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AN INQUIRY INTO WESTERN AID RECEIVED BY BYZANTIUM DURING THE SIEGE OF CONSTANTINOPLE (1453)

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Abstract: While many studies provide detailed narrative or military analyses of the capture of Constantinople, few offer a comprehensive structural explanation for the absence of Western aid. By utilizing typological analysis and synthesizing insights from multiple studies, this paper aims to supplement the account of the capture of Constantinople and construct a macro-to-micro causal framework to answer why Western aid was limited and inadequate during the siege. This paper first provides a general account of Byzantine history after the Fourth Crusade in the 13th century and identifies the scope of this research. It then categorizes Western states by their interests into three groups—pan-Balkan countries, Italian merchant republics, and the Pope—and elucidates each one. Ultimately, this paper aims to establish a holistic, interrelated, and multifaceted causal framework that integrates political, economic, and religious factors spanning four centuries to explain the research question.
Keywords: Siege of Constantinople (1453); Western Aid; Byzantine Empire; East-West Schism; Decree of Florence; Ottoman Conquest; Republic of Venice; Battle of Varna

1 INTRODUCTION

And yet, even when God's just anger was overtaking you, your hearts were not inclined towards peace. Even in such circumstances, if an angel had come down from heaven, making this offer to you: 'If you accept the Union, and the peaceful settlement of the Church, I shall drive your enemies from the city'—even then, you would not have consented. Or if you had, it would have been only a feigned agreement; you know this in your hearts, you who only a few days before were saying, 'Better to fall into the hands of the Turks than into those of the Franks!' [1] —Doukas, Byzantine historian from the 15th century

On Tuesday, 29th May 1453, Constantinople was captured. The Ottoman soldiers first seized the walls, then the gates, and fighting their way through the city, they eventually reached the Hagia Sophia, where they cleaved its huge bronze doors apart and exposed the last citizens in hiding along with the priceless treasures inside [1-3]. The thousand-year-old state had been brutally put to rest by the Ottomans, and the capture of its capital marked the end of the once magnificent *Imperium Romanum* and its legacy, the *Basileia Rhomaion*[1].

The capture of Constantinople signifies a watershed moment in European history. For contemporary countries, most importantly, the event enabled the Ottomans to reshape the Eastern European geopolitical landscape shortly thereafter. Byzantium had long been a vanguard of Christendom defending against Islamic powers, and with its capture, Christian states west of Greece now faced the threat directly themselves. They surely witnessed what followed. For the next two centuries, the Ottoman Empire posed a perennial threat to European countries in the west, among them many capitulated and were annexed. Byzantium was of direct interest to trading republics like Venice, and for many states, its existence mattered far beyond religious reasons. The Byzantines were well aware that they could not stop the Turks by themselves, and for years, they made many efforts to gain help from their fellow Christians in the West. However, when Mehmed started besieging Constantinople in April 1453, western succour was far from adequate. When the siege started, the only support received from the west was the 200 archers that Cardinal Isidore brought with him from Crete and the Western populations that were unfortunate enough to be stuck in the city [4]. A few more arrived during the siege, but nothing substantial[2]. This then raises the question: Why did Byzantium receive minor, inadequate aid from Western Christendom during the siege of Constantinople in 1453?

To this day, the collapse of the Byzantine Empire has been widely discussed, with numerous works examining its weakening or the siege itself. While many studies and books offer extensive descriptions and analyses of the event collectively, most focus on the narrative of the siege, and none formulates a comprehensive and structural causal explanation for the absence of Western aid. Among the most renowned scholarships are Sir Steven Runciman's Fall of Constantinople (1965), Roger Crowley's 1453: *The Holy War for Constantinople and the Clash of Islam and the West* (2006), and Michael Angold's *The Fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans: Context and Consequences* (2014). These works mostly account for the chronicle of the event and only sporadically mention Byzantium's diplomatic predicaments, though a full explanation seems beyond their narrative focus. They devote more attention to the consequences of the reconciliation than to others. Other works, such as Donald M. Nicol's *Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations*, devote more to diplomatic and political analyses and offer case studies of individual diplomatic relationships. By utilizing typological analysis and synthesizing insights from multiple studies, this paper aims to supplement the account of the capture of Constantinople and construct a macro-to-micro causal framework to answer the research question.

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This paper first provides a general account of Byzantine history after the Fourth Crusade in the 13th century and identifies the scope of this research. It then categorizes Western states by their interests into three groups and elucidates each one: first, it analyzes the Crusade of Varna (1443-1444) and the Crusade of Kosovo (1448), showing their impact on pan-Balkan states and how these events caused them to leave Byzantium on its own. Then, it evaluates the affairs of the Italian Republics—namely, Venice and Genoa—and their deliberations on providing aid, revealing why the Republics also failed to salvage Byzantium. Finally, it examines Byzantium's attempt to reconcile the East-West Schism in its last years, explaining why the reconciliation came too late for the Pope and the Catholic states to respond. Ultimately, this paper aims to establish a holistic, interrelated, and multifaceted causal framework spanning four centuries to explain Western states' absence during the siege of Constantinople in 1453.

