

# **MEDIEVAL TRADE IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN AND BEYOND**

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David Jacoby

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## PREFACE

The studies reproduced in this volume form a sequel to some of those reproduced in eight previous volumes of mine in the *Variorum* series. Studies 1–9 deal with neglected or overlooked aspects of Western trade and shipping in the Eastern Mediterranean from the late eighth century onward. They focus upon the economic interaction between Italian maritime cities and the countries along the Eastern Mediterranean shore, as well as on their trade in the Black Sea and inner Asia. Study 10 examines the legal status and social interaction of the Jews of Venetian Crete with their Christian neighbors and their contribution to the island's economy and exports throughout the Eastern Mediterranean.

The extension of Italian trade and shipping into the Eastern Mediterranean began earlier than generally assumed. Venetians were already active in the region by the late eighth century, and the merchants of Amalfi joined them somewhat later. The common focus in research on their relations with Byzantium is largely responsible for the neglect of their commercial operations in Muslim countries. While the two nations could offer timber and iron in exchange for commodities available in Egypt, they lacked the means to purchase luxury goods in Byzantium. Cabotage and tramping along the Byzantine shore, to which little attention has been paid so far, became initially a major source of capital that could be reinvested. These maritime patterns were extended to the Levant by the mid-eleventh century, when the two nations were joined by Genoa. Economic factors account for the decline of Amalfitan trade in the Eastern Mediterranean in the second half of the twelfth century, while Venice's and Genoa's trade in particular continued to expand in the following period (studies 1 and 3). This expansion was reflected in the function of Cyprus in inter-regional trade and shipping. A marginal market before 1291, it became a major transit station between the West and the Mamluk territories of Egypt and Syria following the fall of the crusader states in that year. From the early fourteenth century Cyprus also benefited from the export of its cotton and sugar. Venice significantly contributed to these developments and acquired an important economic and political role in Cyprus, which eventually led to the extension of its rule over the island in 1489 (study 2).

The investigation of the economy of the Frankish Levant in the twelfth and thirteenth century has been dominated by a Eurocentric and bi-polar approach. As

a result, Western trade in the region has been considered the dynamic factor in that economy. A shift in focus and a different perspective reveal the important contribution of the region's own market-oriented production of rural and industrial commodities and of its service sector, to which little attention has been paid in the past. As a result, the Frankish Levant emerges as an active partner in trans-Mediterranean commercial exchanges (study 4). Acre, the main Frankish port, is generally considered as being a consumption center and the destination of Western goods in the framework of bi-lateral exchanges. Local consumption was undoubtedly boosted by the presence of Western pilgrims visiting the Holy Land. Yet the commercial relations between Alexandria and Acre made a substantial contribution to the latter's major function as a relay station between Egypt and both the West and Byzantium, and account for its flourishing trade in the thirteenth century (study 5).

Three studies also deal with Western trade beyond the Eastern Mediterranean. The credibility of the travel account of the Venetian Marco Polo across Asia from 1271 to 1295 has been challenged time and again. His business ventures and those of his close relatives in the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions have been examined in past. However, once they are inserted within their contemporary context and connected with the travel account, they substantially enhance the latter's reliability (study 6).

It is generally assumed that Byzantium closed the Black Sea to the Italians before 1204 to protect its maritime trade in that region. Rather than Byzantine intervention, the focus of the Italian maritime nations on Mediterranean trade and the the availability of Black Sea commodities in Constantinople account for their lack of interest in the region at that stage of their commercial expansion (study 7).

The import of food and wine from the Mediterranean region to Constantinople gained substantial impetus from the early eleventh century onward, following an accumulation of wealth and a rise in purchasing power in the city. The Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204 dealt a severe blow to its economy and entailed the loss of its function as major consumption center. It remained a major destination of Mediterranean edible goods and wine after the Byzantine recovery of the city in 1261, yet increasingly functioned as transit station on the way to the Black Sea region (study 8).

Market-oriented rural exploitation in the Byzantine Peloponnese began in the eleventh century. It intensified after the establishment of Frankish rule over most of the region and that of Venice in its southwestern portion in the early thirteenth century, both well documented. In contrast, there are few sources bearing upon territory in the southeast of the peninsula regained by Byzantium in the 1260s. The study examines the demographic evolution and the status of the peasantry, land distribution, taxation, relations between peasants and lords, as well as the production and export of olive oil, grains, wine, currants, cotton, acorn cups for tanning, and kermes, a colorant (study 9).

The last study in this volume deals with the Jews in Crete under Venetian rule, their legal status, their relations with the administration, and their social

## PREFACE

interaction with the members of the two Christian communities in the island, the Greeks and the Latins, until the late sixteenth century. Jewish voluntary social segregation was also reflected by the operation of an internal economic network dealing with the production, transportation and distribution of kosher foodstuffs and wine in Crete, parallel to the regular supply network yet not entirely dissociated from it. The operation of this Jewish economic network extended from the island to several countries of the Eastern Mediterranean and contributed thereby to Crete's growing exports throughout that region.

I wish to thank the following institutions and publishers for granting me permission to reproduce the studies included here, which originally appeared in periodicals or collective volumes, some of which are not easily available: Taylor and Francis (I, VI); Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation (II); Centro di Cultura e Storia Amalfitana (III); Istituto "F. Datini" (IV); Professor A. Paravicini and Sismel, publisher (V); Walter De Gruyter, publisher (VII); Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften (VIII); Dumbarton Oaks (IX); Centro Tedesco di Studi veneziani and Storia e Letteratura, publisher (X).

