Introduction

The Eastern Roman Empire maintained a continuous imperial government for over a thousand years. Understanding how the formal stability of imperial rule may be reconciled with the adaptations that necessarily accompanied the transition from antiquity to early modernity forms the larger framework of inquiry behind this study. That the political continuity of the empire masks a mutable and occasionally dynamic society is no longer in doubt. The mid-twentieth-century conception of Byzantium placed it in strong continuity with Rome and in contrast with the West. Revisions in the models of Byzantine urbanism and economic development since the 1970s have increased estimations of both Byzantium's disjuncture with the classical past and its commonality with Europe. The Byzantine Empire is now seen as sharing with the West the same essential trajectory of economic growth from the ninth through thirteenth centuries. How much further changes in Byzantine society should be assimilated to the experiences of the western transition from ancient to medieval society remains open to question, as does the nature and extent of discontinuities with the Late Roman Empire. This study attempts to add nuance to our understanding of the changes in Byzantine society and government by examining the exercise of authority in the core provinces of the empire from the mid-tenth through the eleventh centuries.

Understanding authority in Byzantine provincial society requires addressing fundamental questions about the organization of society on the level of the family and local communities on the one hand, and the imposition of imperial government on those families and communities on the other. Such an inquiry thus nearly amounts to a study of provincial society in general. Yet here social structures have been examined with the specific goal of uncovering common means of manipulating and coercing behavior. Authority is broadly conceived as the ability to effect change in a given situation through any form of persuasion, manipulation, or coercion.

The primary conclusion drawn from this inquiry into the practicalities of authority in the core provinces is that the imperial administration touched lightly on provincial society yet maintained a monopoly on sovereignty, allowing much of social regulation to be undertaken by individual provincial households. The emperors and their agents acted in the provinces almost exclusively to further a limited set of objectives: maintenance of imperial sovereignty, suppression of revolt, and collection of revenue. The imperial government was generally effective in meeting its goals, but those goals did not encompass the close regulation of provincial society. Provincial people felt and tested the strength of imperial authority where their lives intersected with the desires of the imperial administration. This left many aspects of provincial life free from government intervention. Personal freedom in the provinces was constrained more by neighbors and rival households than by the imperial government. The ordering of society was left to individual households and communities who competed for control with little concern for the intervention of imperial officials.

While apathetic about regulating provincial society, the emperors effectively prevented provincial individuals or households from usurping systematic governmental authority. As the maintenance of imperial sovereignty was one of the chief aims of the emperors, locally powerful people in the core provinces seem to have been anxious not to look like rulers, at least so long as the imperial authorities were paying attention. The fear of false accusations of disaffection and the central administration's aggressive suppression of revolts seem largely to have maintained the imperial monopoly on outright government, without necessarily suppressing various forms of local authority and social regulation.

The provinces under consideration are those outside the vicinity of Constantinople but firmly within the sphere of imperial control, specifically the areas surrounding the Aegean: Thrace, Hellas, Peloponnesos, and western Asia Minor. These provinces formed the core of the empire, where we would expect imperial administration to be most direct and thorough. The Aegean provinces contrast with the outer provinces and frontier regions, where the nature of government seems to have been quite different. Recent work on the empire's frontier has posited that the aim of imperial control of the outer provinces was to maintain stability and prosperity in the inner provinces. In this model the frontier regions were lightly governed through positive incentives offered to local potentates rather than through the heavy-handed imposition of imperial administration.[1] This study

[1] Paul Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier: A Political Study of the Northern Balkans, 900–1204* (Cambridge, 2000), 317. The eastern frontier seems to follow a similar model: Catherine Holmes,

addresses the sources of authority of the inner provinces, whose prosperity and revenue were vital to the maintenance of imperial power.

Before engaging directly with provincial society, this book opens with an examination of the cultural expression of imperial politics and administration in Constantinople. It makes the case that Byzantium's traditional reputation as a state with an extensive and pervasive government arose because, until the late eleventh century, Byzantine political culture was expressed with characteristics that can look bureaucratic to modern observers. That political culture, however, was grounded in an ideology of empire that was substantially different from the ideologies of civil service that underpin modern government agencies. The evolution of Byzantine political culture in the late eleventh century into a form that appears less bureaucratic does not necessarily correlate to any significant changes in governing the provinces.

