

"Atticism" cf. Böhlig, *op. cit.* 94-95. Rhythmic considerations play their part in determining the use of the middle voice here.

ὀρμίσκων C1. *LXX Gen.* 38.18.

σόβη: In classical Greek = "tail of an animal"; here connected with σοβέω, σόβημα etc.

τὸς σοφοῖς τοῖς πάλαι πεθιλοσόφηται: Probably an allusion to the story of Herakles' choice.

μετα θηρίων οἰκίσει κτλ.: Cf. *LXX Dan.* 4.25

19. ὡς ἡ θεία λέγει γραφή: Cf. *LXXIII Reg.* 19.11.

εὐκατάνυκτος: Cf. John. Clim. *Scal.* 4.

Βαρλαάμ: The reference is to the story of Barlaam and Joasaph, universally attributed in the Middle Ages to St. John Damascene. On the cult of St. Barlaam of *A. B.* 22 (1903) 131.

ῥῆμα Θεοῦ πρὸς Ἰωάννην Cf. *Ev. Marc.* 1.4, *Ev. Luc.* 3.3, *Act. Ap.* 13.24.

ἐλέφαντες: Cf. Aelian *NA* 8.15.

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*The Role of the People in the
Political Life of the Byzantine Empire:
The Period of the Comneni and the Palaeologi*

The Byzantine empire was an absolute monarchy.¹ The emperor was the viceroy of God on earth and as a consequence his powers could not be less than absolute. But this was in theory; in practice, there were important limitations. For this reason J. B. Bury preferred the use of the expression "limited autocracy" to describe the character of the Byzantine monarchy.²

Among the factors which in one way or another served to limit the power of the monarchy in Byzantium, one must include the people. It should be observed, however, that the people, in the political context in which the term is used, did not include all inhabitants of the empire. The general peasantry was not a part of it, and the upper classes, generally referred to as the *archontes*, were excluded, except for individuals among them who served to lead the people. The people consisted essentially of the city dwellers. The population of a Byzantine city was composed of landed magnates whose properties lay in the surrounding countryside, of various administrative officials, of high church dignitaries, of numerous small merchants and artisans, of the lower clergy and monks, and of a host of others who managed to eke out a living by working either in the town as laborers or in the nearby countryside as field hands.³ But not all of these groups among the city dwellers were included in

1. But not a despotism, certainly not in the sense that Montesquieu defined that term, a definition which generally still obtains in political thought: a regime based on ignorance and fear, where the prince, in general lazy, ignorant, voluptuous, capricious, often tyrannical, follows no rules, considering himself to be all and the others nothing. Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, pt. 1, bk. 2, ch. 5; bk. 2, chs. 12, 9 and 10; and bk. 4, ch. 3. The Roman Empire: a despotism, pt. 2, bk. 12, ch. 30. There were, to be sure, emperors who, whatever their other qualities, can only be described as tyrannical—Phocas I, Justinian II, Andronicus I, readily come to mind—but they all met with a violent death in an internal uprising against their authority.

2. J. B. Bury, "The Constitution of the Roman Empire," in *Selected Essays of J. B. Bury*, ed. H. Temperley (Cambridge, Eng.: Univ. Press, 1930), pp. 99 ff.

3. It is a well-established fact, of course, that the population of the Byzantine city included many who were engaged in agriculture. Most of the inhabitants, declared Palamas, when speaking of Thessalonica, spread into the country in order that they might take care of the harvest and bring in the crops: G. Palamas, *Homilia XXIV*, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca*, 161 vols. (Paris: Seu Petit-Montrouge, 1857-66), CLI, col. 333. See in general Věra Hrochová, *Byzantská města ve 13.-15. století. Příspěvek k sídelní topografii středověkého Řecka*, Acta Universitatis Carolinae Philosophica et Historica Monographia XX (Praha: Universitá Karlova, 1967), 95-100. The reference is to the summary in French.

the composition of the people, in the political context of that term. That composition was restricted to the small merchants and artisans and to the various laborers, including, no doubt, numerous hangers-on. These groups made up the people, the *demos* of the Byzantine texts.⁴ The vast majority among them were poor, and for this reason the *demos* was often equated with the poor, an equation which explains why its intervention in politics was very often motivated by social and administrative injustices. It was also the most numerous group among the city dwellers, and for this reason it was often referred to as "the many." In modern parlance one may call them the masses.

