended beyond Italy to the conquest of the Byzantine Empire itself. Second, the Norman presence permanently altered the balance of power

in the Adriatic and Ionian seas, threatening Byzantine communications and trade. Third, and most significantly for the purposes of this article, the Norman conquest entangled Byzantine-Western relations with papal politics. The popes, who had initially viewed the Normans as a threat, came to see them as valuable allies—and instruments for the assertion of papal authority over the Greek churches of southern Italy. The gregorian reform movement, which we will examine in section four, developed in the context of this new papal-Norman alliance, and its ambitious claims to universal jurisdiction reflected the transformed political landscape of the Mediterranean.<sup>13</sup>

### III. The Road to 1054: Ecclesiastical Controversy and the Mutual Excommunications

The ecclesiastical conflicts that culminated in the mutual anathemas of 1054 must be understood against the backdrop of the political transformations just described. The Norman conquest of Byzantine Italy created immediate practical problems for the organization of the Church in the peninsula. As Byzantine political authority retreated, the Greek dioceses of Apulia and Calabria found themselves under Latin Norman rule, raising acute questions about ecclesiastical jurisdiction and liturgical practice. Should Greek bishops remain subject to the patriarch of Constantinople, or should they transfer their obedience to the pope? Should Greek monasteries in Norman-controlled territories continue to follow the Byzantine rite, or should they adopt Latin customs? These practical questions, arising from the new political reality,

inevitably drew attention to the long-standing differences between Greek and Latin ecclesiastical practice.

The controversy that would explode in 1054 began, appropriately enough, in southern Italy. In 1052 or early 1053, at the request of Patriarch Michael Keroularios of Constantinople (1043-1058), Archbishop Leo of Ochrid composed a letter addressed to John, the Latin archbishop of Trani in Apulia. Leo's letter denounced the Latin practice of celebrating the Eucharist with unleavened bread (*azymes*) as a "Judaizing" observance, and extended this criticism to the entire Latin Church, including "the priesthood of the Franks and the reverend pope." The letter was subsequently forwarded to Rome, where Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida translated it into Latin and brought it to the attention of Pope Leo IX (1049-1054).<sup>14</sup>

The choice of the azyme controversy as the flashpoint for Greek-Latin conflict was not accidental. As Tia Kolbaba has shown, Byzantine polemic against Latin liturgical practices drew upon a long tradition of distinguishing orthodox Greek usage from the deviant customs of heretics, Jews, and schismatics. By associating the Latin use of unleavened bread with Jewish practice, Greek polemicists could present the Latins as not merely different, but as contaminated by contact with Judaism—a particularly charged accusation in a Christian culture that had defined itself against Judaism for centuries.<sup>15</sup> Anton Michel suggested that Keroularios, who lacked the theological sophistication of his ninth-century predecessor Patriarch Photios, recognized

in the azyme controversy a visible and emotionally charged issue around which to mobilize Greek opposition to Latin pretensions.<sup>16</sup>

The arrival of Leo of Ochrid's letter in Rome coincided with a period of intense activity in the reform papacy. Leo IX, the first of the great reform popes, was actively promoting monastic renewal, combating simony and clerical marriage, and asserting papal authority throughout the Western Church. Cardinal Humbert, a monk of Moyaenmoutier who had become Leo's closest advisor, embodied the radical wing of the reform movement. For Humbert, as Walter Ullmann demonstrated, the implementation of Roman primacy was the cardinal point of Christian ecclesiology: "the Roman Church is the hinge and head—*cardo et caput*—of all the other Churches." This principle, in Humbert's view, "comprises also the Eastern half of Christendom"; both Western and Eastern emperors were properly understood as "the arms of the Pope."<sup>17</sup>

The correspondence that passed between Rome and Constantinople in 1053-1054 revealed the fundamental incompatibility of these ecclesiological visions. Pope Leo IX, in letters drafted by Humbert, asserted Roman primacy in terms that Keroularios could not possibly accept. The pope claimed that the Roman Church was the "head and mother of all churches," that its authority derived directly from Christ's commission to Peter, and that the Constantinopolitan see owed it obedience. The patriarch, for his part, defended the traditional pentarchic order—the governance of the Church by

the five ancient patriarchates—and insisted that Roman primacy was merely one of honor, not jurisdiction.<sup>18</sup>