From this discussion of the shifting cultural expressions of imperial administration, the book turns to the actions of that administration in provincial society. The major activities of the imperial administration in the core provinces involved maintaining imperial sovereignty and collecting revenue. Maintenance of sovereignty was achieved through skillful diplomacy and military policy, control over fortifications and suppression of revolt. The efforts of the imperial administration to extract wealth affected provincial life more regularly and profoundly. The hand of government fell with considerable intensity in a few particular contexts. Aside from maintaining sovereignty and extracting wealth, the administration did little to govern provincial society.

After considering the strength and interests of the imperial administration, the argument turns to examine provincial society and the relationships that ordered that society. Chapter 3 describes the relationships within a household, *oikos*, the extension of household terminology into non-familial settings, the establishment of hierarchy among households, and the ways households formed associations. The model of provincial society developed in chapter 3 is then used in subsequent discussions of the interactions between prominent provincial households and imperial officials, and of the regulation of provincial society. Finally, to see how authority was exercised in the face of serious opposition, chapter 6 examines how provincial households prosecuted disputes with each other.

The temporal boundaries of the project are set loosely at 950 and 1100. Given the paucity of sources dealing with provincial society, I needed to

"Byzantium's Eastern Frontier in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," in *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices*, ed. David Abulafia and Nora Berend (Aldershot, 2002), 83–104.

cast a wide net for information. On the other hand the changing nature of Byzantine society and culture required temporal restraint. Change over time is more readily seen in the chapters that deal with the imperial administration, because the political culture of the capital is both better documented and understood, and the changes are clearer. In the chapters dealing more directly with provincial society, I have tried not to trace changes over time but to lay out an aggregate description.

The sources selected for this study either originate outside of Constantinople or deal substantively with provincial society. As most of the sources used here are little known to those who are not experts in medieval Byzantine history, they are described in the Appendix.[2] The bulk of the evidence derives from monastic archives, provincial hagiography, and instructive literature.

[2] With the exception of quotations from the following, all translations are my own: Richard P. H. Greenfield, ed., *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion: An Eleventh-Century Pillar Saint* (Washington, DC, 2000); Gyula Moravcsik and Romilly Jenkins, eds., *De administrando imperio: Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus*, new rev. edn (Washington, DC, 1967); Denis Sullivan, ed., *The Life of Saint Nikon: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Brookline, MA, 1987); John Thomas and Angela Constantinides Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents: A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments*, 5 vols. (Washington, DC, 2000); F. A. Wright, trans., *Liudprand of Cremona: The Embassy to Constantinople and Other Writings* (London, 1993).

CHAPTER I

Imperial administration and Byzantine political culture

For many years the existence of a centralized literate bureaucracy was commonly considered one of the chief characteristics of medieval Byzantine civilization. This bureaucracy was thought to have allowed a particularly high level of state control over society.[1] This view of the Byzantine government is partially responsible for making "Byzantine" a derogatory term for inflexible and overly intricate organizations.[2] Yet a scholarly consensus has been growing for some time that the bureaucratic model does not fit Byzantine realities particularly well and that the provincial administration cannot have been as efficient and pervasive as had been thought.[3] It is here proposed that the reason anyone ever thought the Byzantine government was bureaucratic is that the political culture of the ninth and tenth centuries had characteristics that, through deceptive analogy with modern experience, can look bureaucratic to modern observers. The actual meanings and messages of Byzantine governmental ritual are foreign to us while bureaucratic regimes are familiar. Aspects of Byzantine political culture

[1] An extreme contemporary view: "Byzantine society, originally defined by the state, was constantly changed by it." Warren T. Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford, CA, 1997), xvii. Other scholars have posited a high degree of government control over life: Alexander Kazhdan and Giles Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium: An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies* (Washington, DC, 1982), 19–36; Nicolas Oikonomides, "Title and income at the Byzantine court," in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, DC, 1997), 200. Bureaucracy continues to be singled out as one of the most notable characteristics of the Byzantine Empire: Rosamond McKitterick, ed., *The Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2001), 40.

[2] Admirers of Byzantium have tended not to dispute the existence of a large state apparatus, but rather expressed an appreciation of bureaucracy. See Paul Lemerle, "Présence de Byzance," *Journal des Savants* (1990): 259–60; Thomas F. Carney, *Bureaucracy in Traditional Society: Romano-Byzantine Bureaucracies Viewed from Within* (Lawrence, KS, 1971), 148.

