

THE PHENOMENON OF MEDIEVAL IMMIGRATION – THE RELEVANCE OF THE WELCOMING STATE REACTION

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Abstract: This study tries to make a short approach to the immigration issue and the reverberations caused by it. The subject of migration is worrying for all the world's governments. From America to Australia the borders are full of people who are seeking for a better future. Not to mention the events caused this summer in Europe. So, the immigration is a reality that can not be neglected. The globalization and the socio-economic uniformity of the contemporary world has a new baby: immigration. Perhaps the answer to this new dilemma, appropriate ways to absorb the immigration phenomenon, is offered by the past, the Medieval times. By exposing a medieval paradigm – the Venetian quarter from Constantinople in the XIth-XIIth centuries and the relationship between Venice and Byzantine – we are trying to identify the most appropriate action to be taken by a State when is faced with immigrants.

Keywords: Medieval History, Crusades, Emigration, Venice, Globalization.

In the beginning, we must remind the great waves of immigrants have caused, in every era of the history, massive changes.¹ First of all it would be appropriate to achieve a conceptual redefinition. Immigration is ultimately a fancy term because it reminds us that two worlds meet or collide for the first time. The issue of contemporary immigration exposes the meeting between West and East. But the meeting between West and East has a longer history than it seems. And it all starts in Constantinople. By the daring translation of the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to Constantine the Great Bizantion accomplished more than he proposed: the union of two parts of the world. And, not incidentally, the metropolis on the Bosphorus have to quickly reach the status of center of the known world.

The medieval Constantinople was deeply cosmopolitan. In view of its size and the fact that the borders touched three continents, the Byzantine Empire could not be immune to the influences of nations that it comprises. Knead on the the universalist and imperialist ideology, the Byzantines considered themselves de jure and de facto successors, protectors and followers most justified of Roman civilization.

The Divine Providence has selected the people who has found a new home on the banks of the Bosphorus to guide to good and to the true God destinies of the world. Therefore, in all eras the Byzantine emperors fought on all fronts that have enabled logistics availability to demonstrate their superiority. The dream of the Emperor Justinian (527-565) to transform the Mediterranean Sea into a „roman lake” or the triumphant campaign at the Holy Places of the first bazileu Heraclius (610-641) fall precise to the Byzantine concepts.

The Western World at the dawn of the second millennium needed a new perspectives. For the Western world the East offered a new horizon. Those latins who were the first to found the Eastern world were the pilgrims to the Holy Land in general aristocrats, who understood the potential of the Levantine area. But to get there they had to cross the most powerful empire of the time, the Byzantine Empire. Nor Greek riches could not be neglected. Until the Crusades, which constitutes the most appropriate paradigm of the Medieval

¹ Pierre Daru, *Histoire de la Republique de Venise*, vol. I, Imprimeurs de L’Institut de France, Paris, 1853, p. 2.

immigration, the Byzantine Emperors opened the door to Venetians. In exchange for military support in the war between the Greeks and Normans, from the beginning of his reign, Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118) in March 1082 issued a *chrysobull*, which canceled any transit fee in the Greek ports for Venice. Among other privileges, the document provides for the Venetian quays, buildings, a bakery and a church in Constantinople. These areas formed the nucleus of a future Venetian neighborhood in the capital of Byzantium, busy with sailors, traders, ambassadors, prisets, adventurers and simply curious. Punctual we are interested in how the host state, Byzantium, managed or surrendered in front of the immigration phenomenon, manifested by the Venetians permeated in the texture of the most enviable metropolis of the twelfth century, the queen of cities, Constantinople.

The interaction between the Byzantines and Venetians, representatives of two different worlds provoked the society in Constantinople. Our interest does not relate to historical events that are largely known and have been extensively reviewed. More relevant seems, for the disturbing context of the world today, offering solutions for the today immigration phenomenon or at least to avoid errors. And the first mistake of the Host State was the haste with which the Venetian people were invited in the Byzantine capital. Of course the war with the the Normans and the help needed from the venetians ships, widows the bizantines of many options but the lack of any principle is defiant to Byzantium. Especially the Greek opinion towards the Latins was not flattering just as we learn even from the Emperor Alexios I's daughter, Ana.²

An error that has occurred since 991 was the exceptional jurisdiction of the Venetians in the Byzantine State. We do not understand how the emperor Basil II Macedonian (958-1025) himself has allowed to the Venetians to be controlled and supervised by only one person. It is true that it was an official of the highest degree, assimilated to a current foreign minister, named *loghotet tou dromou* but it is clear with his many tasks he had not time to investigate in detail the venetian crafts.³ The privileged status would have allowed the Venetians from Constantinople in the capital of the Byzantine Empire a sealant position.