In Byzantium there was no constitutional provision, no established institution, specifically designed to enable the people to express their will in the politics of the empire. In the earlier periods two organizations served as media through which the populace, especially of the capital, could act: (1) the theatre and the circus, the people directly involved in their activities, i.e., the circus factions, and their partisans, organized groups drawn from the general population, which enjoyed official recognition, participated in official ceremonies and generally made the Hippodrome or the theatre the scene of their demonstrations⁵; and (2) the trade guilds, official organizations of artisans

4. John Kantakouzenos draws a distinction between the *demos*, on the one hand, and the merchants, soldiers, clergy, and heads of monasteries on the other. The merchants and artisans in this instance were no doubt the big merchants: Joannes VI Cantacuzenus, *Historiarum libri IV*, ed. I. Schopen, *Corpus scriptorum historiae Byzantinae*, 3 vols. (Bonn: Impensis E. Weberi, 1828-32), III, 34. On the *demos*, see further G. Weiss, *Joannes Kantakouzenos, Aristokrat, Staatsmann, Kaiser und Mönch, in der Gesellschaftsentwicklung von Byzanz im 14. Jahrhundert*, *Schriften zur Geistesgeschichte des östlichen Europe*, Bd. 4 (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1969), pp. 74-76.

5. On these groups and their political role, though the sense in which the term *demes* is used needs to be modified, the basic work is still G. Manojlović, "Le peuple de Constantinople, de 400 à 800 après J. C. Etude spéciale de ses forces armées, des éléments qui le composaient et de son rôle constitutionnel pendant cette période," trans. from Croation by H. Grégoire, *Byzantion*, 11 (1936), 617 ff. For further references, see S. Vryonis, Jr., *Byzantium: Its Internal History and Relations with the Muslim World*, *Collected Studies* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1971), study 3, p. 291, n. 7. See also H. G. Beck, *Senat und Volk von Konstantinopel. Probleme der byzantinischen Verfassungsgeschichte*, *Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften Philosophisch-Historische Klasse. Sitzungsberichte Jahrg. 1966, Heft 6* (München: Verlag der bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Beck in Kommission, 1966); and J. Jarry, *Hérésies, et factions dans l'empire byzantin du IV^e au VII^e siècle*, *Recherches d'archéologie, de philologie et d'histoire*, t. 29 (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1968). For what in my opinion is a more accurate interpretation of the term *demes*, see G. Dagrón, *Naissance d'une capitale. Constantinople et ses institutions de 330 à 451*, *Bibliothèque Byzantine, Etudes 7* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974), pp. 353-64; also A. Cameron, "Demes and Factions," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 67 (1974), 74-91. For references to the *demes* in the provincial towns, Egypt in particular, see [A. Christophilopoulos] "Οἱ ἀπὸς τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Βυζαντινοὶ Δῆμοι," *Χαριστήριον εἰς Ἀναστάσιον Κ. Ὁρλάνδου* 2 (Athens, 1966), pp. 327-60. The information that the author of this study has brought together, whenever meaningful, identifies *demes* with the circus factions and their partisans. But any examination of the factions in Byzantium must take into account the views of A. Cameron, *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976), esp. pp. 5-155 and 297-312.

through which the state controlled and regulated its urban economy.⁶

The circus groups as media of political activity seem to have ceased to function at the beginning of the ninth century,⁷ but the trade guilds continued on, to enjoy their best period during the next two or three centuries. They survived into the last period of the empire,⁸ but for this period very little, certainly insofar as their organization and their influence on the people is concerned, is known about them. Whether in fact they continued to serve, as they had done before, as a medium through which the populace could express its will, is a question which is better left open. Artisans are often mentioned, along with other elements of the population of the city, to have attended assemblies convoked by emperors.⁹ But here again it is impossible to say whether these artisans were summoned as the organized members of guilds or simply as individual artisans. On one point, however, there can be no doubt at all. The trade guilds of the period of the Palaeologi were not as strictly supervised by the central administration as they had been, say, under the Macedonians. At the end of the thirteenth century, for instance, it was not officially known who were the bakers in Constantinople and how many of them there were. Nor were they supervised with the aim of assuring the quality of, and a fair price for, their products.¹⁰ The guilds are not known,

6. On the guilds as economic and political organizations, see Vryonis, *Byzantium*, study 3, pp. 289-314; see n. 13 for the reference to the literature on the guilds. The study of Vryonis referred to, entitled: "Byzantine Democracy and the Guilds in the Eleventh Century," was originally published in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 17 (1963), 289-314.