Some corrections and additions are listed in the *Addenda et corrigenda* preceding the first study in this volume.

DAVID JACOBY  
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# ADDENDA ET CORRIGENDA

The footnotes to the articles included in this volume mention some studies reproduced in three earlier volumes of mine in the *Variorum* series: *Byzantium, Latin Romania and the Mediterranean*, Aldershot, 2001 (cited below as Jacoby, *Byzantium*); *Latins, Greeks and Muslims; Encounters in the Eastern Mediterranean, Tenth–Fifteenth Centuries*, Farnham, 2009 (cited below as Jacoby, *Latins, Greeks and Muslims*); and *Travellers, Merchants and Settlers across the Mediterranean, Eleventh–Fourteenth Centuries*, Farnham, 2014 (cited below as Jacoby, *Travellers*).

## **1 Venetian Commercial Expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean, 8th–11th centuries**

- p. 385, n. 78: The article is reproduced in Jacoby, *Travellers*, no. I.
- p. 387, n. 93: **replace** “Camlet Manufacture and Trade in Medieval Cyprus: Aspects of the Evolving Economy of Famagusta” in N. Coureas, P. W. Edbury, and M. Walsh (eds.), *Medieval and Renaissance Famagusta: History and monuments* (in press) **by** “Camlet Manufacture, Trade in Cyprus and the Economy of Famagusta from the Thirteenth to the Late Fifteenth Century”, in Michael J. K. Walsh, Peter W. Edbury and Nicholas S. H. Coureas, eds., *Medieval and Renaissance Famagusta: Studies in Architecture, Art and History*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2012, pp. 88–90.

## **2 The Venetians in Byzantine and Lusignan Cyprus: Trade, Settlement, and Politics**

- p. 88, n. 22: D. Jacoby, “Migrations familiales ...” is reproduced in Jacoby, *Latins, Greeks and Muslims*, no. III.
- p. 93, n. 93: **replace** in press **by** Farnham, 2012, pp. 16–17.
- p. 94, n. 105: The article is reproduced in Jacoby, *Latins, Greeks and Muslims*, no. XII.

- p. 94, n. 107: D. Jacoby, “The Economic Function of the Crusader States” is reproduced in this volume, no. IV.
- p. 95, n. 112: D. Jacoby, “Marino Sanudo Torsello on Trade Routes, Commodities, and Taxation” is reproduced in Jacoby, *Travellers*, no. XI.

### 3 **Commercio e navigazione degli Amalfitani nel Mediterraneo orientale: sviluppo e declino**

- p. 104, n. 83: **replace** the entire note **by** D. Jacoby, “The Minor Western Nations in Constantinople: Trade and Shipping from the Early Twelfth Century to 1261”, in Gogo K. Barzeliote – Kostas G. Tsiknakes, eds., *Γαληνοτάτη. Τιμή στη Χρύσα Μαλτέζου*, Athens, 2013, pp. 319–332.
- p. 122, n. 188: **add** D. Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. A Corpus*, 1993–2009, III, pp. 205–206, identifies Francavilla as being on Mount Carmel, and Palmarea as the area around the mouth of the Kishon River, *ibid.* pp. 150–2, 155–156.

### 4 **The Economic Function of the Crusader States of the Levant: a New Approach**

- p. 162, n. 5: **add** The first article is reproduced in Jacoby, *Latins, Greeks and Muslims*, no. V.
- p. 162, n. 5: **add at the end:** The article is reproduced in Jacoby, *Latins, Greeks and Muslims*, no. X.
- p. 168, n. 33: **replace** IDEM, *Pisa e l’Oriente crociato*, in “*Pisani viri in insulis et transmarinis regionibus potentes*”. *Pisa come nodo di comunicazioni nei secoli centrali del medioevo*, G. GARZELLA, M.L. CECCARELLI LEMUT eds. (in press) **by** D. Jacoby, “Pisa and the Frankish States of the Levant in the Twelfth Century” (forthcoming).

### 5 **Acre-Alexandria: A Major Commercial Axis of the Thirteenth Century**

- p. 151, n. 1: The article is reproduced in this volume, no. IV.
- p. 152, n. 4: The article is reproduced in Jacoby, *Travellers*, no. III.
- p. 157, n. 25: The article by D. Jacoby, “New Venetian Evidence ...” is reproduced in Jacoby, *Travellers*, no. IV.

- p. 163, n. 55: The article by D. Jacoby, “The Economy of Latin Constantinople, ....” is reproduced in Jacoby, *Travellers*, no. VII.

## 6 **Marco Polo, His Close Relatives, and His Travel Account: Some New Insights**

- p. 216: The article by D. Jacoby, “The *fonde* of Crusader Acre and its Tariff ...” is reproduced in Jacoby, *Latins, Greeks and Muslims*, no. VI.
- p. 216: The article “The Economy of Latin Constantinople,...” is reproduced in Jacoby, *Travellers*, no. VII.