The Venetian quarter was founded in the port area of the Byzantine capital named the Golden Horn and after positioning we realize that the place was very well chosen. This is explained by the intense commercial activity carried out by the Venetians in the Empire before the year 1082. Citizens of Pisa and Genoa will subsequently receive places in the same area but the best wharves will be held by the Venetians. For a century, the Venetian quarter, in particular and the Italian area from the Golden Horn, in general, have gained a scale that began to arouse envy between Greeks. Even the design style of the Italian church buildings from Constantinople has attracted the jealousy of the Byzantines in comparison with the modest dimensions of the Greek churches.⁴

The difficult cohabitation with the Italians on the Bosphorus sea-banks led the Byzantines to reinforce their negative opinion towards Venetians who were equally devoid of virtues like the other Latins and now, with substantial financial accumulations, had become even rude. This is a critical point of our debate because the changes in perception, especially those from the Byzantines point of view, had a terrible role in the evolution of events, defining both the history of the Byzantine Empire and the Republic of Venice. For the

² Ana Comnena, *Alexiada*, vol. I, Biblioteca pentru toți, Editura Minerva, București, 1977.

³ G.F. Tafel, G.M. Thomas, *Urkunden zur altern Handels und Staatsgeschichte der Republik Venedig*, Wien, 1856, p. 51-54.

⁴ Paul Magdalino, „The Maritime neighborhoods of Constantinople: Commercial and Residential Functions, Sixth to Twelfth Centuries”, in: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, No. 54, Alice-Mary TALBOT, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington, D.C., 2000, p. 226.

inhabitants of Constantinople was very delicate to adapt to Italian manners supported by money earned from the elimination of the Greeks at the forefront of commercial activities.⁵

It may be that the Greeks have been uncomfortable revealing their own character through the eyes of connoisseurs Venetians. Entering in the privacy of the Constantinopolitan society, the Venetians had discovered to the Byzantines that their civilization itself is not so exemplary, but that includes many flaws linked to their nature.⁶

On the other hand, the link between Venetian settlers and the population of Constantinople was, at first, balanced. And the main factors that led to the harmonization of relations was manifested by neighborhood housing and mixed marriages. Byzantine historians, as John Kinnamos, recall the marriage of Venetian citizens with Byzantine women and the employment of the Greek houses. These marriages interest and a religious explanation for that were mixed families were born. The new types of kinship did not suit to a conservative Byzantium. The Latins, on the other hand, they were not excited of the mixed marriages, because the eastern wives lead the Westerners to renounce to their religious traditions.

To be attractive to immigrants the receiving State shall arouse a cultural appetite. In our case, the Venetians were delighted by the byzantine **culture**. The best example is the church of Saint Mark from Venice. In building were involved numerous Byzantine human resources among architects and builders. In fact, the very architecture of the church respected the plan provided by the church Saints Apostles in Constantinople. The cult of St. Mark is referential to Venice. For that, the Venetians have build a church dedicated to the Saint Mark even in Constantinople. From 1136 the spiritual center of the venetians from Constantinople became the Church of St. Mark. Until then, the *chrysobull* from 1082 mention the disposal of the church St. Achyndin to the Venetians. The Relevance of this holy place was not just spiritual. The church had owned a bakery, essential catering element of the lagoon. More important in the care of churches were trade measures and the commercials weights. At Constantinople had came not only Venetian sailors and traders but also leading people of culture: the philosopher Jacobo Veneticus and the clergyman Moise da Brolo. They have reached to become members to constantinopolitan society since they have been involved in religious discussions of the capital on the Bosphorus.⁷ These discussions are an important element of the concerns of society cults of Byzantium. If we read the pages of *Alexiad*, written by Anna Komnenos, he most trusted sources of the time, we observe that the religious element is prominent.⁸ Emperor Alexios I have engage heavily in religious discussion and even acts as a bishop or a Patriarch who struggle against heresies, even pronouncing anathemas.