7. A. Maricq, "La durée du régime des partis populaires à Constantinople," *Bulletin de l'Académie Royale de Belgique Cl. des Lettres*, 35 (1949), 63-74. Maricq's conclusion has been questioned, but this questioning, based on an interpretation of the texts, may in turn be questioned: see Jarry, p. 544. Jarry would extend the political activities of the *demes* beyond the beginning of the ninth century, but N. Oikonomides, in an unpublished paper read at the 1972 meeting of the American Historical Association, would have it stop by the end of the seventh century. But see now Cameron, *Circus Factions*, pp. 297 ff.

8. P. Charanis, "On the Social Structure and Economic Organization of the Byzantine Empire in the Thirteenth Century and Later," *Byzantinoslavica*, 12 (1951), 149 ff; and A. P. Christophilopoulos, *Τὸ Ἐπαρκὸν Βιβλίον Λέοντος τοῦ Σοφοῦ καὶ αἱ συντεχνίαι ἐν Βυζαντίῳ* (Athens, 1935), p. 4 and n. 2. (This book is written in modern Greek).

On the possible remnants of the Byzantine guild system in Asia Minor, see S. Vryonis, Jr., *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1971), pp. 401 f. and 480.

9. Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, ed. I. Bekker, *Corpus scriptorum historiae Byzantinae* (Bonn: Impensis E. Weberi, 1835), p. 631; and Cantacuzenus, III, 34.

10. Charanis, "On the Social Structure," pp. 149 ff. See now Alice-Mary M. Talbot, ed. and trans., *The Correspondence of Athanasius I Patriarch of Constantinople, Letters to the Emperor Andronicus II, Members of the Imperial Family, and Officials*, *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, Consilio Societatis Internationalis Studiis Byzantinis Provehendis Destinatae Editum*, vol. III (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1975), ltrs. 93 and 100.

either, to have played an active role in any of the various popular demonstrations and uprisings which took place during this period. In these demonstrations individuals, in most instances, men belonging to the aristocracy, advised and led the crowd. The one notable exception is, of course, that of the mariners of Thessalonica, who played such a big role in the revolt of the Zealots in that city. But even they were led by men of the aristocracy, men most probably appointed by the government to head their organization, an organization usually regarded as a trade guild.¹¹

But whether by means of the medium of the circus factions, the trade guilds, or the promptings of individuals, it was through violence or the threat of violence that the populace in Byzantium sought to express its will. Indeed the Byzantines defined *democratia*, democracy, by the violent demonstrations and outbreaks of the *demos*.¹² Nicetas Choniates would have us believe that what drove the crowd into these demonstrations was their fickleness, their simple-mindedness, their ignorance.¹³ But this view simplifies the matter, for often underlying these demonstrations were issues—religious, dynastic, social—of far-reaching importance. There are, in the history of Byzantium, says Manojlović, great scenes “in which the people of Constantinople played an important and violent role and were the decisive factor in great changes.”¹⁴ Some of Manojlović’s views on the factions of Constantinople, views which relate to their organization, and to their religious, social, and political orientation, have been recently questioned,¹⁵ but there can be no doubt about the soundness of the statement just quoted.

Manojlović had in mind, of course, the great scenes of the earlier period, the great tumults of the populace during the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, of which the best known is the *Nika* revolt of 532.¹⁶ But similar scenes took place during subsequent periods, especially in the eleventh century and the period of the Comneni and that of the Palaeologi. The popular upheaval in 1042, which restored to the throne the descendants of Basil I after the empress Zoe had been pushed aside by Michael V, has been made

11. P. Charanis, “Internal Strife in Byzantium during the Fourteenth Century,” *Byzantion*, 15 (1940-41), 313 ff.

12. G. Bratianu, “Empire et démocratie à Byzance,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 37 (1937), 86 ff.; for two classical references to *democratia* in the classical sense of the term, see *idem*, “Démocratie” dans le lexique byzantin à l’époque des Paléologues,” in *Mémorial Louis Petit, Mélanges d’histoire et d’archéologie byzantines*, Archives de l’orient chrétien, Vol. 1 (Bucarest: Institut Français d’Etudes Byzantines, 1948), pp. 32-45.