2 A DWINDLING EMPIRE

In 1204, a crusade originally aiming for Egypt was gathered but ended up eliminating Byzantium instead. The siege of Constantinople by the Christians was surprisingly successful; the city was captured by the crusaders, who established a Frankish state on the remnants of Byzantium. What followed was sixty years of disarray, and when Michael VIII Palaiologos recaptured Constantinople in 1261, he inherited an extremely weakened state. Emperor Michael VIII endeavored to repair the country during his following years in reign, even expanding some of its influence, but the burden he laid on the country's economy proved his efforts a double-edged sword [5]. The legacy of Michael VIII was little more than a weakened and overstrained state. His successor, Andronikos II Palaiologos (r. 1282-1328), attempted to stabilize what was rapidly crumbling apart, but ultimately failed. His reforms to "save the country" mostly backfired heavily, and during his reign, Byzantium continued to weaken, reduced to a second-rate power [3]. The civil wars in the following century, inflicted by Andronikos III in 1321 and John VI Kantakouzenos a mere twenty years later, exacerbated the weakening of Byzantium, and the invasions from Serbia most definitely accelerated its collapse [5]. By the time the newly emerged Ottomans captured Gallipoli in 1354 [3, 5], all that was left of the state was Thessaly and some minor territories across the Aegean Sea. Byzantium would still linger for another century, but those hundred years amounted merely to "a prelude to the history of the Ottoman Empire that was to take over its provinces and finally its capital in 1453", accurately described by Professor Donald Nicol. By 1453, Byzantine territory was no larger than the city of Constantinople and some lands surrounding it. They controlled the Peloponnese peninsula as a despotate, but Mehmed II had already scorched the place in 1452, for it would obviously provide support for the city if under siege [3]. The realm was in a state of drastic vulnerability and dilapidation, and to survive, it had to rely on others—other powers that could actually contend with the increasingly powerful Ottoman Empire.

It is important to understand the situation of the Byzantine Empire in 1453, as it helps us filter which countries to analyze and determine how to analyze them. Aforementioned, Byzantium was by this time no larger than a city-state, and its influence on other countries was merely minimal. Hence, for most cases, there was little that Byzantium, as a "second-rate power", could do to dictate whether Western countries would send assistance or not. In the 1450s, Constantine XI presented lavish appeals for anyone who could come to aid, but yielded few results. For Ragusa, he promised special trading privileges; for Aragon, he promised the island of Lemnos; and he did the very same to Venice, Genoa, the Pope, and Hungary, but all in vain [6]. Even if the reconciliation provided the Greek side with room for maneuvering, Byzantium's ruling class was still curbed by its subjects on the ultimate enactment of the Decree of Florence[3]. Therefore, the analysis should focus only on states with spontaneous interests in Byzantium, and Western states should be prioritized in the analytical method. In the third section, the religious populace, rather than Byzantium, should be the main subject of analysis in most scenarios.

2.1 The Consequences of a Crusade

Most countries in the pan-Balkan region shared a common fate with Byzantium. The Ottoman threat was universal, and they often allied to dismantle the yoke. The Crusade of Nicopolis in 1396 was one instance, though it met with a crushing defeat by Bayezid I. Following Nicopolis was another unsuccessful attempt: Varna, which came close and eliminated the chances of the involved countries gathering again. This section will briefly present the progression of the Crusades of Varna and Kosovo and analyze how they disabled associated countries from aiding Byzantium.

2.2 The Legacy of Varna

Crusades in the Balkans were common to the Christian countries; also common, ironically, were their defeats by the Ottomans. Most consequential to the capture of Constantinople was the debacle of the Crusade of Varna in 1444. The Crusade began on 1st January 1443, as a result of the decisions reached by the Council of Florence [7]. Composed of Poles, Hungarians, Lithuanians, Croatians, Bosnians, and many more minor countries, the Christian army was initially victorious as they advanced into Ottoman lands in October, but as they marched further into the mountains, they were unexpectedly obstructed in the Zlatitsa pass by Ottoman troops led by Murad II. Commander John Hunyadi tried to break out, but his attempt failed, and the army suffered a devastating defeat. They retreated along the same path, yet whilst they did, they carried out an ambush and captured the son-in-law of the Sultan by the Dragoman pass, a feat they demonstrated to the Christian world as evidence for their being "triumphant." More support was then gathered [7-8].

By September 1444, the Christians had finished their preparations and were ready for the second campaign. They set out on the 20th. The army marched from Szeged to the coast of Varna, raiding settlements and slaughtering Turks along

the way. Hurried back from Anatolia [9], Murad II and his men eventually confronted the Christian army near the town of Varna on 10th November 1444. At the outset, the Christians seemed to be holding their line, yet it was one ambiguous move that changed the whole outcome. Sometime into the battle, the Sultan ordered his janissaries to make their way down a hill. King Wladyslaw III, ruler of Hungary and Poland, saw this as a great opportunity since the Sultan now seemed vulnerable, and, eager to achieve glory for himself, launched a flippant assault against the Sultan's ranks with his cavalry. He was killed and beheaded. With their king and commander nowhere to be found, the Christian army quickly descended into chaos and began to flee [7-8]. The aftermath of the battle proved brutal for the Christian side, with the coalition forces suffering tens of thousands of casualties. As their king was slaughtered during action, Hungary soon fell into disorder, even facing collapse. Though it recovered when Hunyadi came to power in 1446, by then, no other allies had any hopes for a new crusade to aid Byzantium. The Crusade of Varna was the last great attempt to stop the Turks, and if Hunyadi wanted to continue to fight the Ottomans, he would be on his own [3, 7].