## 7 **Byzantium, the Italian Maritime Powers, and the Black Sea before 1204**

- p. 680, n. 18: D. Jacoby, “Diplomacy, trade, shipping and espionage ...” is reproduced in Jacoby, *Latins, Greeks and Muslims*, no. II.
- p. 685, n. 40: D. Jacoby, “Foreigners and the urban economy in Thessalonike, ...” is reproduced in Jacoby, *Latins, Greeks and Muslims*, no. VII.
- p. 686, n. 44: The article “The Economy of Latin Constantinople,...” is reproduced in Jacoby, *Travellers*, no. VII.
- p. 687, n. 51: **replace** Venedig im Schnittpunkt der Kulturen. Außen- und Innensichten europäischer und nichteuropäischer Reisender im Vergleich/Venezia incrocio di culture. A confronto le percezioni dall’interno e dall’esterno di viaggiatori europei e non. Roma 2008 (in press). **by** Venezia incrocio di culture. Percezioni di viaggiatori europei e non europei a confronto. Atti del convegno Venezia, 26–27 gennaio 2006 (Centro Tedesco di Studi Veneziani, Ricerche, 4), Roma, 2008, pp. 135–164, repr. in Jacoby, *Travellers*, no. II.
- p. 689, n. 60: **Replace** the entire note **by** David Jacoby, “Caviar Trading in Byzantium”, in Rustam Shukurov, ed., *MARE ET LITORA*. Essays presented to Sergei Karpov for his 60th Birthday, Moscow, 2009, pp. 350–351.
- p. 694, n. 91: “Migrations familiales ...” is reproduced in Jacoby, *Latins, Greeks and Muslims*, no. III.



**8 Mediterranean Food and Wine for Constantinople: The Long-Distance Trade, Eleventh to Mid-Fifteenth Century**

- p. 127, n. 5: The article is reproduced in Jacoby, *Travellers*, no. VII.
- p. 129, n. 17: The article is reproduced in Jacoby, *Latins, Greeks and Muslims*, no. XII.
- p. 134, n. 82: The article is reproduced in Jacoby, *Latins, Greeks and Muslims*, no. XI.
- p. 134, n. 85: **after** around 1240, **add** p. 197, reproduced in Jacoby, *Byzantium*, no. VII.
- p. 136, n. 113: The article is reproduced in Jacoby, *Latins, Greeks and Muslims*, no. III.

**9 Rural Exploitation and Market Economy in the Late Medieval Peloponnese**

- p. 237, n. 186: **add** The article is reproduced in this volume, no. VIII.
- p. 238, n. 191: **add** The article is reproduced in this volume, no. I.
- p. 243, n. 241: **replace** Cician **by** Cilician.

**10 Jews and Christians in Venetian Crete: Segregation, Interaction, and Conflict**

- p. 242, n. 8: **read** (Text and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism 23), Tübingen, 2009, pp. 163–164.
- p. 251, n. 63: **add** The article is reproduced in Jacoby, *Travellers*, no. II.
- p. 257, n. 96: **erase** For more evidence, see David Jacoby, “The Jews in Byzantium and the Eastern Mediterranean: Economic Activities from the Thirteenth to the Mid-Fifteenth Century”, in Michael Toch/Elisabeth Müller-Luckner, eds., *Wirtschaftsgeschichte der mittelalterlichen Juden: Fragen und Einschätzungen*, München, 2008 (in press), n. 166.
- p. 258, n. 101: **add** The article is reproduced in Jacoby, *Travellers*, no. IX.
- p. 264, n. 129: **add** The article is reproduced. in Jacoby, *Latins, Greeks and Muslims*, no. XII.

# Venetian commercial expansion in the eastern Mediterranean, 8<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries

David Jacoby

The spectacular rise of Venice from a small community scattered over a cluster of islands in the northern Adriatic to a major maritime power in the Mediterranean in the 12<sup>th</sup> century was furthered by a conjunction of political, military and economic developments over several centuries.<sup>1</sup> Venice's relations with Byzantium are considered to have been a major factor in its economic growth and commercial expansion. On the other hand, Venetian trading with the Muslims in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries is generally viewed as marginal in that respect. In addition, the Muslims have been treated as one bloc, without proper distinction between states and regional economies. More generally, Venice's commercial exchanges with Byzantium, on the one hand, and Muslim countries, on the other, are regarded as having been largely conducted independently from each other. This bi-polar and fragmented perspective of Venetian trading in the eastern Mediterranean, in accordance with a long-standing Eurocentric tradition, is utterly distorted.<sup>2</sup> The present paper suggests a different approach. It examines Venetian commercial expansion both in connection with Byzantium and Muslim entities within the context of the decisive changes affecting the economies of the eastern Mediterranean in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, with due attention to the interdependence between them, and attempts to determine Venice's role in their interaction.

Venice's commercial and maritime expansion in the eastern Mediterranean was underway and its basic patterns were already

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<sup>1</sup> Severe space restrictions prevent any discussion of political or military developments. Whenever possible, references are limited to recent studies containing earlier bibliography. I apologize for frequently citing some of my own recent studies, upon which the present paper is partly based while offering new interpretations.

<sup>2</sup> For my criticism of the current approach to eastern Mediterranean trade, shared by historians of Byzantium and of the medieval West, see D. Jacoby, 'Byzantine trade with Egypt from the mid-tenth century to the Fourth Crusade', *Thesaurismata* 30 (2000), 25–30, repr. in D. Jacoby, *Commercial Exchange across the Mediterranean: Byzantium, the Crusader Levant, Egypt and Italy* (Aldershot, 2005), no. I.