[3] Hans-Georg Beck, "Theorie und Praxis im Aufbau der byzantinischen Zentralverwaltung," *Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse Sitzungsberichte* 8 (1974): 3–33. Ralph-Johannes Lilie, "Die Zentralbürokratie und die Provinzen zwischen dem 10. und dem 12. Jahrhundert. Anspruch und Realität," *BF* 19 (1993): 65–75. Jean-Claude Cheynet, "Point de vue sur l'efficacité administrative entre les XE et XIE siècles," *BF* 19 (1993): 7–16. Ihor Ševčenko, "Was there totalitarianism in Byzantium? Constantinople's control over its Asiatic hinterland in the early ninth century," in *Constantinople and Its Hinterland*, ed. Cyril A. Mango and Gilbert Dagron (Aldershot, 1995), 91–108.

having to do with the ritual exaltation of imperial majesty can give the appearance of an extensive administrative apparatus, with large numbers of functionaries and rigid assignations of duties and powers. When expressions of political culture are separated from administrative phenomena it is possible to get a clearer sense of both how the government appeared and what it was able to accomplish.

The discussion of Byzantine political culture and imperial government is complicated because neither stayed the same for very long. The period from the middle of the tenth to the end of the eleventh century is regarded as a key turning point in the administrative history of the Byzantine Empire, in which government through a pseudo-meritocracy of officials gave way to government through the personal relationships of aristocratic kin. I would like to distinguish between changes in government practice and challenges on the one hand and changes in political culture on the other. The period saw significant changes in government administration: monetary policy, fiscal practice, military organization, judicial administration, and poor relief. The circumstances in which the government needed to function changed: economic activity increased, provincial towns grew, neighbors were alternately quiescent and belligerent, and territory was gained and lost through conquest. Concurrent with these changes were also shifts in the insignia of political culture: in the markers of high social status, in ideas about what creates power, and in what constituted desirable personal virtues. Changes in political culture affected more the way the government looked than what it did. Changing ideas about the constitution of imperial authority and membership in the imperial hierarchy were significant for the culture and experience of the urban elite and of the great families involved with the government in Constantinople. They did not necessarily have a significant impact on the strength of the imperial administration in provincial communities.

The distinction between changes in administrative structures and changes in political culture should not be pushed too far because the phenomena are deeply intertwined. The distinction is helpful, however, both to understand why Byzantium has been perceived as a bureaucratic state and to identify changes that had real impact on the government's regulation of provincial society.

DEVELOPMENTS IN GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION

In keeping with the goal of distinguishing changes in political culture from changes in actual administration, I summarize here some of the

institutional, economic, and political changes of the later tenth and eleventh centuries. Fine analyses have been made of the developments in the offices and hierarchy of the imperial administration.[4] The more modest task here is to sketch the changes in institutional structures, economics, and politics relevant to the development of Byzantine political culture and ideology in the eleventh century.

The Byzantine civil administration was formed in the seventh century as part of a large-scale consolidation of power in the capital. As provinces were conquered and cities of the Balkans and Anatolia declined in the seventh century, Constantinople experienced a profound increase of its share of imperial wealth and power.[5] The seventh-century transformation created a government based on a marked disparity of power between the capital and the hinterland.[6] The seventh-century consolidation established a slim government for an empire greatly reduced in size and complexity. Late Roman provinces were replaced by four large districts known as *themata*. Soldiers of a particular *theme* army were settled in that province and expected to meet most of their expenses out of the revenue from their property. By the middle of the ninth century the *themata* were administrative as well as military districts. The general of the *theme* army also acted "effectively as generalissimo in his province, with at the very least a supervisory authority over fiscal and judicial officials."[7]

The economic revival of the empire now seems to have been underway at the beginning of the ninth century and to have continued through the twelfth century.[8] As the empire recovered militarily and economically, the size and importance of the professional military units increased, as did the number of administrative districts. The generals were relieved of their duties in civil administration, as judges were appointed to each province.[9] The armies of the *themata* were augmented by an increasing number of professional mobile military divisions. The number of *themata* increased as

[4] H. Glykatzi-Ahrweiler, "Recherches sur l'administration de l'empire byzantin aux IXe–XIe siècles," *BCH* 84 (1960): 1–111. Nicolas Oikonomides, "L'évolution de l'organisation administrative de l'Empire byzantin au XIe siècle," *TM* 6 (1976): 125–52.