After Varna, resistance against the Ottomans in the Balkans soon became sporadic. Kastrioti Skanderbeg, Lord of Albania, continued to fight, as did John Hunyadi. Hunyadi started another small crusade in 1448; hoping that Skanderbeg could catch up to him, he marched into Serbia and ultimately encountered the Ottomans on the plains of Kosovo. His fate, however, was no better than the fate of those who fought there similarly sixty years earlier. Skanderbeg never showed up, and after three days of intense battle, the Hungarians were defeated yet again. Failing another crusade, Hunyadi knew that he did not have the resources to further contend with the Turks. He turned his interests away from the Balkans and focused on defending his homeland instead [3]. Varna and Kosovo thus marked the end of any chance that he would again try to help the Byzantines. Later in 1451, Hunyadi even reached a three-year truce with the Ottomans and adhered to it [10].

Note that securing a crusade would require major forces to respond to the rally for assurance and to appeal to minor states; Hungary, along with Poland, which was linked with Hungary under a personal union until Wladyslaw's death, fulfilled this role during Varna, but after three decisive defeats, the attenuated and exhausted country plausibly could not [3, 11]. The participants, especially the minor powers, participated in Varna not only for Byzantium, but also for their own survival, in order to oppose the Ottoman threat clearly indicated by the Sultanate's military actions in Transylvania and Serbia prior to Varna [7]. They suffered similarly, and with no new coalitions likely to form after Varna and Kosovo, none would even dare to help the Byzantines, even if the end of Byzantium meant facing a more immediate Ottoman threat. Like Hunyadi, Skanderbeg also struggled to contest the Ottomans. The Venetians took him as a threat to their commercial activities in the Balkans and sabotaged him together with the Turks. Under pressure, Skanderbeg had to contract his operations and similarly shifted to a defensive posture. Thus, there remained [4, 12].

2.3 Serbia and Aragon

One exception among the Balkan participants of the Crusade was Serbia. If there was anyone who truly benefited from the Crusade of Varna, Serbian Despot George Branković must be one of them. As a result of the Treaty of Edirne, Branković regained Serbia proper along with a few other fortresses, restoring Serbia that had been previously annexed by the Ottomans in 1441 [12]. He also got his two sons back. Though the Despotate of Serbia had great relations with Byzantium, even funding the repair of parts of the Theodosian wall, Serbian aid was nowhere to be found when the siege of Constantinople started—they were actually on the other side helping the Sultan as a vassal [3]. How did this happen? The explanation lies in the associations between Serbia and the Ottomans. Branković had long been juggling relations with the Turks; as early as 1435, he had married his daughter to Sultan Murad II. The Sultan gave her great respect, and so did his successor Mehmed II, which was a highly favorable situation for Branković. The two sons he got back were previously captured by the Ottomans in 1439 and blinded, leaving Branković well intimidated. He refused to participate in the second campaign of the Crusade of Varna to be loyal to the Treaty of Edirne, which promised peace between Serbia and the Ottoman Empire, nor did he help Hunyadi in the Battle of Kosovo, during which he even warned the Ottomans about the attack. The Sultan had been friendly hitherto, and Branković knew he could not risk antagonizing the Ottomans. It would only result in an Ottoman invasion. This consideration most likely shaped Branković's decisions to side with Mehmed II when the latter laid siege to Constantinople. Furthermore, wars and disputes with Bosnia and Hungary had greatly exhausted the state, further explaining his decision to leave Byzantium on its own [3, 13].

Aragon was an exceptional case, as its interests in Byzantium were due to its King, Alfonso V. Alfonso was an ambitious man who envisioned restoring the Latin Empire and bringing the Orthodox East back under Catholic rule. To no one's surprise, he demanded Constantine XI's throne for the price of his reinforcement, and his aid was equally illusory [4, 6, 11].

As previously mentioned, though many pan-Balkan countries were aware of their fate once Byzantium was captured, none dared to contest the Ottomans, nor did they have the ability to do so. Varna had deprived them of it. A crusade was potentially a solution to their weakness by combining forces, but one had failed less than seven years before the siege of Constantinople in 1453. Their weaknesses, along with the unwillingness of the Pope, as discussed later in this paper, hindered further ones from being rallied. This brings us to the remaining states that still could have a chance to provide succour, but as the following sections will show, some refused, and others failed to.

3 THE ITALIAN MERCHANT REPUBLICS

Venice and Genoa were two main beneficiaries of Byzantium; the vast privileges within Byzantine land had facilitated their trade with convenience and market access, and the state's's trade routes basically generated more wealth for them than for itself. Until the end, the state couldn't even transport its own grain to its capital [4]. In contrast to the Balkan countries surrounding Byzantium, which would defend Byzantium for their own safety, Venice and Genoa would likely defend Byzantium for their profits, which provided the republics with very flexible policies and tendencies towards the Ottoman Empire. In the end, the two responded differently, but both failed to reach their objectives of obtaining an outcome they thought to be optimal[4].

3.1 Optimism, Disappointment, and a Predicament

Both the Most Serene Republic of Venice and the Republic of Genoa's main interest in the East Mediterranean was trade. Byzantium provided them with the concessions to trade, and the asymmetrical privileges they gradually gained since the 13th century enabled them to be in a far superior position to Greek or other merchants. Obtaining these privileges often entailed wars, or at least conflicts with the emperor. Brutal force, however, proved much less effective against the Ottoman Sultanate, as they were substantially more powerful than the Byzantine Empire, already one foot in the grave [4]. Whether retaining the Byzantine Empire was necessary to the two republics depended on both the Ottomans and the Byzantines: if trade with the Turks turned out to be possible or even more palatable than with the Byzantines, the republics would likely stay neutral in the wars between the two adversaries—even if the side they cherished was an infidel from the Christian perspective [14].