From *Byzantine Trade, 4th–12th Centuries*. Copyright © 2009 by the Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies. Published by Ashgate Publishing Ltd, Wey Court East, Union Road, Farnham, Surrey, GU9 7PT, Great Britain.

established by the late 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> The Venetians imported silks from Byzantium and Syria-Lebanon,<sup>4</sup> and costly furs from the Black Sea region and Dalmatia.<sup>5</sup> Egypt was one of the sources of oriental spices, dyestuffs and aromatics, among which myrrh and frankincense from the Arabian peninsula were widely used in the Christian liturgy. The Venetians appear to have regularly visited Jerusalem in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century, undoubtedly in connection with the seasonal fair surrounding Christian pilgrimage and the availability of costly oriental commodities arriving from Baghdad.<sup>6</sup> They must have also brought these goods from Byzantium. From the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Trebizond was a major market at the crossroads of Byzantine, Armenian and Muslim states and commercial routes.<sup>7</sup> Venetian relations with Egypt and Syria are further illustrated by the decree prohibiting trade with these regions issued in Venice under the pressure of Emperor Leo V of Byzantium (reigned 813–20), who attempted to enforce a blockade on these regions. The implementation of the decree had ceased long before 828, when ten Venetian ships sailed to Alexandria in what was clearly a routine journey and returned with St Mark's relics.<sup>8</sup> It is likely that Venetian ships and merchants crossed the friendly and relatively secure Byzantine waters with which they were familiar to reach the Levant and Egypt, rather than sailing via Sicily and along the African coast, where for long stretches there were few sources of sweet water and few trading opportunities. Incidentally, it has not been noted that

<sup>3</sup> Overview of Venice's internal development and its relation to commercial expansion from the 8<sup>th</sup>- to the 10<sup>th</sup> century by G. Ortalli, 'Il mercante e lo stato: strutture della Venezia altomedievale', in *Mercati e mercanti nell'alto medioevo: l'area euroasiatica e l'area mediterranea*, Settimane di studio del Centro italiano sull'alto medioevo 40 (Spoleto, 1993), 85–135. On trade, see McCormick, *Origins*, 526–31, 631–3.

<sup>4</sup> On continuous western imports of silks in the late 8<sup>th</sup>-, 9<sup>th</sup>- and 10<sup>th</sup> century, see D. Jacoby, 'Silk crosses the Mediterranean', in G. Airaldi, ed., *Le vie del Mediterraneo. Idee, uomini, oggetti (secoli XI–XVI)*, Università degli studi di Genova, Collana dell'Istituto di storia del medioevo e della espansione europea 1 (Genoa, 1997), 56–7, repr. with corrections in D. Jacoby, *Byzantium, Latin Romania and the Mediterranean* (Aldershot, 2001), no. X.

<sup>5</sup> See McCormick, *Origins*, 730–31, who, however, dismisses without justification the possibility of fur imports from Constantinople. The city was supplied in furs by the Rus: *ibid.*, 610.

<sup>6</sup> Jerusalem was not only a source of relics, as conveyed by a hagiographic text mentioning the merchants, on which see McCormick, *Origins*, 526–7. On the seasonal fairs, *ibid.*, 133, 587. Some pilgrims most likely sailed on the Venetian ships carrying the merchants.

<sup>7</sup> S. Vryonis, Jr., *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the process of Islamization from the eleventh through the fifteenth century* (Berkeley, 1971), 15–16; B. Martin-Hisard, 'Trebizonde et le culte de Saint Eugène (6<sup>e</sup>–11<sup>e</sup>s.)', *REArm*, n.s. 14 (1980), 337–8.

<sup>8</sup> McCormick, *Origins*, 238–40, 272, 527–8. McCormick, *ibid.*, 759, speculates that the ships may have carried slaves.

Venetian merchants and ships were the first Italians in the middle ages to engage in trans-Mediterranean voyages to Egypt. The continuity of Venetian trade with Ifriqiya is illustrated by the transfer of slaves bought in Rome to that region in the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century and the sailing of Muslim envoys from the Maghreb to Sicily on Venetian ships, reported by Pope Leo III in 813.<sup>9</sup> Venice's multilateral trade relations are confirmed by finds of Carolingian, Byzantine, Ummayyad and Abbasid coins from the 8<sup>th</sup> and early 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, some in Torcello and others in Venice.<sup>10</sup>

From the 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, Venice concluded a series of treaties with the Lombard, Carolingian and Ottonian rulers successively controlling the neighbouring mainland. The purpose of these treaties was to ensure the preservation of the city's virtual political independence, the Venetian diffusion of commodities imported by Venice from the eastern Mediterranean, both in northern Italy and beyond the Alps, and the orderly supplies of food, finished products and raw materials from the mainland. Both naval timber from the Alps floated down the rivers to the head of the Adriatic and iron from the area of Brescia in northern Italy and from Carinthia were of special importance in that context.<sup>11</sup> The construction of ships for commercial and military use and the manufacture of weapons were key factors in Venice's commercial and maritime expansion in the Adriatic and in the eastern Mediterranean. Venice boosted its naval power in the 9<sup>th</sup> century by the adoption of a Byzantine type of galley, technically superior to the ships sailing until then in the Adriatic. The Venetian chronicler Giovanni Diacono reports under the year 852 that two such ships, 'called *zalandriai* in the Greek language', in fact *chelandie*, were constructed by the doges, and that never before had that been achieved in Venice.<sup>12</sup> Their construction implies the presence of Byzantine shipwrights

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 513, 527; on the Venetian slave trade, 753–4, 763–8.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 330–35, 366–7, 380–84, 832–3, 849; M. Asolati and C. Crisafulli, 'Le monete', in L. Fozzati, ed., *Ca' Vendramin Calergi. Archeologia urbana lungo il Canal Grande di Venezia* (Venice, 2005), 157–62; A. Saccocci, 'Ritrovamenti di monete islamiche in Italia continentale', in *Simposio Simone Assemani sulla monetazione islamica*, Padova, II Congresso Internazionale di Numismatica e di Storia Monetale, Padova 17 Maggio 2003 (Padua, 2005), 140–41.