Into this charged atmosphere, in the spring of 1054, arrived a papal legation bearing letters from Leo IX to the emperor Constantine IX Monomachos and to Keroularios. The legates—Humbert, Frederick of Lorraine (the future Pope Stephen IX), and Peter of Amalfi—had instructions to negotiate an alliance with the emperor against the Normans and to resolve the outstanding ecclesiastical disputes. Crucially, by the time the legates reached Constantinople in June, Leo IX was already dead (he had died on April 19), a fact that may have been known to Humbert but that cast doubt on the legates' canonical authority to act.<sup>19</sup>

The negotiations quickly broke down. Keroularios refused to meet with the legates, perhaps suspecting that they intended to demand submission to Rome rather than engage in genuine dialogue. The emperor, more conciliatory than the patriarch, received the legates warmly and attempted to mediate, but could not persuade Keroularios to compromise. On July 16, 1054, Humbert and his colleagues entered the church of Hagia Sophia during the liturgy and deposited on the high altar a bull of excommunication against Keroularios and his followers. The bull accused the patriarch and his associates of numerous errors, including the omission of the *filioque* from the creed, the use of leavened bread in the Eucharist, and various other deviations from Roman practice. Keroularios responded by convening a synod that anathematized Humbert and his companions—though

notably not the pope or the Roman Church as such.<sup>20</sup>

The significance of these events has been debated ever since. Earlier generations of scholars, both Catholic and Orthodox, often treated 1054 as the definitive "Great Schism" that divided Eastern and Western Christendom. More recent scholarship has adopted a more nuanced view. As the contributors to a recent collective volume emphasize, contemporaries did not regard the mutual anathemas as a church-dividing schism. Peter of Antioch, writing shortly after the events, treated them as a localized quarrel between Rome and Constantinople that need not affect the broader communion of churches.<sup>21</sup> Brett Whalen has argued that the events of 1054 are best understood not as a single schism but as "an extended moment" in a longer process of estrangement.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, 1054 marked an important threshold. The mutual anathemas, even if not initially recognized as definitive, created a powerful precedent and provided a store of polemical resources for future controversies. The texts generated by the dispute—Humbert's dialogues, Keroularios's encyclicals, and the various collections of canonical materials assembled on both sides—entered the literary tradition and shaped subsequent perceptions of the Greek-Latin divide. Moreover, the events of 1054 demonstrated that the reformed papacy would pursue its claims to universal jurisdiction with unprecedented aggressiveness. Humbert's actions in Hagia Sophia, however canonically dubious, reflected a conviction that the

Roman Church possessed authority to judge and condemn even the most ancient sees of the East. This conviction would only grow stronger in the decades after 1054, as the gregorian reform movement reached its zenith.

#### IV. The Gregorian Papacy and the Byzantine East: Gregory VII's Vision of Universal Authority

The pontificate of Gregory VII (1073-1085) represents the apogee of eleventh-century papal assertiveness and a crucial phase in the deterioration of Byzantine-Latin relations. Gregory, the former archdeacon Hildebrand who had served as a key figure in the reform movement since the 1050s, brought to the papacy an exalted conception of papal authority unmatched by any of his predecessors. His *Dictatus papae* of 1075, a collection of twenty-seven propositions about papal power, included claims that the Roman Church had never erred and would never err, that the pope alone could depose bishops and emperors, and that he might be judged by no one.<sup>23</sup> While scholars debate whether Gregory intended these propositions as legal principles or as aspirational statements, they leave no doubt about his conception of papal primacy.

How did Gregory's vision of papal authority apply to the Byzantine East? H. E. J. Cowdrey, in his magisterial study of Gregory VII, cautions against assuming that the *Dictatus papae* had any special reference to Byzantine affairs. Gregory's primary concerns were with the Western Church, and his claims about papal authority over emperors were directed

primarily at the German ruler Henry IV, with whom he was engaged in a bitter struggle.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the universalist implications of Gregory's claims were inescapable. If the pope could depose the German emperor, why not the Byzantine emperor as well? If the Roman Church was the source of all ecclesiastical authority, how could the ancient patriarchate of Constantinople remain outside its jurisdiction?