For both Venice and Genoa, the circumstances were complex; though, as mentioned earlier, they had vast advantages that they could easily exploit to obtain great wealth in Byzantine lands, the Turks were not completely unnegotiable. Venice had just had its privileges reconfirmed by the emperor in 1450, but it also established a trading business within the Sultanate that had recently started earning remarkable profits [11]. The aggrandizement of Ottoman territory brought them into proximity with Venetian colonies, and Sultan Murad I had granted them various trading privileges in the late 14th century. Genoa also had trading relationships with the Ottomans. Both Genoa and Venice signed an agreement in 1403, which was reconfirmed after every conflict. Trade was prominent and frequent, eventually becoming so essential that after the capture of Constantinople, even in times of war between Venice and the Ottomans, trade was still maintained with the help of the Republic of Ragusa as an intermediary [14]. The Venetians and Genoese both imported large amounts of grain along with other food products produced on the Anatolia highlands to fuel their Mediterranean colonies; metals, such as lead, copper, and silver, were imported into the Genoese Colony of Chios and then exported to western Europe, and it was also Genoa that had almost monopolized the alum trade in Ottoman lands. Their merchants bought spices, cotton, slaves, and silk from Ottoman markets and, in turn, sold brocades, velvets, wine, and woolens to them. The further the Turks expanded into Europe, the more utilized these trading networks became [15]. Trade with the infidels became immensely important to the two republics, and provoking the Ottomans would likely worsen the situation.

Apart from relying on trading with the Turks, their position vis-à-vis the Turks forced them to comply. Striking differences were evident in the ambassadorial exchanges: Venice had dispatched its first ambassador in 1365. The Ottomans did so later, in 1383. By the time Byzantium was captured in 1453, a mere ten ambassadors of the Sultanate saw its presence in the Venetian court, compared to the more than fifty Venetian ambassadors. This numerical disparity of ambassadors sent suggested that the necessity of Levantine trade for Venice was supported by the Ottomans, and the fact that the Turks could easily find substitutes for Venetians, such as Genoa or Ragusa, also contributed to this imbalance. Ultimately, it was the Venetians who had to adapt to Ottoman initiatives, a pattern not mirrored on the Ottoman side. The permission of whether a foreigner could trade or not depended on the Sultan's *Ahidnâme*, a letter guaranteeing both peace and freedom for foreigners and non-Muslim communities. The foreigner was required to "recognize the sultan as guarantor of his own freedom", and in return, the Sultan recognized his trading rights. This *Ahidnâm*e, however, was appreciably mismatched; the Sultan had arbitrary power to retract this letter one-sidedly by only considering his country's laws and interests, and should he so wish, the pact could be immediately rescinded. Both Venice and Genoa had already gained this *Ahidnâme* for its merchants in the 1403 Agreement, a settlement reconfirmed by Mehmed II when he ascended to the throne [16]. Not to say that Venice already had a non-aggression treaty with the Ottomans, which they would violate in order to send soldiers to Constantinople [10]. This further increased the penalties for the two to aid Byzantium during the war with the Ottomans.

Unlike the appealing prospects of Ottoman trade, Venetian business with the Byzantines started to sour right at the crucial timepoint of two years before the siege. It started when some new taxes were imposed on trade goods imported to Constantinople, including fur and wine that were imported from the Turks, in which the Venetians were engaged. The Venetians in the city felt extremely antagonized by the emperor's "pathetic attempt", and authoritative remonstrances were quickly lodged by their representative, Nicolò da Canale. He even threatened the emperor with harsh menaces, such as evacuating all Venetian citizens to a more secure area and denying any kind of requested assistance whenever Byzantium was in peril. Emperor Constantine XI explained there were desperate needs for these funds, but the Venetians did not acquiesce. Even after a compromise that the emperor would remove all taxes, the Venetians continued to stress the menaces [4, 17]. The Venetians were already deliberating on whether to leave Byzantium on its own, and an envoy who arrived in April 1451, carrying the news that portions of the trade taxes would still be levied, only worsened the circumstances. By then, the Canale was even ordered to negotiate with the Ottomans for the port of Herakleia, a substitute port envisioned by the Senate, if the Byzantines would not budge. Moreover,

Byzantium also had 17,163 *hyperpyra* worth of debt unpaid. Eventually, the Venetians lost most hope in Byzantium. The capture of Constantinople was viewed as inevitable, and a sense that a substitute might be found in the Ottoman Empire emerged [4]. Their "harassment of Italian merchants" and their volatile political context were far too alien for Venice's liking [18], and some Venetians even anticipated that a Turkish Constantinople would be more dependable and prosperous, which would better support their trade in the Levant [11]. This series of unpleasant events proved that Venice's focus was more on its privileges rather than on the pure "fate of the city." [4] It was unsurprising then that they neglected the fact that Constantinople was constantly threatened by the ambitious Sultanate, and found the news of Byzantium at the brink of elimination so surprising in February 1453.

The Turks were regarded as amicable [4], while the Byzantines were seen as discreditable. From their failed attempt to sustain Thessalonica, the Venetians learnt "that the goodwill of the Sultans was far more important than that of the emperors." [4] Both Italian republics carefully cultivated relations with the Turks throughout the decades, and hopes of allowing the Ottomans to replace the Byzantine Empire proved more and more feasible as an increasing number of negotiations and agreements were signed between them and the Sultanate. In conjunction with how Canale coerced Constantine XI, threatening to refuse aid if taxes were perpetuated, the reasons why Venice severely delayed sending aid to Byzantium lay in its optimism regarding Ottoman trade and its priority to resolve its disputes with the "unfair" taxes. Both republics' brittle relationships with the Turks meant they were required to please the Sultan continually, and the importance of their trading business made them refuse to take the risk of infuriating him.