<sup>11</sup> See A. Schaube, *Handelsgeschichte der romanischen Völker des Mittelmeergebiets bis zum Ende der Kreuzzüge* (Munich, 1906), 4–13, paras. 2–9; G. Rösch, *Venedig und das Reich. Handels- und verkehrspolitische Beziehungen in der deutschen Kaiserzeit*, Bibliothek des Deutschen Historischen Instituts in Rom 53 (Tübingen, 1982), 7–17, 83, 87, 93, 144–8, and map at the end of the volume.

<sup>12</sup> G. Diacono, 'Cronaca veneziana', in G. Monticolo, ed., *Cronache veneziane antichissime*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1890), 115. On that ship type, see J.H. Pryor and E.M. Jeffreys, *The Age of the Dromon: the Byzantine navy ca 500–1204* (Leiden–Boston, 2006), 166–70, 188–92. Pryor, *ibid.*, 168, writes that Venice 'had attempted' to build *chelandiae*. However, in the chronicle's context, 'perficere studuerunt' means 'strove to complete' or 'to achieve'. The wording leaves no doubt regarding the ships' construction.

in Venice or the apprenticeship of Venetian craftsmen in Byzantium. Naval timber also became an important export item to Muslim countries by the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, as we shall see below.

The Adriatic expansion of Venice in the 10<sup>th</sup> century gradually removed actual or potential commercial rivals and ensured increasing security of navigation along the Dalmatian coast, the preferred sailing-lane between Venice and the Mediterranean, unless ships called in Italian ports.<sup>13</sup> Yet in the Dalmatian region there was yet another, less conspicuous factor at play, namely access to naval timber. This is indirectly confirmed in 971, when Venice prohibited ships sailing to the Mediterranean from loading it along the way, a reference to the Dalmatian coast.<sup>14</sup> This period coincides with an increasing Egyptian demand for timber, examined below.

The combination of abundant supplies of timber and iron as well as advanced technical expertise in shipbuilding eventually ensured Venice of naval superiority in the Adriatic, yet also yielded important commercial benefits, since the same ships were used in commercial and military enterprises in that period. Venice established its commercial dominance at the head of the Adriatic at the expense of its rivals, obtained commercial concessions from Byzantium in return for the promise or for actual naval support, and consolidated thereby its function as commercial intermediary between its continental hinterland and the eastern Mediterranean.

Venice's ongoing role as intermediary between Germany and the eastern Mediterranean is illustrated by a Venetian decree of 960 attesting to the transfer of letters from the *Regnum Italiae*, Bavaria and Saxony to Constantinople.<sup>15</sup> Several envoys of King and later Emperor Otto I passed through Venice and sailed on Venetian ships to Byzantium: in 949, Liutfrid, a very rich merchant from Mainz, presumably involved in business with Venetians,<sup>16</sup> in 967, Dominicus Venedicus, a merchant most likely familiar

<sup>13</sup> On the advantages of that route, see J.H. Pryor, *Geography, Technology and War: studies in the maritime history of the Mediterranean, 649–1571* (Cambridge, 1988), 93–4.

<sup>14</sup> See below. On timber resources of that region, see M. Lombard, 'Arsenaux et bois de marine dans la Méditerranée musulmane: VII<sup>e</sup>–XI<sup>e</sup> siècles', repr. in M. Lombard, *Espaces et réseaux du haut moyen âge* (Paris–The Hague, 1972), 133. They are confirmed for the 13<sup>th</sup> century: D. Jacoby, 'The supply of war materials to Egypt in the Crusader period', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 25 (2001), 111, 116, repr. in Jacoby, *Commercial Exchange*, no. II.

<sup>15</sup> G.L.F. Tafel and G.M. Thomas, eds., *Urkunden zur älteren Handels- und Staatsgeschichte der Republik Venedig* (Vienna, 1856–57), vol. 1, 17–25, esp. 21.

<sup>16</sup> Liutprand von Cremona, 'Antapodosis', VI, 4, in J. Becker, ed., *Die Werke Liutprands von Cremona*, MGH, *ScriptRerGerm* 41 (Hanover–Leipzig, 1915), 153–4.

with Constantinople;<sup>17</sup> and in 968, Bishop Liudprand of Cremona.<sup>18</sup> Around 965, the Spanish Jew Ibrahim ibn Ya'qub was surprised to find in Mainz all the spices of India and the Far East.<sup>19</sup> The *Honorantie civitatis Papie*, the market regulations of Pavia compiled between 991 and 1004, mention yearly Venetian imports of similar spices as well as dyestuffs and silks.<sup>20</sup> The spices must have reached Mainz through Pavia or directly from Venice, considering this city's relations with the German imperial court, rather than from eastern Europe with Slav merchants, as has been suggested by some. Doge Otto Orseolo (reigned 1009–26) limited Venetian sales of silks on the mainland to Pavia and Ferrara.<sup>21</sup>