[5] Anthony Cutler and Alexander Kazhdan, "Continuity and discontinuity in Byzantine history," *Byzantion* 52 (1982): 468.

[6] John Haldon, *Byzantium: A History* (Stroud, 2000), 117. John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: The Transformation of a Culture* (Cambridge, 1990).

[7] John Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World* (London, 1999), 84.

[8] Angeliki Laiou, "The Byzantine economy: an overview," in *The Economic History of Byzantium from the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Angeliki Laiou (Washington, DC, 2002), 1146–56. Michael F. Hendy, "Byzantium, 1081–1204: the economy revisited, twenty years on," in *The Economy, Fiscal Administration and Coinage of Byzantium* (London, 1989), 9–18.

[9] Helen Saradi, "The Byzantine tribunals: problems in the application of justice and state policy (9th–12th c.)," *REB* 53 (1995): 173.

border districts, *kleisourai*, were upgraded to *themata* once they stabilized. Eventually the older armies of *themata* became irrelevant as the "field armies both along the frontiers of the empire and within the provinces were composed increasingly of either mercenary, professional troops or forces sent by subordinate and vassal princes and rulers of the various smaller states bordering the empire."[10] By the early eleventh century, rather than having soldiers of the *themata* support themselves from their land, taxes from their lands paid for professional soldiers.[11]

This increasing professionalism of the military contributed to the empire's great territorial revival of the tenth century.[12] Imperial generals enjoyed significant success in expanding the borders of the empire to the east and increasing control over the Aegean. In 961 Crete was reconquered by the future emperor Nikephoros Phokas (963–9) and local shipping became significantly safer as pirates were eliminated. Nikephoros and his family developed effective techniques for fighting Muslim raids and pushed the eastern border beyond the Taurus Mountains. The political disintegration of the Abbasid caliphate contributed to their success. The incorporation of northeastern territories in the Caucasus led the way for a recovery of northern Syria.[13] Several Georgian and Armenian princely families, persuaded to cast their lot with the empire, allowed their territories to be annexed. Bulgaria was incorporated into the empire as a consequence of John Tzimiskes' (969–76) effort to drive out the invasion of Sviatoslav of Kiev. The rebellions that broke out after Tzimiskes' death were eventually subdued by Basil II (976–1025).[14]

Some areas in the newly conquered territories in the east appear to have been converted into imperial estates that provided the administration with a direct source of income in the early eleventh century. New major posts were created in the fiscal administration to manage imperial estates and charitable houses. These offices reflect the increasing importance of direct

[10] Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World*, 85.
[11] *Ibid.*, 124. Nicolas Oikonomides, "The role of the Byzantine state in the economy," in *The Economic History of Byzantium from the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Angeliki Laiou (Washington, DC, 2002), 1022–3.
[12] On the political consequences of the increased strength of the army see Catherine Holmes, "Political elites in the reign of Basil II," in *Byzantium in the Year 1000*, ed. Paul Magdalino (Leiden, 2003), 38–56.
[13] Jonathan Shepard, "Constantine VII, Caucasian openings and the road to Aleppo," in *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium*, ed. Anthony Eastmond (Aldershot, 2001), 19–40. Catherine Holmes, "'How the east was won' in the reign of Basil II," in *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium*, ed. Anthony Eastmond (Aldershot, 2001), 41–56.
[14] Stephenson, *Balkan Frontier*, 47–79.

exploitation of property by the imperial administration.[15] Further changes in fiscal administration in the eleventh century also point to more direct exploitation of resources by the government now acting as landowner rather than tax collector.[16] Cultivation of estates gave the government the option of conducting non-monetized transactions. Imperial estates also produced cash revenue through the sale of produce and may have become a significant source of cash for the government. It is possible that at the beginning of the eleventh century the state drew more revenues from its estates than it did from taxes on land.[17]

From the eighth through the tenth century the economy of the government was highly monetized. Salaries were paid in gold and most taxes were collected in gold. One of the chief burdens of paying taxes was the requirement that taxes be paid in gold *nomismata* coins. Assessments ending in more than two-thirds of a *nomisma* were rounded up to the next full gold coin and change was given in silver and bronze.[18] The imperial administration functioned as the chief force for moving currency through the economy: "The state was able to pay salaries and collect taxes in money without the use of that money becoming general (or rather, before it did so). The money with which to pay taxes thus became yet another scarce (and probably expensive) commodity."[19] While the *nomisma* was juridically valued by weight of gold, its status as the only acceptable means of payment must have led its exchange value to exceed its nominal value.