Unlike Genoa, however, Venice ultimately opted to assemble a tremendous fleet that sailed to Constantinople as reinforcements shortly after it heard the shocking news that the city was about to be captured. Their intelligences had never shown such an urgent situation at Byzantium [18], and, completely stunned and unprepared for what was about to happen, they chose to help stabilize the military affairs of the siege. They "anticipated the inevitable", but refused to risk the unexpected. Even so, they still sent an ambassador with the fleet to explain to the Sultan that these ships were sent only to "protect their commerce and the interests of Venice." [4] The fleet, unfortunately, did not, and would never, arrive in Constantinople, for while they were still at sea, their destination had changed from *Kōnstantinoupolis*[5] to *Ḳosṭanṭīnīye*[6] instead. Though the fleet's deferment was directly caused by more proximate reasons, the incredibly late date on which the senate decided that there would be a fleet to aid Byzantium—19th February 1453, only three months before the capture of Constantinople [4]—was intermediately due to its focus on what they viewed as more "beneficial" instead.

Genoa's reaction was, on the other hand, quite the opposite. Though they had similar privileges within Byzantine lands, Genoese citizens were permitted to "do as they pleased", and colonies were instructed to strictly avoid confrontation with the Ottomans. Pera, or Galata tower, was at the heart of the Genoese trading businesses, and, according to the governor of Pera, Angelo Giovanni Lomellino, Genoa was fully reliant on this colony [10-11]. It was their very own commercial quarter, similar to what the Venetians had inside Constantinople, and trade was likewise channeled through the Galata district [4]. The Genoese thought that if they demonstrated neutrality[7], the Turks might just show mercy to their colonies, especially to Pera [11], allowing them to maintain their trading activities in the East Mediterranean. Considering that their failure to assist Byzantium was directly attributable to both their considerable confidence in the outcomes of Ottoman trade and their endorsement of the importance of not interfering with Ottoman plans, this paper contends that they were also major factors behind why Byzantium did not receive adequate aid.

3.2 Underestimation and Procrastination

When the Venetians finally realized that Constantinople was in boiling water, the senate quickly fell into panic. From the envoys sent by Byzantium, they all knew Constantinople was under threat, but none took it seriously [4]. Before, both Venice and Genoa were much distracted by the Italian wars with Milan and Florence [11], and like the Balkan countries, they would not try to contend with the Ottomans on their own [4]. The two sent money and provisions, but were reluctant to provide military aid [10]. Even after the siege had begun, Venetian intelligences still showed optimistic reports on the situation [18], and the messenger sent by the Baillie, upon arriving in February, presumably terrified the Senate. Blatant threats to Venice's interests were as manifest as possible, and no one could definitely guarantee that Ottoman expansion would prove more advantageous, despite whatever earlier relations appeared to indicate. Furthermore, they were already technically at war with the Ottomans when one ship dared to cross the Marmara Strait without Turkish permission on 24th November 1452. The ship was sunk under bombardment by the newly built *Rumeli Hisar*, and the men on it were all beheaded except for one, who was enslaved [4]. The future was only to be bet, and the Senate finally took action.

On 19th February 1453, the Senate sanctioned two transports carrying four hundred armed men and fifteen[8] galleys to be prepared at once. Another two warships were ordered to set sail for Negroponte[9] from Crete. There, Zaccaria Grioni, who had recently fled Constantinople with the latest news, would assume command of the ships. The fleet gathered in Venice was planned to be ready on 8th April. However, the execution phase was carried out at an excruciatingly slow pace. On 2nd March, the Senate realized that the fleet should have a Captain-General, which a week later they appointed Giacomo Loredan. Loredan was still on his way back from Constantinople, and he was originally instructed to stay at Modon, a Venetian colony[10], with his fleet. At Modon, he would wait for Alvise Longo with the fleet of galleys departing from Venice. That said, the ships unfortunately failed to be promptly prepared, and, on 13th April, Longo was reinstructed to set sail with one ship to the island of Tenedos to keep watch of Turkish movements, and Loredan was to return to Venice to fetch the galleys himself. Longo was scheduled to leave on 17th April, but somehow

managed to depart two days late. At Tenedos, they were to meet on 20th May, but the delays nevertheless dragged on. A total of 16,000 ducats for the new warships were supposed to be levied on merchants who had interests associated with Black Sea and Romanian trade, but many refused and had to be threatened to comply. It was on 7th May when the Senate at last ordered Loredan to set sail immediately, despite only with five ships. Even so, the trip was not directed to Constantinople. He first headed to Corfu to pick up more warships, then returned to Modon to be joined by the ships from Crete. He then stopped at Negroponte for provisions and planned to pass Tenedos for Alvise Longo to catch up. Since the Senate received more urgent news from Modon on 11th May, three more ships would join him in Tenedos. He would finally head to Constantinople, which of course he would not do, as the city had already been captured while he was still in Negroponte [4].

Though they tried to save Constantinople, they dawdled, and they failed. For Venice, communication barriers existed, but they were warned months earlier [4, 10]. The time they committed to send aid was already extremely late, and poor coordination with its colonies and within the country further aggravated the delays. In hindsight, Constantinople was captured on 29th May 1453, while the Venetian fleet was still not due to fully gather until 20th May at Tenedos [4], some 270 kilometers from the city. Even the 20th was never met. As expected, they failed to reach the city on time. If the fleet really departed as planned on 8th March, it would probably have reached Constantinople since three Genoese ships sent by the Pope at the end of March did so successfully [3, 11]. On the basis of the above, the procrastination of the Venetian fleet should be considered a major setback of Western aid to Byzantium, if not the most significant one.