The importance of Venice's simultaneous relations with Muslim states, Byzantium and the Italian mainland is well illustrated soon after the election of Doge Pietro II Orseolo in 991. The new doge conducted successful negotiations with foreign rulers, which incidentally illustrate the full extent of Venice's independent policies and standing at that time.<sup>22</sup> Egypt must have stressed its strong interest in the continuation of timber, iron and arms deliveries. In March 992, the Byzantine emperors Basil II and Constantine VIII reinstated a previously granted reduction in the passage fee paid by Venetian ships at Abydos and eased control over their cargo. On the other hand, on their return voyage Venetian vessels were barred from transporting foreigners in order to prevent the latter from taking advantage of this provision to export illegally silk textiles.<sup>23</sup> The implementation of this last measure curtailed Venetian revenue from

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<sup>17</sup> Liutprand von Cremona, 'Relatio de legatione constantinopolitana', 31 and 25, in Becker, ed., *Die Werke Liutprands von Cremona*, 192 and 188 respectively. The name is not mentioned in the second instance.

<sup>18</sup> Von Cremona, 'Relatio', 14, Becker, ed., *Die Werke Liutprands von Cremona*, 183: 'navis [...] Veneticorum oneraria'.

<sup>19</sup> A. Miquel, trans., 'L'Europe occidentale dans la relation arabe d'Ibrahim b. Ya'qub (X<sup>e</sup> s.)', *Annales. Économies, sociétés, civilisations* 21 (1966), 1059–60; for the dating, see *ibid.*, 1049.

<sup>20</sup> C. Brühl and C. Violante, eds., *Die 'Honorantie civitatis Papie': Transkription, Edition, Kommentar* (Cologne–Vienna, 1983), 19, lines 53–67; 40 and 44–5, commentary to lines 56 and 65–6, respectively. For the layers of the text and their dating, see *ibid.*, 77–85. See also Jacoby, 'Silk crosses the Mediterranean', 57.

<sup>21</sup> Decree in Monticolo, *Chronache veneziane*, 178–9, no. 3; identification of the localities in Röscher, *Venedig*, 120 and n. 154.

<sup>22</sup> Giovanni Diacono, 'Cronaca veneziana', 148–9.

<sup>23</sup> The chrysobull of 992 has been re-edited by M. Pozza and G. Ravegnani, eds., *I trattati con Bisanzio, 992–1198, Pacta veneta* 4 (Venice, 1993), 21–5, no. I, yet see my emendations to the text and my new interpretation in *Mediterranean Historical Review* 9 (1994), 140–42, a review of the edition. There was no reduction in customs duties, and the grants of 992 do not prefigure, therefore, the commercial and fiscal privileges obtained by Venice in 1082, as often stated.

freight without eliminating foreign competition, since Venice's rivals could board other ships. The Venetians were nevertheless the only Italians enjoying a favoured treatment in the Empire. Finally, in July 992, the German emperor Otto III renewed the privilege of 983, enabling extensive Venetian trade in his dominions.<sup>24</sup>

The sources documenting Venetian exports to Byzantium in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries occasionally refer to capital investments in cash or in money of account, yet fail to offer evidence regarding goods, except in one instance. In 1031, Leone da Molin arrived in Constantinople with four pieces of cloth, the origin of which is not stated.<sup>25</sup> In addition to merchants and goods, Venetian ships took passengers on board. In 949, Bishop Liutprand of Cremona sailed to Constantinople together with a Byzantine envoy returning home.<sup>26</sup> Yet there were also Venetian operations along the way. The sources recording maritime voyages generally refer to points of departure and ultimate destinations. They rarely mention ports of call, although the constant need to resupply ships with sweet water clearly required numerous stops. These were undoubtedly also exploited to take on board passengers and goods. Cabotage, the picking-up of passengers and cargo along the way at ports located at fairly short- or medium-range distances one from another, and tramping, calling into ports without a fixed schedule, yielded revenue that could be invested in the course of long-distance journeys between Venice and eastern Mediterranean ports. In short, trade and transportation services along the way generated additional financial means, possibly in some cases quite substantial, and furthered a speedier turnover of the initial capital, amplified during the voyage.

Navigational considerations induced Venetian ships to hug the coast of the Balkans and to rely on a string of islands to cross the Aegean on their way to Constantinople or Asia Minor and Egypt. Sailing in open sea, for instance directly from Crete to Egypt, was not practised before the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup> However, economic incentives prompted shipmasters and merchants to deviate from their customary itineraries.

<sup>24</sup> See above, note 11.

<sup>25</sup> A. Lombardo and R. Morozzo della Rocca, eds., *Nuovi documenti del commercio veneto dei sec. XI–XIII* (Venice, 1953) (hereafter 'DCV'), I, 6–7, no. 7.

<sup>26</sup> See above, note 16.

<sup>27</sup> D. Jacoby, 'Byzantine Crete in the navigation and trade networks of Venice and Genoa', in L. Balletto, ed., *Oriente e Occidente tra medioevo ed età moderna. Studi in onore di Geo Pistarino*, Università degli Studi di Genova, Sede di Acqui Terme, Collana di Fonti e Studi 1.1 (Acqui Terme, 1997), 517–18, 523–4, 537, 540, repr. in Jacoby, *Byzantium*, no. II. On sea-lanes from Italy to Constantinople and Egypt, see Pryor, *Geography*, 93–7, yet see Jacoby, 'Byzantine Crete', 523–4, 536–7, 540, for my reservations about the role of Crete and Cyprus in that context.