Gregory's actual dealings with the Byzantine world were more complex and ambivalent than his theoretical pronouncements might suggest. He inherited from the pontificate of Leo IX a conception of the relationship between Rome and Constantinople as one of mother and daughter—a relationship that implied both Roman superiority and Roman responsibility for the welfare of the Eastern Church. The events of 1054, while not forgotten, had not created an enduring rupture in Roman consciousness. As Cowdrey notes, "the anathemas left no visible long-term scar upon memories at Rome, and least of all on the young Hildebrand's; although he must have learned at Rome of what had happened."<sup>25</sup>

Gregory's correspondence reveals a pope who, while asserting Roman primacy, was also prepared to acknowledge positive aspects of Byzantine ecclesiastical life. He noted with approval that in the East, unlike the West, laymen did not dispose of churches or ecclesiastical appointments—a significant concession from a pope engaged in a bitter struggle against lay investiture. He refrained from condemning the Greek practice of a married

priesthood, which Humbert had denounced with characteristic vehemence. On the dogmatic issue of the *filioque*, Gregory expressed a desire to bring the Constantinopolitan church into harmony with Rome, but he did not condemn the Greeks as hardened heretics.<sup>26</sup>

Gregory's attitude toward the Greek liturgy was similarly nuanced. When the Greeks criticized the Armenian use of unleavened bread, Gregory deprecated what he saw as Greek presumption in condemning the customs of others. Yet he explicitly refused to condemn or reject the Greek use of leavened bread, citing St. Paul's dictum that "to the pure all things are pure" (Titus 1:15). "Defending our own unleavened bread with invincible reasoning according to God," Gregory wrote, "we neither censure nor reject their leavened bread, following the apostle who says that to the pure all things are pure."<sup>27</sup> This willingness to acknowledge diversity within unity stands in marked contrast to the intransigence of Humbert and suggests that Gregory's vision of papal primacy, however exalted, did not necessarily entail the suppression of legitimate liturgical variation.

Gregory's pontificate coincided with the darkest years of Byzantine military and political crisis. The disasters of 1071—the loss of Bari and the defeat at Manzikert—were followed by a decade of civil strife and Seljuk advance. In the summer of 1073, the emperor Michael VII Dukas dispatched two Byzantine monks to Gregory with messages that the pope judged to exhibit the emperor's goodwill toward the Roman Church. Michael evidently canvassed proposals for

resolving dogmatic and liturgical differences, and perhaps also requested military support from the West. Gregory responded with characteristic energy, dispatching Patriarch Dominicus of Venice as his intermediary and expressing his desire "to renew the ancient ecclesiastical concord between the Roman Church and her daughter of Constantinople."<sup>28</sup>

The negotiations between Gregory and Michael VII bore no immediate fruit, but they established an important precedent: a Byzantine emperor, facing catastrophic military defeat, had turned to the papacy for help. This precedent would be followed, in very different circumstances, by Alexios I Komnenos. Gregory's own ambitions extended beyond mere negotiation. In 1074, he began to promote what some historians have called a "crusading" project—an armed expedition to the East that would, in his conception, aid the afflicted Christians of Byzantium and perhaps reunite the churches under papal leadership. While this project came to nothing, it anticipated the combination of military aid and ecclesiastical union that would characterize papal policy toward Byzantium for centuries.<sup>29</sup>

Gregory's dealings with the Byzantine world thus present a complex picture. On the one hand, he was the most assertive exponent of papal primacy that the Church had ever seen, a pope who claimed the right to depose emperors and to exercise universal jurisdiction. On the other hand, his actual policies toward the East were marked by remarkable restraint and a genuine desire for reconciliation. The

tragedy of Byzantine-Latin relations in the eleventh century is that this restraint came too late. By the time Gregory ascended the papal throne, the Normans had conquered Byzantine Italy, the mutual anathemas of 1054 had created a store of polemical resources on both sides, and the political circumstances that might have enabled reconciliation—a strong Byzantine emperor negotiating from a position of strength—had disappeared. Gregory's vision of a reunited Christendom under papal leadership, however sincerely held, foundered on the realities of power and the accumulated grievances of decades.