The population of the empire increased steadily through the tenth century.[20] The territorial and demographic expansion of the empire throughout this period would necessitate an expansion in the money supply.[21] The

[15] Oikonomides, "Role of the Byzantine state," 992, 1005–7. Oikonomides, "L'évolution de l'organisation administrative," 150. On the political role of imperial ownership of estates see James Howard-Johnston, "Crown lands and the defense of imperial authority in the tenth and eleventh centuries," *BF* 21 (1995): 86–97.

[16] Oikonomides, "L'évolution de l'organisation administrative," 137.

[17] Jacques Lefort, "The rural economy, seventh–twelfth centuries," in *The Economic History of Byzantium from the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Angeliki Laiou (Washington, DC, 2002), 288. The evidence for the rapid growth of direct imperial exploitation of estates is far from conclusive. See Catherine Holmes, "Basil II and the government of empire: 976–1025" (DPhil thesis, Oxford, 1999), 256–74.

[18] Cécile Morrisson, "Byzantine money: its production and circulation," in *The Economic History of Byzantium from the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Angeliki Laiou (Washington, DC, 2002), 944.

[19] Oikonomides, "Role of the Byzantine state," 978.

[20] Alan Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire, 900–1200* (Cambridge, 1989), 47–56. Laiou, "The Byzantine economy," 1147.

[21] Morrisson, "Byzantine money," 912. Oikonomides, "Title and income," 200. D. M. Metcalf, "Monetary recession in the middle Byzantine period: the numismatic evidence," *The Numismatic Chronicle* 161 (2001): 114–15. The Byzantine monetary system was multi-denominational and far more complex

efforts to integrate the Bulgarian economy with the rest of the empire in the eleventh century also created new demands for coinage. The expansion of the empire required coins not only to facilitate normal economic exchange, but to pay for the continued good-will of frontier elites.[22] The silver content of the gold *nomismata* increased very slightly between 914 and 1041, by an average of 0.04 percent per year.[23] Between 1041 and 1071 a more aggressive devaluation of the *nomisma* brought about a yearly increase in monetary supply "on the order of 1% (or an increase by one-third in monetary units over thirty years)."[24] The debasement of the coinage became rampant between 1071 and 1091, when the percentage of gold in the *nomisma* fell from 70 percent to 10.6 percent. Silver and bronze coins were also debased.

The devaluation of the coinage was one symptom of the increasing difficulty of the task of government in the eleventh century. The current paradigm of roughly increasing population and economic prosperity from the ninth through twelfth centuries has profound implications for our understanding of government.[25] In the eighth century Constantinople was the only city in the empire that could command the resources necessary to be a center of power. The government in Constantinople was able to maintain a highly centralized state because there was a vast power differential between the capital and the hinterland. When, with increased economic prosperity, towns grew, the relative power of Constantinople decreased and the government faced increasing challenges in accomplishing the same set of tasks.[26] As the eleventh century progressed, the growing prosperity of the empire created an impetus toward decentralization that made the task of governing the empire from Constantinople increasingly difficult.

In the second half of the eleventh century the empire faced great reversals in its military fortunes. Southern Italy and Sicily were lost permanently to the Normans. Imperial authority in eastern Anatolia collapsed quickly in the face of the Seljuk advance in the 1070s, and the establishment of the sultanate of Rum significantly reduced imperial territory. By the 1080s the Seljuks had established a capital at Nicaea. More successful efforts were made to repel the Norman invasion of the Balkans under Robert Guiscard. This invasion was practically concurrent with several rebellions in the Balkans.

than those in place in the medieval West until the thirteenth century. Thomas J. Sargent and François R. Velde, *The Big Problem of Small Change* (Princeton, NJ, 2002), 93.

[22] Stephenson, *Balkan frontier*, 135–6. [23] Morrisson, "Byzantine money," 922. [24] *Ibid.*, 924.

[25] For a statement of the current paradigm see Laiou, "The Byzantine economy," 1147–56.

[26] Hendy, "Economy revisited, twenty years on," 12–18.