4 SCHISM, RECONCILIATION EFFORTS, AND THE POPE

The Papal States were one of the few countries willing to aid Byzantium, but it came at a cost: the Byzantines must not be heretical [11]. This meant that the Eastern and Western Churches would have to reconcile, but in practical terms, it more often meant that the Orthodox Byzantines would have to convert to Catholicism. Enmity, however, accumulated heavily during the centuries after the Schism in 1054, and when it came to forsaking their “righteous” beliefs and reuniting with the Latins, the Byzantines vehemently opposed it. Michael VIII tried to reconcile, but his progress was discarded by Andronikos II [3]. John VIII Palaiologos, the predecessor of Constantine XI, also made great efforts to achieve reconciliation, but they proved fruitless. Much of the opposition persisted and continued to trouble Constantine XI when he attempted the same. This section addresses why it was too late for the Pope to send assistance and exactly what hindered the process.

4.1 The Schism and Efforts of Reconciliation

Why Byzantium was considered heretical by the Pope could be traced back to 1054. On 14th July 1054, three cardinals in full canonical robes stepped into the Hagia Sophia. After delivering a brief speech, they proceeded directly to the altar and placed upon it a bull of personal excommunication [19][11]. They then left, shaking the dust off their feet as they stepped out of the church in accordance with the gospel. The bull excommunicated the ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Michael I Cerularius, Archbishop Leo of Ohrid, the Patriarch Chancellor, and all their associates. Whilst affirming the emperor and the people of Constantinople, the text scornfully accused Cerularius of daily disseminating heresy, for which the legates included a list of them, not least among them allegations of not complying with the addition of the *filioque* clause in the Nicene Creed. The church deacon on duty attempted to return the bull to the legates, begging them to retract it, but they threw it to the ground and continued walking, afterwards refusing to offer any explanation for their actions. The incident caused considerable riots in the days that followed. The document passed through several hands before eventually reaching the patriarch. Upon the emperor learning of the situation from him, an imperial letter was issued, authorizing the patriarch to pronounce anathema back on the legates and to publicly burn a Greek translation of the bull. Four days after the bull was burnt, on 24th July, a synod was convened which formally condemned the bull under strong support from the people [2, 19-20]. From then on, Catholicism and Orthodoxy were generally recognized as two separate churches, an event later interpreted as the symbolic beginning of the East-West Schism[13].

Since the Schism, many emperors before Constantine XI tried to reconcile the two religions, but all in vain. The last attempt was made by Emperor John VIII Palaiologos in the late 1430s. This attempt, though unsuccessful, resulted in the Decree of Florence, the very decree that Constantine XI was required to implement. It foreshadowed many comparable obstacles that Emperor Constantine would later face. During the earlier decades of the 15th century, Byzantine land continued to shrink, and the Turkish threat appeared increasingly prominent. After the capture of Thessalonica from the Venetians, Sultan Murad II quickly turned his army against Epirus and Albania, and the signs were clear that Byzantium was once more destined to become the target of capture by the Ottomans. To preserve the weak state, John VIII resumed the discussion of a reconciliation with the West, reaching out to Pope Martin V in 1430 to explore solutions to the Schism. After Martin V died in 1431, the negotiations were passed down to Pope Eugenius IV. Nonetheless, they gradually reached an agreement in 1437 on holding a council of the whole Church in Ferrara. At the end of November, the Emperor and his delegates departed from Constantinople to attend the Council [3]. The Council handled many disputes between the Eastern and Western Churches; some were carried out smoothly, such as in the cases of the doctrine of Purgatory and the unleavened bread, but others appeared much more contentious, especially the *filioque*[14] quarrel. This *filioque* problem was one of the major controversies between the Churches. The other was the supremacy of the Pope [2]. Orthodox Christians argued that the Father processed the Holy Spirit, while Catholics recognized the procession by both the Father and the Son. The difference was so ingrained that no one gave in. The

problem was only finally resolved with a vague description that "the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father 'through the Son'", thereby "blurring the distinction between the prepositions 'from' and 'through.'" Still, not everyone was pleased by this solution, and during the debates, the Council had to transfer from Ferrara to Florence since the Pope ran out of money. A document of Union was finally drawn up after reaching a questionable "consensus" on all the agendas, and the Orthodox delegation signed the document on 5th July 1439, with the sole exception of one prelate: Mark Eugenikos of Ephesos [3, 21].

The Union was celebrated in Italy with great enthusiasm for it at last resolved the East-West Schism since 1054, but the situation was quite the opposite in Constantinople. By the 15th century, the hostility between the two sides had become far more intense than in 1054 due to numerous infamous conflicts, such as the 1204 Sack of Constantinople. The reconciliation was widely regarded as a humiliation, and the delegates were condemned as traitors of their faith. Shortly thereafter, many delegates who had signed the Union renewed their signatures in a manifesto in 1441. The Orthodox Patriarchs of Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria also rejected the Union and declared the signatures of their representatives invalid. Even worse, Mark Eugenikos, who was endorsed by the masses, soon initiated an anti-unionist campaign in 1442, the same year he returned to Constantinople. Renowned and respected by the people of Constantinople Eugenikos was, even the emperor was unable to act against him. Persecuting him would do no good. Unlike Eugenikos, both Cardinals appointed by the Pope had no popular foundation. Bessarion of Nicaea, the cardinal who was supposed to assist the emperor, fled back to Florence in disgust at the opposition in Constantinople, and Isidore of Kiev was arrested by the Grand Duke Basil II and his furious mob right after he returned to Moscow. He managed to escape and also fled to Italy. On top of that, Unionist George Scholarius switched sides after a debate with Eugenikos, and he proved to be a person with great zeal who would continue to haunt both John VIII and Constantine XI after Eugenikos's death [3]. The Union ended up achieving no lasting effect.