In sixty years, the Venetian residents from Constantinople had caught roots and claimed the refurbishment and augmentation of their housing. The opportunity was offered during the Second Crusade when rendering the customary maritime assistance, demanded instead extend to Italians locations from the Greek metropolis.⁹ The third emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1181) tried to control the Venetian colony in Constantinople, who growed in too much volume. King Manuel I felt that the problems generated by the new residents of

⁵ Thomas Madden, *Enrico Dandolo and the rise of Venice*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2003, p. 9.

⁶ Michael Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204. A political History*, Longman House, Essex, England, 1984, p. 203.

⁷ P. Schreiber, *L'importance culturelle des colonies occidentales en territoire byzantin*, in: *Coloniser au MoyenAge*, M. Balard, A. Ducellier, Paris, 1995, pp. 288-293.

⁸ Ana Comnena, *Alexiada*, vol. I, Biblioteca pentru toți, Editura Minerva, București, 1977.

⁹ Giorgio Ravegnani, *Bisanzio e Venezia*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2006, p. 83.

Constantinople should be handled with tact and imposed very specific terminology to describe Westerners who established their residence, the latter commercial business or dating in the Byzantine capital. So the Venetians were shared in two categories: *burgensis*, namely those residents fixed in the capital by commercial relationships or even conjugal and who were expressing fidelity towards Byzantium, named after the statutory qualifying *douloi* and those who were just in traffic. It seems that this vigorous action of the byzantine king was a part of a larger incorporation of immigrants into the Byzantine society.¹⁰

Especially since the late twelfth century, the Byzantine leadership was firmly determined to clarify the issue of immigration, at least in the area of Constantinople, using the same nominal and social demarcation on other Latins existing in the byzantine capital, like citizens of Pisa, Genoa or franks. At the first sight, the measure seems feasible and we can add it like a suggestion addressed to the today leaders concerned about immigrant absorption. I think that absorption is the key word in the question of immigration. An this absorption must be a action taken account by the both sides. If the host element will behave biased and higher, the immigrants will landlocked and at the first problem will be born regrettable tensions. I suppose that the success of the absorption of the immigration elements is like a beautiful marriage: you must like from your partner the defects too, not only the skills.

The immigration cause complex complications, especially for receiving state, but when it can not be avoided it is not necessary to be considered to the real intensity and to the long-term effects.

Returning to the event occurred in the twelfth century, it is normal that the initial systematization and organization of immigrants must by followed, subsequently, by the elimination of disturbing factors from the new colony. But the fundamental mistake of the king Manuel was that he acted too impulsively, as was his nature, and relatively late. The king acted too shallow and did not expected the effects of its measures.

The emblematic Greek historians of the period, John Kinnamos and Nicetas Choniates, in their works¹¹ convey the concern or the merger of the Latin conglomerate with the Byzantine structure of society but are forced to recognize that it is a reality that can not be ignored. They were even worried by the growing Italian element in the Byzantine Empire. Nicetas Choniates remembers the entering of the Venetians in the Eastern Roman Empire and the severity of their insulting attitude towards the native locals, the Byzantines. It is poignant the passage in which he describes the lightness with which the Venetians have left their homeland and moved peremptory in Byzantium:

„Adopted by *romans* when they needed naval forces, they fled their homeland to Constantinople in swarms and clans. From there they dispersed throughout the Roman Empire; withholding only their surname and considered as native and genuine *romans*, they grew and gathered together. They accumulated great wealth and have become so arrogant and insolent that it acted belligerently against Rome but they also ignored the commands and Imperial threats”¹².

We see that the growth of the Venetians wealth residing in Byzantium in the context of the decreasing comfort of the local Greeks were disturbing for the Constantinopolitan society. The people from Constantinople withstood to the Venetians through actions of

¹⁰ Silvio Borsari, *Venezia e Bisanzio nel XII secolo. I rapporti economici*, Deputazione Editrice, Venezia, 1988, p. 50.