13. Choniates, pp. 304 f.

14. Manojlović, p. 685.

15. Jarry, pt. 2, pp. 114-27 and 157-73, but esp. by Cameron, *Circus Factions*, pp. 5-155 and 297-312.

16. For an analysis of the sources of the *Nika* revolt, see J. B. Bury, “The *Nika* Revolt,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 17 (1897), 92-119.

notable by Michael Psellos’ vivid description of it. The crowd, says Psellos, was, by the time the news of Zoe’s deposition had been spread, already “beyond control and violently excited at the idea that it was going to seize the throne from him who had usurped it.”¹⁷ The tumultuousness of this outbreak was equalled, and in some instances surpassed, by the outbreaks which occurred toward the end of the period of the Comneni¹⁸ and under the Palaeologi, especially those which took place during the fourteenth century.¹⁹ The underlying issues of these outbreaks were also more complicated. They involved not only the imperial throne but serious social and economic problems, problems which arrayed the poor against the rich.

The upheaval of September, 1185, which led to the deposition of Andronicus I, and inflicted on him perhaps the cruelest death ever inflicted on a Byzantine emperor, is an example of the popular outbreaks during the period of the late Comneni.²⁰ It seems to have been accidental, without any apparent cause. But this appearance was on the surface only, for underneath was the smoldering discontent of the populace which Andronicus, despite some reforms which benefited many provincials, had not only failed to extinguish but had inflamed the outbreak by reviving what could be interpreted to be the pro-Latin policy of Manuel. This discontent burst into flames when the city was threatened by the Normans who, following the capture and sack of Thessalonica, were on the march against it.

The occasion for the outbreak was the attempt to arrest Isaac Angelos, who, it was thought, might cooperate with the Normans, whose invasion of the Byzantine empire had been instigated at least in part by members of the Byzantine nobility. Isaac had killed one of the agents, a very close advisor of Andronicus, who had been sent to arrest him. But Isaac, eluding the others, had fled to Saint Sophia for safety, where he was soon joined by some members of his family. As the news of this event traveled throughout the city, a large crowd flocked to the great church, drawn out of curiosity, anticipating that Andronicus would soon seize Isaac and put him to death. But things did not work out that way. Andronicus was absent from the city and none of his agents was at the scene, a situation which helped the partisans of Isaac to win the crowd to their cause. By the next day the crowd increased considerably and became more tumultuous. A message sent by Andronicus in an effort to

17. Michael Psellos, *Chronographie, ou, Histoire d’un siècle de Byzance (976-1077)*, ed. and trans. E. Renauld, 2 vols. (Paris: Société d’édition “Les Belles Lettres,” 1926-28), I, 102; and *The Chronographia of Michael Psellus*, trans. E. R. A. Sewter (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 99.

18. In general see F. Cognasso, *Partiti politici e Lotte dinastiche in Bisanzio alla morte di Manuele Comneno* (Torino: V. Bona, 1912). See also, C. M. Brand, *Byzantium Confronts the West: 1180-1204* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 30-75.

19. Charanis, “Internal Strife,” pp. 313 ff.; and Weiss, pp. 78 ff.

20. Choniates, pp. 444-52; Cognasso, pp. 312-16; and Brand, pp. 68-73.

calm them had no effect, and when he finally decided to return to the capital and take charge of the situation himself it was too late. The crowd had broken into Saint Sophia and literally forced a reluctant Isaac to accept the crown. The crowd included many artisans, for among the weapons which they carried during the last phases of the demonstration were numerous tools from workshops of the city. And so it was that Isaac became emperor, chosen for the office not by the senate, not by the army, not by a reigning emperor, but by the people. This was the first time in the history of Byzantium that the people alone successfully deposed one emperor whom they had helped to make and replaced him by another.