Considering the result, the Union was obviously a void, and the Pope was generous enough to call for the Crusade of Varna to save the Byzantines. As aforementioned, the crusade unfortunately failed, and if the Byzantines expected more actions from the Pope, it would have required them to properly enact the Decree of Florence rather than rebel against it [4, 11]. The responsibility of doing so fell on Constantine XI when he came to the throne, but the disastrous Union and Crusade only further alienated the Byzantines from the West. Similar to John VIII, Constantine XI also identified the approaching threat of the Turks and entreated the Pope for military assistance. Resistance, though, did not fade away. As a Unionist emperor, Constantine was met with opposition from the moment he came to the throne. George Scholarios, a former official of John VIII, refused to serve Constantine [3]. He retired to a monastery under the name Gennadios but nonetheless continued his anti-unionist campaign, organizing a synod of his kindred. Due to his and the Patriarch's unionist identity, Constantine did not dare to be officially crowned in St. Sophia, fearing further riots [2]. But this was exploited by the anti-unionists, and they refused to pray for the emperor in the Churches. Constantine tried to talk some sense into them, but resulted in a debate during which Scholarius and John Eugenikos[15] again denounced all unionists. Eventually, the Patriarch of Constantinople Gergory III Mammes got fed up with all the nonsense and chose to flee to Rome in disappointment, just like Bessarion [3]. With the help of Patriarch Gregory, Pope Nicholas V was fully aware of the rebellious acts of the people when Constantine reached out to him. He did not plan to undertake actions until the Byzantines were serious about the Union. In his reply to Constantine, he made it clear that the city would be left to its own fate if his people did not comply and urged him to suppress the anti-unionist movement. To monitor the enactment of the Decree, in May 1452, Pope Nicholas appointed Cardinal Isidore of Kiev (the one arrested in Moscow) for supervision [2-3]. He sailed in the Mediterranean for three months, during which Scholarios Gennadios gave a compelling harangue from midday to evening, warning people not to betray their faith. Cardinal Isidore arrived on 26th October, along with 200 archers—not much but enough to have a drastic effect on the Byzantines. People started to hope that the archers were only a proportion of a huge army yet to come, and it seemed that unionist opinions finally started to prevail. The ascendency, unfortunately, did not last long when people saw no signs of a larger force arriving in Constantinople. Gennadios's manifesto, which he authored and nailed on his front door after witnessing the prelates' arrival, certainly did not help, and anti-Latin riots soon broke out again. In fear of total chaos, Constantine summoned a new synaxis[16] to assuage and hear the voices of the anti-unionist clergy. Together, they proposed to the emperor a document of protest. They did not appear to be completely incommunicable in the synaxis, stressing which requirements of the Union could be achieved under certain circumstances, and that a new council could be held to revise some agendas. However, the Ottomans' actions did not give them the time to summon one before the booms and blasts outside the city quickly intimidated the populace into more sober thinking. The citizens in Constantinople at last accepted the Doctrine of Economy[17] that Loukas Notaras had long persuaded them to accept, and Gennadios, who was absent in the synaxis, also gave in and detached himself from the protests. At last, a liturgy celebrating the Union of the Churches was carried out in Hagia Sophia on 12th December 1452, and the commemoration of the Decree was finally implemented [2-3, 11]. The date was only some five months before Constantinople's ultimate capture.

The reasons why the Greeks were so reluctant toward the Union were complicated. They believed that they had great grievances. During the Council of Florence, it was always they who conceded. The fact that the Catholics were so obstinate about one word filioque proved to them a lack of sincerity to reconcile [3]. The Crusade of Varna failed, and the Greeks were not sorry for it. They interpreted it as a sign that the Latins would come to no help [18]. British historian Edward Gibbon identified the fundamental differences in their demands: "the Greeks insisted on three successive measures, a succour, a council, and a final reunion, while the Latins eluded the second, and only promised the first as a consequential and voluntary reward of the third." [3, 22] That their interests did not align amply demonstrated the difficulty of winning the Greeks' approval of the Decree. Some reasons may have roots deeper in

history. Many Byzantines regarded the Latins with great arrogance, perceiving them as barbarians, and acknowledging the Pope as an authority "above all Churches" was near impossible for them to accept. Their thoughts were more theological and less pragmatic, and the Union was described as "evil", "displeasing to God", and the "source of all our other misfortunes", which "destroyed us utterly" rather than a remedy for their country [2]. This manifested itself through profound resentment against the Latins that was practically irreconcilable. "Better to fall into the hands of the Turks than into those of the Franks!" [1] was often said in the city, as if they were forces more malevolent than the ones currently besieging Constantinople. This itself prevented the Byzantines from easily submitting to the Westerners.