¹¹ Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, Bartholomei Javarina, Venetiis, 1729 and John Kinnamos, *The Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, tr.C.M.Brand, New York, 1976.

¹² Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, Bartholomei Javarina, Venetiis, 1729, p. 90.

burning the houses of their neighborhood.¹³ It is the first time when the Byzantines anger was directed to the area inhabited by Italians in Constantinople. This operation imagined a precedent with numerous aftershocks.

Another remark is about the interruption between the Venetians settlers and their authorities from the Italian lagoon. As an exemple we offer the fact that the Doge Vitale Michiel II (1156-1172) has called often his subjects from Constantinople but his appeal was ignored. The Grand Council remained only with the ability to fine the relatives of the departed citizens.¹⁴

The mistakes made by the Host, the byzantine State, and the Venetians from Constantinople evolved in time and led towards a conflict materialized into the arrest of all Venetians from the Byzantine Empire, on the day of 23 March 1171. It is hard to understand how Emperor Manuel I managed to fulfill such a decision since it was needed for a well-organized administration, having in mind the immense surface of the Empire. Judging through the consequences, the rough measure taken by the Byzantine emperor was not very inspired because Venetians will retaliate soon. After stopping the political relations with Byzantium, Venice leadership has turned his attention towards the alliance with the Normans, the German Empire and the Pope, the traditional enemies of the Greeks.

After some years the Emperor Manuel Komnenos returned to better feelings and restarted the diplomatic dialogue between Venice and Byzantium. The Venetians started to occupy their properties from Constantinople in 1183 but it was too late. A normal relationship between the two countries was no longer possible. The animosity worsened rapidly and became serious since Venice would be a important factor for The Forth Crusade which led to the conquest of Constantinople from 1204.

As we have seen the Host State, Byzantium in our case, made fatal errors when it had to face the immigration problem. It was not able neither to receive nor to remove in a friendly way the newcomers. Thus the receiving State must be careful from the beginning on the principles that will guide the relationship between immigrants and their new home. Most times things happen quickly and precipitate and therefore every state needs a plan to relate to immigrants which must include a clear set of measures. And between them should not be too many favors or as those contained by the *chrysobulls* from 992 and 1082. A key element of these documents was special jurisdiction. Being controlled by only one byzantine official was a serious error. New entrants must comply with new state laws. Otherwise the situation will become chaotic. A good exemple of legislation and jurisdiction can be taken from Venice. Those who wanted to settle here were close supervised and must meet certain conditions to receive the status of Venetian citizen, including the proof of the payment for 10 years of taxes claimed by the Republic.¹⁵

From a different point of view, the immigrants can became for the receiving State one way to self-knowledge. Perhaps this knowledge was not flattering for the byzantines of the 12th century and urged them to extreme gestures, culminating with the arrest of all Venetians in 1171 and full extermination of Latin in the capital on the Bosphorus, in 1182.¹⁶

¹³ Michael Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204. A political history*, Longman House, Essex, England, 1984, p. 154.

¹⁴ Andrea Castagnetti, „Il primo comune”, in: *Storia di Venezia, II, L'eta del comune*, Roma, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia italiana, 1995, p. 90.

¹⁵ Yadira González de Lara „The Secret of Venetian Success: Public-order yet Reputation-based Institutions”, in *XIV International Economic History Congress*, Helsinki, 2006, p. 17.

¹⁶ Michael Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204. A political History*, Longman House, Essex, England, 1984, p. 203.

The inevitable differences in mentality can be alleviated by using the means of culture. The fact that from its beginnings Venice had a strong relationship with Byzantium, that shared the same faith and that the icon of Venice Saint Mark Cathedral was built with Byzantine help helped the Venetians that came in Constantinople to adapt rapidly.

In our days we must follow the positive attempts made by the Byzantine emperors to adapt Venetians in the Constantinopolitan society. For the contemporary problem of immigration from the relationship between Italians and Byzantines, from the twelfth century, we can extract a few factors which today we must take them into consideration: a flexible legislative framework, the constant endeavor to absorb the colonizing element, taking account for culture of both sides and, most important, respect and understanding.

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