Equally significant, if not more so, as an index of the role of the people in the politics of the Byzantine Empire, are the popular upheavals which took place during the period of the Palaeologi, the most tumultuous of which occurred in the fifth decade of the fourteenth century. The occasion for these uprisings was the proclamation of John Kantakouzenos to the throne, a proclamation which was immediately supported by the landed magnates and instantly opposed by the populace. Thus, the struggle for the throne became from the beginning a struggle between the rich and the poor and rent asunder virtually every city of the empire, including the capital. The first popular uprising, instigated by the laborer Branos, took place in Adrianople on 27 October 1341, but it was not long before every city in Thrace and eastern Macedonia was affected. "The entire Roman Empire," writes Kantakouzenos himself, "was given to a much more (than in Adrianople) savage and grievous strife. . . . The people were ready to revolt at the slightest pretext and dared the most terrible deeds, for they hated the rich for their bad treatment of them during peacetime and now hoped, above all, to seize their property, which was great. . . . The sedition spread throughout the Roman empire like a malignant and terrible disease . . . all the cities in common rebelled against the nobles."²¹

The strife and conflict, which had affected every city of the empire, was greater and more violent in Thessalonica, next to the capital the most important city of the empire. There a party called the Zealots, supported by the general populace and more specifically by the mariners who had their own organization—virtually free from any external control—seized the city.²²

21. Cantacuzenus, II, 177-79.

22. Charanis, "Internal Strife," pp. 313-15; I. Ševčenko, "The Zealot Revolution and the Supposed Genoese Colony in Thessalonica," *Προσφορά εις Στίλπωνα Π. Κυριακίδη ἐπὶ τῇ ἐκοσιπενταετηρίδι τῆς καθ' ἡγεσίᾳ αὐτοῦ (1926-1951)*, Ἑλληνικά. Παράρτημα 4 (Thessaloniki: Ἑταιρεία Μακεδονικῶν Σπουδῶν, 1953), pp. 603-17; Weiss, pp. 86-103. For additional references, especially to the works of Ševčenko on the so-called Anti-Zealot Discourse of Cabasilas, see Charanis in *Revue des Etudes Sud-Est Européennes*, 9 (1971), 369-76.

The revolt broke out in the summer of 1342, provoked by an attempt of the partisans of Kantakouzenos to turn the city over to him. The populace, led by the Zealots, drove the governor of Thessalonica and about one thousand of the aristocracy, all supporters of Kantakouzenos, out of the city, seized control of it, and installed as archon Michael Palaeologus, one of their leaders. A new crisis was precipitated in 1345 when remaining members of the aristocracy made an attempt to overthrow the Zealots and return Thessalonica to Kantakouzenos. They assassinated Michael Palaeologus and in due time opened negotiations with Kantakouzenos, which provoked a second, more violent, upheaval among the people.

The leadership in the second upheaval was taken by Andrew Palaeologus, who, though a member of the aristocracy, headed the organization of the mariners, the most powerful and turbulent element of the population. Andrew Palaeologus himself appealed to the mariners, while others among the Zealots harangued the people in general. The result was a tumultuous uprising and a veritable scene of carnage. About a hundred nobles, including the imperial governor of the city, were slaughtered in cold blood. It was a general attack of the poor against the rich. "Here," says Kydonis, "the servant pushed the master, there, the slave him who had bought him. The rustic dragged the general, and the peasant the soldier."²³ The result of this bloody popular uprising was the re-establishment of the regime of the Zealots.

Contemporaries had difficulty in describing the Zealot regime of Thessalonica. The historian Gregoras, unable to fit it into any of the constitutions of antiquity, called it simply "a strange ochlocracy brought about and directed by chance."²⁴ Its leaders were demagogues, whose principal objective was the confiscation of the property of the rich. In reality what the Zealot revolution achieved in Thessalonica was the establishment of a popular regime virtually independent of any outside authority. The new regime introduced new laws while it discarded some old ones. Some connection with Constantinople was maintained, for the latter was represented by an imperial governor, but his powers were only nominal, for even the orders of the emperor were often disregarded. Thessalonica under the Zealots was an independent republic. This republic was liquidated in 1349 when the city was surrendered to Kantakouzenos. The aristocracy was back in control, but Thessalonica remained to the very end of its Byzantine period a scene of intense social tension, where the danger of some upheaval by the populace was ever present.

During the period of the Comneni and the Palaeologi two tendencies made their appearance, tendencies which on the surface promised to make possible

23. Demetrius Kydonis, *Monodia Occisorum Thessalonicae*, in Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca*, CIX, col. 648.

24. Nicephorus Gregoras, *Byzantina Historia*, ed. L. Schopen, *Corpus scriptorum historiae Byzantinae*, 3 vols. (Bonn: Impensis E. Weberi, 1829-55), II, 795.

the expression of the will of the people in a peaceful and institutionalized way: (1) The emperors' calling of assemblies from time to time in which the common people were included; and (2) the granting of greater autonomy to cities.