## V. Alexios I Komnenos and the Prelude to the First Crusade

The reign of Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118) marks the culmination of the transformations traced in this article and the immediate prelude to the crusading movement. Alexios came to the throne at a moment of extreme crisis. The Normans under Robert Guiscard were preparing to invade the Balkans; the Seljuk Turks occupied most of Anatolia; and the Pechenegs threatened the empire's European provinces. Alexios's military and diplomatic response to these challenges would reshape Byzantine-Western relations and create the conditions for the First Crusade.

Alexios's first major confrontation with a Western power came almost immediately after his accession. In 1081, Robert Guiscard launched a full-scale invasion of the Byzantine Balkans, seeking to exploit the chaos following the overthrow of Nikephoros III Botaneiates. Robert's fleet crossed the Adriatic and laid

siege to Dyrrachium, the gateway to the Via Egnatia and the route to Constantinople. Alexios rushed to meet the threat, but his army was decisively defeated at the battle of Dyrrachium in October 1081. Only Robert's recall to Italy in 1082—prompted by rebellion among his vassals and pressure from the German emperor Henry IV—saved Constantinople from a Norman siege.<sup>30</sup>

The Norman invasion of 1081-1085 left an enduring mark on Byzantine perceptions of the Latin West. Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*, composed in the 1140s, preserves a vivid account of these events and reflects the deep suspicion with which the Komnenian court came to regard Western adventurers. Anna's portrayal of Robert Guiscard as a treacherous and ambitious barbarian, driven by insatiable greed for empire, established a template for Byzantine representations of Latin aggressors. Yet the *Alexiad* also reveals the complexity of Byzantine attitudes: Anna acknowledges Robert's military skill and courage, and she records the presence of loyal Latin mercenaries in Byzantine service.<sup>31</sup>

The Norman wars also drew Alexios into diplomatic contact with the papacy. In his struggle against Robert, Alexios found a natural ally in the German emperor Henry IV, who was himself locked in conflict with the papacy and the Normans. Alexios's alliance with Henry brought him into opposition to Gregory VII and the reform papacy, complicating any prospects for ecclesiastical reconciliation. Yet the logic of realpolitik also pushed Alexios toward détente with the papacy. After Gregory's death in 1085 and the

election of Urban II (1088-1099), Alexios opened negotiations with Rome, perhaps recognizing that the papacy's influence over Western knights might be harnessed to Byzantine advantage.

The critical moment came in 1095. At the Council of Piacenza in March of that year, Byzantine envoys appeared before Urban II and appealed for Western military assistance against the Turks. The terms of this appeal are not precisely known, but it evidently made a deep impression on the council. According to the chronicler Bernold of Constance, the envoys reported that the Turks "had devastated the churches of God in their kingdom" and begged "that they might be helped by faithful Christians against the pagans." Urban urged those present to promise aid to the Byzantines, and many did so.<sup>32</sup>

The Piacenza appeal has traditionally been seen as the immediate trigger for the crusade. More recently, however, scholars have questioned the relationship between the Byzantine appeal and Urban's preaching of the crusade at Clermont later that year. Thomas W. Smith has subjected the surviving letters attributed to Alexios to rigorous scrutiny, concluding that the famous letter to Robert of Flanders—long cited as evidence of Alexios's appeal for Western aid—is almost certainly a Western invention composed during the crusade itself. The letters to Abbot Oderisius of Montecassino may also be spurious.<sup>33</sup>

These findings have important implications for understanding Alexios's intentions. The traditional picture of Alexios as a desperate ruler who

summoned the West to liberate the Holy Land, and who thereby unwittingly unleashed the crusade, now appears untenable. Alexios almost certainly requested military assistance—probably a limited force of mercenaries who could serve under imperial command—but he did not request a mass pilgrimage of armed knights under their own leaders. The transformation of his appeal into the First Crusade was the work of Urban II, who saw in the Byzantine request an opportunity to assert papal leadership of Christendom, to channel the martial energies of the Western knighthood toward a worthy goal, and perhaps to reunite the churches under papal authority.<sup>34</sup>