Business contracts sometimes stipulated in advance the particular region in which they were to operate, implying the purchase of specific commodities available in them.

The adoption of these practices was related to economic and social developments in the Byzantine Empire. Economic growth was already apparent in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, the social elite and the urban middle stratum, especially in Constantinople, enjoyed increasing purchasing-power expressed in new consumption patterns in food, dress and other ways.<sup>28</sup> These in turn generated a growing and more diversified demand for agricultural, pastoral and manufactured commodities. The Venetians successfully adjusted to the changing circumstances. Instead of relying exclusively on income accruing from chance customers and goods taken on board in ports of call, they increasingly focused upon specific commodities in order to respond to the demand of Byzantine markets or to stimulate it.

Cheese is a case in point. In 1022, Leone da Molin, brought to Constantinople six *milliaria* of cheese weighing at least 2,860kg, purchased in a Byzantine province along the maritime route leading from Venice to the imperial capital.<sup>29</sup> This was presumably a high-grade and much-appreciated Cretan cheese, rather than the inferior Vlach brand from Thessaly. Its purchase required a significant deviation from the usual course of navigation. Contrary to common belief, Crete was not located along the major sea-lanes used in that period.<sup>30</sup> The export of cheese from the island was closely connected to the commercial function of the Cretan *archontes* or great landlords, who as wholesalers concentrated the island's surpluses and marketed them.<sup>31</sup> Leone da Molin was once more in Constantinople in 1031, possibly again with cheese.<sup>32</sup>

There is further evidence about Venetian merchants visiting Crete in the 1060s or 1070s in order to purchase local produce for trading in

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<sup>28</sup> Jacoby, 'Byzantine trade', 31 and n. 19 for bibliography. The growth in demand for silks is a clear indication of that process: see D. Jacoby, 'Silk in western Byzantium before the Fourth Crusade', *BZ* 84/85 (1991/92), 470–76, repr. in D. Jacoby, *Trade, Commodities and Shipping in the Medieval Mediterranean* (Aldershot, 1997), no. VII.

<sup>29</sup> DCV, I, 2, no. 2. For the dating of Venetian commercial documents prior to 1039, see *ibid.*, XXVII–XXVIII. For the weight of the cheese, see note 31.

<sup>30</sup> See above, note 27.

<sup>31</sup> Jacoby, 'Byzantine Crete', 518–22. On the types of Cretan cheese and the main regions producing them, see D. Jacoby, 'Cretan Cheese: a neglected aspect of Venetian medieval trade', in E.E. Kittel and Th.F. Madden, eds., *Medieval and Renaissance Venice* (Urbana–Chicago, 1999), 50–51, repr. in Jacoby, *Commercial exchange*, no. VIII.

<sup>32</sup> DCV, I, 6–7, no. 7. In April 1030, he had just returned to Venice from a maritime voyage, the destination of which is not stated: *ibid.*, 3–5, nos. 4–5.



Alexandria.<sup>33</sup> It seems, nevertheless, that Venetian exports from the island to Constantinople were still rather limited around that time. This would partly explain the omission of the island from the list of localities and regions submitted by Venice to Emperor Alexios I Komnenos and reproduced in the chrysobull he granted her in 1082.<sup>34</sup> Venetian trade in the island expanded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The brother of a merchant involved in 1110 or 1111 in the purchase of *agrarium*, a collective term for pastoral and agricultural products, brought cheese to Constantinople ten years later.<sup>35</sup> Shortly before 1171, the so-called Ptochoprodromos referred in a satirical work to the Venetian quarter in Constantinople as the place where good-quality cheese can be bought. Despite the paucity of documentary evidence, it appears that the trading-pattern established in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century at the latest was progressively expanded, to the extent that the Venetians may have acquired a sheer monopoly in the supply of Constantinople's market in Cretan cheese by the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It is not excluded that the Venetian purchases of *agrarium* also covered Cretan sweet wine, which was highly appreciated.<sup>36</sup>

Olive oil was yet another commodity in demand in Constantinople. This is attested in 1051, when a ship presumably from Bari carrying oil from Apulia was destroyed by fire close to the promontory of Monopoli, shortly after leaving for the Byzantine capital.<sup>37</sup> Venetian merchants were involved in oil exports from Sparta to Constantinople in 1147 or 1148,<sup>38</sup> and again shortly before March 1171.<sup>39</sup> The shipments were made from Modon in the south-western Peloponnesos, as attested shortly before 1201.<sup>40</sup> Venetian vessels anchored at Modon, an outlet for the region's

<sup>33</sup> See below, note 71.

<sup>34</sup> Jacoby, 'Byzantine Crete', 524–5. On the charter of 1082 and the list it contains, see also below.

<sup>35</sup> DCV, I, 35–6, no. 33, and 48–9, no. 46.

<sup>36</sup> Jacoby, 'Byzantine Crete', 525–8. On Cretan wine, see H. Eideneier, ed., *Ptochoprodromos* (Neograeca medii aevi, V) (Cologne, 1991), 157 (IV, 332). On Venetian trade in Crete in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, see also D. Jacoby, 'Italian privileges and trade in Byzantium before the Fourth Crusade: a reconsideration', *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 24 (1994), 353–6, 363–7, repr. in Jacoby, *Trade*, no. II.