There are indications of the development of the institution of the assembly²⁵ as early as the last quarter of the eleventh century, when Alexius Comnenus, then only a military commander, summoned the people of Amaseia and urged them to contribute the funds he needed to pay the Turk, Tutach, who had captured for him Roussel of Bailleul, the Norman adventurer who almost did in Asia Minor, create an independent Norman state, what Robert Guiscard, another Norman adventurer, succeeded in doing in southern Italy. Alexius' proposal aroused considerable opposition, even the danger of a popular revolt, but Alexius finally succeeded in having the people contribute willingly the funds which he needed.²⁶ To what extent the common people were included in this assembly is not quite clear, but the institution as it developed in the course of the twelfth century and during the period of the Palaeologi often included them in addition to the upper elements of society.

The assemblies convoked by emperors were held only on special occasions and the problems put before them were problems of the immediate moment. A number of such assemblies are known, but there is no need to cite and analyze every one of them; one or two examples will suffice.

The first of these assemblies offered here as an example is that of 1197, convoked by Alexius III in his effort to raise funds to meet the danger that the ambition of Henry IV, the German emperor and King of Sicily, posed for the Byzantine Empire.²⁷ Among the people called were, besides the senate and the clergy, the merchants, and the artisans of the city. The proposal put

25. On the assembly, as it evolved during the period of the Comneni and the Palaeologi, see C. P. Kyrris, "Gouvernés et gouvernants à Byzance pendant la révolution des Zélotes (1341-1350)," in *Gouvernés et gouvernants*, Recueils de la Société Jean Bodin pour l'histoire comparative des institutions, t. 22 and 23 (Bruxelles: Editions de la Librairie encyclopédique, 1968-), pp. 271-330; *idem*, "The Political Organization of the Byzantine Urban Classes between 1204-1341," in *Liber Memorialis Antonio Dell'Era* (Bruxelles: Editions d'Art Corten, 1963), pp. 21-31; Charanis, "On the Social Structure," pp. 148 ff.; and Beck, pp. 62 ff. On the other hand, the assembly of this period is ignored completely by G. I. Bratianu, "Les assemblées d'états en Europe orientale au moyen âge et l'influence du régime politique byzantin" in *Actes du VI^e Congrès international d'Etudes byzantines* (Paris: Ecole des Hautes Etudes Sorbonne, 1950), pp. 35-56. There were assemblies, of course, during the early periods, but their function was to acclaim or to participate in ceremonials not, as was the case of the assemblies of the later period, to receive specific proposals.

26. Anna Comnena, *Alexiade*, ed. and trans. by B. Leib, 3 vols. (Paris: "Les Belles Lettres," 1937-45), I, 13; and *The Alexiad of the Princess Anna Comnena, Being the History of the Reign of Her Father, Alexius I, Emperor of the Romans, 1081-1118 A.D.*, trans. by Elizabeth A. S. Dawes (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Trubner, 1928), p. 10.

27. Choniates, p. 631.

before them—that they should make contributions from their own possessions in order to meet the demands of the German emperor—raised bitter opposition and the danger of a popular revolt. The emperor, therefore, dissolved the assembly and sought to raise the necessary funds in a different, most curious way: he opened the graves of former emperors and seized whatever treasures had been buried there.

No better was the outcome of the other assembly, which was called by the Emperor John Kantakouzenos in 1347 in an attempt to ameliorate the financial conditions of the empire. This assembly, in the words of Kantakouzenos himself, represented every level of life among the citizens of Byzantium,²⁸ for among those summoned were the merchants and soldiers, some artisans, and not a few from the people (*demos*); also included were the heads of monasteries and the principal leaders among the clergy. The senators are not mentioned, but their presence may be taken for granted. Kantakouzenos took the floor and, in a fashion reminiscent of the city assemblies of Greek classical antiquity, sought to arouse the patriotism of his listeners. He reminded them of the former greatness of the empire and then described in some detail the dangers in which it now found itself. He had hoped thereby to affect them in such a way that they would come forward and voluntarily contribute the funds needed to face these dangers. A number of others also spoke, expressing similar sentiments. That Kantakouzenos, in following this procedure, sought consciously to emulate the traditions of the ancients cannot, of course, be stated as a fact, but he did know Thucydides. The assembly did not achieve what Kantakouzenos had hoped.²⁹