An amalgamation of these factors contributed to the capture of Constantinople. In exchange for aid, the pope demanded religious conformity from the Byzantines. John VIII failed to enact the Decree of Florence, leaving the task to Constantine XI. Facing more intense opposition, Constantine XI commemorated the Union so late that the time afforded to the papacy was minimal, severely limiting its ability to assemble substantial assistance. In the end, only three ships were sent promptly to Constantinople, with clear evidence suggesting the Pope had more in mind [3]. Considering the above, the final major reason Western aid failed to reach Byzantium was the delayed enactment of the Decree of Florence. Viewed in a broader historical context, this outcome was hardly unexpected, given the longstanding enmity and deep-seated tensions between Byzantium and the Latin West.

5 CONCLUSION

The reasons why Byzantium received limited and inadequate assistance during the siege of Constantinople in 1453 can be explained through a macro-to-micro framework. From a macro perspective, this outcome stemmed from the defeat of the Crusade of Varna, the long-term accumulation of animosity between Byzantium and Western states, the rising importance of the Ottoman Sultanate to the two major Italian merchant republics, and the profound ideological and ecclesiastical estrangement between Orthodoxy and Catholicism. From a micro perspective, these conditions were manifested concretely in the resistance encountered during the implementation of the Decree of Florence, the inability of the defeated states of Varna, the pragmatic accommodation with Ottomans by the two merchant republics and the Balkan states, and the Republic of Venice's delayed and ineffective mobilization of its fleet. Taken together, these factors explain why Western responses at Byzantium's final moment remained limited in both scope and effectiveness.

And so it was. Near sunrise, the first Turkish soldier arrived at the top of the Theodosius Wall. He was a burly man named Ulubat. Though the defenders quickly swarmed around him and chopped him into pieces, more of the Sultan's janissaries followed and eventually occupied the entirety of the walls. Soon, the horde plunged into the city, and bloodshed filled the streets. It was believed, according to an old prophecy, "that the enemy would penetrate the city as far as the Column of Constantine, near the great church, when an avenging angel would descend, sword in hand, and inspire the defenders to drive them out of the city." [2] The angel did not appear. Why? If you ask the Byzantines, they would likely answer that it was a divine punishment precisely because of the commemoration of the unjust Decree of Florence. It was also said, according to a prophecy that John Hunyadi heard from a hermit or beggar before the Battle of Kosovo, that only the capture of Constantinople could halt the Ottomans from further onslaughts into Europe [23]. Nonetheless, both conjectures proved to be false. Genoa believed that they would be just fine by remaining neutral, and Venice thought that Byzantium would be just fine until it was too late. These predictions proved false still. Byzantium collapsed, the Ottomans expanded into Europe, and the commercial empires of the republics dissolved in the following centuries. Yet one thing is true: if any of the figures or groups discussed in this paper, whether King Wladyslaw, the Venetian Senate, or the Constantinople populace, had approached the problems before them with greater rationality, their responses would have been more pragmatic than the decisions so nonchalantly made and the tenets so deeply held.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

NOTES

1. The *Basileia Rhomaion* and the "Byzantine Empire" are the same entity, however, Western historians commonly began referring to it as the "Byzantine Empire" around the 19th century. The Greeks recognized their country as the *Basileia Rhomaion* (Βασιλεία Ῥωμαίων, "Monarchy of Romans"), as they considered themselves the sole Roman Empire after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire.
2. Not including Giovanni Guistianni and his soldiers, as he was voluntary and was not appointed by any country.
3. For the Decree of Florence, see *The Schism and Efforts of Reconciliation*.
4. For the outcomes see *Conclusion*.
5. Romanized version of Greek word "Κωνσταντινούπολις", meaning "Constantinople."
6. Romanized version of Ottoman-Turkish word "قسطنطنيه", meaning "Constantinople."
7. Except for one ship, which sailed voluntarily to Constantinople with the Venetian fleet. It did not arrive in time as well.
8. According to Donald MacGillivray Nicol, the number of galleys may be 10 depending on the source.
9. Nowadays Euboea.
10. Nowadays Methoni, Messenia.
11. In *The Eastern Schism* (p.51), Runciman informed that "Humbert had been careful not to include the whole Church of Constantinople in his excommunication....."; hence the bull was most likely drawn up by the legates themselves, and

not under direct instructions of the Pope. Also, the Pope had already passed away when they arrived at Constantinople, so the bull would have lost its effectiveness by then. Nevertheless, Leo IX's successor, Victor II, validated it afterwards, so the results are the same [19].

12. Though the reconciliation would indeed be traced back to the 1054 rupture, the rupture's consequences did not significantly manifest before East-West relations became unprecedentedly critical. This may largely be ascribed to the retroactive construction made during the Second Council of Leon in 1274, as this event quickly faded in hype and both Eastern and Western Christians rarely paid any further attention to the incident for the next century. Only Cerularius and his adherents were excommunicated; the patriarch, though he accused the papal legates of misconduct, refrained from pushing the confrontation to its extreme and hence did not excommunicate them in return, nor the Pope. The anathemas were personal in nature and bore no direct relation to the will of the Pope. No one at the time declared that a rupture had occurred, but the issue was nevertheless revisited during the Second Council of Lyon, where it was formally negotiated and then affirmed as the symbolic beginning of the rupture.

13. *filioque*, meaning "and son" in Latin.

14. Brother of Mark Eugenikos.

15. In Runciman's *The Fall of Constantinople* he explained that a Synod cannot be called without a Patriarch [11].

16. According to Crowley, the Doctrine of Economy "permitted the temporary acceptance of an unorthodox theological position to ensure survival", which, in this case, was the "unjust" Union [2].

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