The encounter between Alexios and the crusaders, when it finally occurred in 1096-1097, revealed the depth of the misunderstandings that had accumulated over the preceding century. The crusaders, for their part, arrived with expectations shaped by their own religious culture: they were embarking on a holy war, a pilgrimage armed with spiritual weapons, and they expected the Byzantine emperor to support their enterprise as a fellow Christian ruler. Alexios, from his perspective, saw the crusaders as mercenaries who had come to serve the empire—useful but potentially dangerous, and certainly not entitled to any conquered territories that had once belonged to the empire. The mutual suspicion that characterized crusader-Byzantine relations throughout the twelfth century had its roots in this original misunderstanding.

## Conclusion

The century between the death of Basil II and the preaching of the First Crusade witnessed a fundamental transformation in Byzantine-Latin relations. At the millennium's turn, the Byzantine Empire stood as the preeminent power of the Christian world, its emperor the divinely ordained regent of God on earth, its church the ancient and orthodox see of Constantinople. The Latin West, while increasingly assertive, still acknowledged—at least implicitly—the superior prestige of the empire and its ruler. By 1095, this configuration of power and prestige had been shattered. The Normans had conquered Byzantine Italy, Seljuk Turks had overrun Anatolia, and a newly assertive papacy claimed universal jurisdiction over both Eastern and Western Christendom.

The argument of this article has been that these transformations resulted not from a single cataclysmic event but from the cumulative effect of intersecting political, military, ecclesiastical, and cultural developments. The Norman conquest of Italy eliminated the territorial basis for Byzantine influence in the West and created a new military threat to the empire itself. The ecclesiastical controversies culminating in 1054, while not initially recognized as definitive schism, generated polemical resources and institutional memories that shaped subsequent perceptions. The gregorian reform movement produced a papacy with unprecedented claims to universal authority—claims that could not easily coexist with traditional Byzantine conceptions of imperial and patriarchal

prerogatives. And the reign of Alexios I Komnenos, for all its achievements in restoring imperial authority, concluded with the arrival of the First Crusade and the misunderstandings that would poison Byzantine-Western relations for generations.

The events traced in this article had consequences that extended far beyond the eleventh century. The mutual excommunications of 1054, initially a localized quarrel, would later be remembered as the beginning of the Great Schism. The Norman conquest of southern Italy created a lasting Western presence in the Mediterranean and established patterns of conquest and settlement that would be replicated in the crusader states. The gregorian papacy's claims to universal jurisdiction provided ideological justification for Latin expansion into traditionally Byzantine spheres. And the First Crusade, born of the intersection of Byzantine weakness and papal ambition, inaugurated two centuries of crusading activity that would alternately threaten and assist the Byzantine Empire.

In the end, perhaps the most significant transformation was in the realm of perception. At the beginning of the eleventh century, Byzantines and Latins, while conscious of their differences, still inhabited a shared imaginative universe—a Christian commonwealth that, however divided politically, acknowledged common roots and common hopes. By the century's end, this shared universe had fractured. Byzantines increasingly saw Latins as barbarians, heretics, or both; Latins increasingly saw Byzantines as

schismatics, effeminate, or untrustworthy. These perceptions, once formed, proved remarkably durable. They would shape not only the history of the crusades but also the longer-term relationship between Eastern and Western Christendom, a relationship whose complexities and tensions continue to resonate into the present.

### Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Nicol, Donald M. , Byzantium and the Papacy in the Eleventh Century, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* , 13 , 1962 , p.1.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>3</sup> Ostrogorsky George, *History of the Byzantine State*, Translated by Joan Hussey, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956, pp.1-14.
- <sup>4</sup> Dölger Franz, Die 'Familie der Könige' im Mittelalter, *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 60 , 1940, pp.397-420; Ostrogorsky, op.cit. , pp.1-14.
- <sup>5</sup> Dölger Franz, Rom in der Gedankenwelt der Byzantiner, *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 66 ,1937, pp.1-42.
- <sup>6</sup> Radulf Glaber, *Historiarum*, PL 142, col. 671; on the authenticity of this report, see Michel, "Weltreichs und Kirchenteilung," 52-64, and Dölger, "Byzanz und das Abendland," p.81.
- <sup>7</sup> Grumel Venance, L'annexion de l'Illyricum oriental, de la Sicile et de la Calabre au patriarcat de Constantinople, *Recherches des sciences religieuses* , 39-40 , 1951-1952, pp.191-200; Anastos Milton V. , "The Transfer of Illyricum, Calabria and Sicily to the Jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 732-33." *Silloge Bizantina in onore di S. G. Mercati (Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici 9)* ,1957, pp.14-31.
- <sup>8</sup> Loud, *Conquerors and Churchmen*, introduction.
- <sup>9</sup> William of Apulia, *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, ed. Mathieu; Anna Comnena, *Alexiad*, ed. Leib.
- <sup>10</sup> Savvides, *Byzantino-Normannica*, pp.45-67.
- <sup>11</sup> Loud G. A. , *Conquerors and Churchmen in Norman Italy*, Aldershot: Variorum, 1999, chapter 3.
- <sup>12</sup> Ostrogorsky, op.cit., pp.317-319.
- <sup>13</sup> Charanis Peter , Byzantium, the West, and the Origins of the First Crusade, *Byzantion* 19 , 1949, pp.193-194; Savvides Alexios G. C. , Byzantino-Normannica: The Norman Capture of Italy (to A. D. 1081) and the First Two Invasions in Byzantium (A.D. 1081-1085 and 1107-1108), *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta*, 165, Leuven: Peeters, 2007, pp.89-112.
- <sup>14</sup> Will, ed., *Acta et scripta*, pp.56-64; Whalen, "Rethinking the Schism," pp.1-2.
- <sup>15</sup> Kolbaba, *Byzantine Lists*, passim; Kolbaba, "Byzantine Perceptions," pp.117-143.
- <sup>16</sup> Michel, "Schisma und Kaiserhof," p.377; cf. Whalen, "Rethinking the Schism," pp.4-5.
- <sup>17</sup> Ullmann, *Growth of Papal Government*, pp.266-268, quoted in Nicol, "Byzantium and the Papacy," p.11.
- <sup>18</sup> Michel, *Humbert und Kerullarios*, I, 20-40; cf. Nicol, "Byzantium and the Papacy," pp.5-6.
- <sup>19</sup> Siecienski, "Caerularios, Michael," p.105.
- <sup>20</sup> Michel, "Rechtsgültigkeit," pp.193-205; Charanis in *Crusades*, I, 210 n. 36; Runciman, *Eastern Schism*, p.46.
- <sup>21</sup> Chrissis et al., eds., *Byzantium and the West*, chapter 1.
- <sup>22</sup> Whalen, "Rethinking the Schism," p.1.
- <sup>23</sup> Cowdrey, *Gregory VII*, pp.495-512.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp.481-482.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.482.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp.483-484.
- <sup>27</sup> Cowdrey, *Gregory VII*, citing Gregory's Register; cf. Cowdrey, "Gregory VII and the World," p.484.
- <sup>28</sup> Cowdrey, *Gregory VII and the World*, 484-485; Hofmann, "Papst Gregor VII," pp.169-181.
- <sup>29</sup> Cowdrey, *Gregory VII*, pp.484-485.
- <sup>30</sup> Savvides, op.cit. , pp.113-156.
- <sup>31</sup> Anna Comnena, *Alexiad*, I.10-16; on Anna's portrayal of the Normans, see Loud, *Conquerors and Churchmen*, chapter on "Anna Komnena."
- <sup>32</sup> Duncalf, *Councils of Piacenza and Clermont*, in *Crusades*, I, 223; Charanis, "Byzantium, the West," pp.17-24.
- <sup>33</sup> Smith, *Call from the East*, pp.11-28.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp.25-28.

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