It is not quite clear what the composition of assemblies convoked by emperors was, in terms of comprehensiveness, i.e., whether or not they included all the people belonging to the various elements of the population. In the assembly of 1197 it appears that all the senators, clergy, merchants, and artisans were included. In the assembly of 1347 this does not seem to have been the case. The merchants and the soldiers were there, but only some artisans, not a few of the people (*demos*), and the principals among the clergy, besides the heads of monasteries, are mentioned as having participated. In general it may be supposed that only the prominent among the various classes convoked were summoned to such assemblies. But what constituted this prominence, especially as it affected the *demos*? Who, in fact, were those of the *demos* who attended the assembly?³⁰ No definite answer can be given. It is

28. Cantacuzenus, II, 34.

29. But compare the results of another assembly summoned by Kantakouzenos. There the issue was also money; the response, however, was more favorable: see Gregoras, II, 845 ff.

30. In the assembly called in 1348, those summoned to attend were the senators and the wiser among the *demos*. *Demos* here is used apparently in a more comprehensive sense to include all the people of Constantinople, except the senators: Gregoras, II, 846.

interesting to note, however, that the *demoi* here is distinguished from the merchants and the artisans. It may be urged, therefore, that the merchants and the artisans specifically summoned were among the wealthy, while the small merchants and artisans were included in the *demoi*.

The Byzantine cities of the period of the Comneni and the Palaeologi, indeed of any period, were dominated by the *archontes*, the landed magnates whose possessions were located in the neighboring countryside. Some big merchants were also included among them. The populace, to be sure, was not ignored, but it was expected to conform. Thus in 1341, the *archontes* of Adrianople convoked an assembly of the inhabitants of the city, including the populace, and announced the elevation of Kantakouzenos to the throne. They had themselves already declared for him and expected the populace to follow suit. But instead of approval and support, there were murmurs of revolt and even open denunciation against Kantakouzenos. Those who had dared to speak openly against Kantakouzenos were insulted and whipped. The popular upheaval organized secretly, to which reference has already been made, soon followed. In Verrhoia, two years later (1343), the populace, informed of the matter, followed the *archontes* in surrendering the city to Kantakouzenos. The same occurred in Vizye a year later. In general, therefore, despite the danger of the opposing force that the populace might, and often did, exert, the power and influence of the *archontes* shaped the political life of the Byzantine city of this period. As a result, imperial authority over it was reduced and its autonomy increased.³¹ The city of Jannina in 1317 illustrates this trend.

The imperial document issued in favor of Jannina in 1317 included the following: a guarantee that the city would never be ceded to the Franks; a guarantee that the imperial governor of Jannina would never move and resettle elsewhere any of the citizens of Jannina against their will, unless they were the cause of public disorder; a provision for the election by the citizens of judges who would act together with the imperial governor and would judge all cases except those subject to the ecclesiastical courts; a grant of freedom of trade throughout the empire without the payment of the commercial taxes; a guarantee that the citizens of Jannina, unless they were enrolled soldiers and held *economiae* for that purpose, would not be forced to serve in the army outside their own city; exemption from certain land taxes and corvees, and finally, a provision for the right to appeal to the emperor if any of

31. On the *archontes* as the dominant element of the population of the Byzantine cities and the growth of autonomy, see P. Charanis, "Town and Country in the Byzantine Possessions of the Balkan Peninsula During the Later Period of the Empire," in *Aspects of the Balkans: Continuity and Change. Contributions to the International Balkan Conference Held at UCLA, October 23-28, 1969*, ed. H. Birnbaum and S. Vryonis, Jr. (The Hague: Mouton, 1972), pp. 134-37.

the privileges were violated by the imperial governor of Jannina. For all practical purposes Jannina had become, by means of this document, virtually independent.

To the very end of the Byzantine Empire, violence remained the basic way whereby the populace could in reality express its will. The assembly convoked by emperors or other officials and the growth of autonomy among the cities might have served to promote the democratization of Byzantine society. But both the assembly and autonomy were in fact signs not of strength, but of weakness, the weakness not of one individual—say a weak emperor—but the weakness of Byzantine society as a whole. For they presupposed no new conditions of life, implying some new internal vigorous activity, nor were they underlined by some new ideology which looked at society with different eyes than those of the past. They were, instead, the products of the process of disintegration which contributed to that process until finally Byzantine society ceased to exist.

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