<sup>37</sup> 'Anonymi Barenensis Chronicon', in L.A. Muratori, ed., *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, vol. 5 (Milan, 1724), 151. On the location, see V. von Falkenhausen, 'Bari bizantina: profilo di un capoluogo di provincia (secoli IX–XI)', in G. Rossetti, ed., *Spazio, società, potere nell'Italia dei Comuni* (Naples, 1986), 211, n. 121.

<sup>38</sup> DCV, 14, no. 11, issued in 1151, yet with a reference to the expedition of Roger II to Greece in 1147. The same business deal is mentioned *ibid.*, 11, no. 9, drafted in 1150.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 352–6, nos. 358, 360 and 361, with references to the arrest of the Venetians in the Empire in March 1171. For a similar Venetian purchase in Sparta in 1135, see below.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 445–6, no. 456.

produce and a regular port of call.<sup>41</sup> It is quite possible, therefore, that the Venetians were already conveying Peloponnesian oil to Constantinople in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Venetian vessels also embarked goods intended for this city before reaching Byzantine waters. A contract of 1088 refers to trade in 'Sclavinia' on the Dalmatian coast, another of the following year to Apulia, and an agreement of 1118 to Sicily.<sup>42</sup> In the last two cases, the shipping of oil may have been envisaged.

The Venetian integration within the internal trade and transportation networks of Byzantium is also illustrated with respect to silk textiles. Venetian as well as Amalfitan and other Italian merchants exported them from Constantinople to the West in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>43</sup> However, the Venetians appear to have been the only ones who managed to take advantage of the rise of Thebes as a manufacturer of high-grade silks from the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century onwards, and to have access to its products until the early 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>44</sup> The *taxegium de Stives*, or 'journey of Thebes', of 1071 and 1073 suggests that, by that time, Venetians were regularly sailing to Corinth, from where they proceeded by land to their destination.<sup>45</sup> Annual sailings from Venice to Corinth are directly attested in 1088, 1092 and 1095. The same small vessel, a *platum*, appears to have sailed in 1088 and 1092, each time with another member of the same family as *nauclerus*, or shipmate.<sup>46</sup> It is unclear whether Corinth already produced silk textiles by that time, yet this was definitely the case some twenty years later.<sup>47</sup> The author of *Timarion*, who around 1110 described the fair of St Demetrios in Thessalonike, mentions the sale of fabrics from Boeotia and the Peloponnesos, in all likelihood silk fabrics. He clearly refers to Thebes and Corinth, respectively, since the two cities were apparently the only textiles manufacturers in these regions at that time, and silks were the only fabrics they produced. Venetians had traded earlier in both cities, as noted above, and there is good reason to believe, therefore, that they were among the Italian merchants who attended the fair of Thessalonike,

<sup>41</sup> As attested in 1071 for a ship returning from Alexandria to Venice: *ibid.*, I, 10–11, no. 11.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 20, no. 17: see *ODB*, III, 1910–11, s.v. Sklavinia; *DCV*, I, 22–3, no. 19, mentions Lombardia: see *ODB*, II, 1249–50, s.v. Longobardia; *DCV*, I, 42–3, no. 40.

<sup>43</sup> Jacoby, 'Silk crosses the Mediterranean', 57–8.

<sup>44</sup> Jacoby, 'Silk in western Byzantium', 466–7, 476–81, 494–5, repr. in Jacoby, *Trade*, no. VII.

<sup>45</sup> *DCV*, I, 11–13, nos. 12–13.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 20–21, 23–4 and 28, respectively nos. 18, 20 and 25. A further sailing to Corinth is attested in 1112: *ibid.*, I, 37–8, no. 35. On the *platum*, see D. Jacoby, 'Venetian anchors for Crusader Acre', *The Mariner's Mirror* 71 (1985), 5–6, repr. in Jacoby, *Trade*, no. XII.

<sup>47</sup> For later evidence on Corinth, see Jacoby, 'Silk in western Byzantium', 462–3, 468.

again according to *Timarion*. The Venetian integration within the internal Byzantine silk trade must have already occurred in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and was extended to Constantinople.<sup>48</sup>

Venice's trade with Muslim countries also underwent important changes in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. The decree issued by Doge Pietro IV Candiano in 960, which prohibited the slave trade, expressly refers to Venice, Istria and Dalmatia. However, the Venetians continued to supply slaves to Fatimid Ifriqiya, as implied some twenty years later by the Arab geographer Ibn Hawqal, who mentions the sale of Slavic eunuchs in Qayrawan.<sup>49</sup> The Venetians also brought timber to the region, which lacked adequate resources for shipbuilding.<sup>50</sup> Presumably under the pressure of Emperor John I Tzimiskes (reigned 969–76), the doge prohibited this trade between 969 and 971. Nevertheless, within these years, lumber was discovered on board Venetian ships about to sail to Fatimid ports: two to Mahdia in Tunisia, and one to Tripoli in Libya. The Venetian authorities were lenient towards the transgressors, in view of their modest economic standing, and allowed them to ship small pieces of worked or unworked timber.<sup>51</sup> Alum most probably originating in the southern Sahara was shipped through Surt, on the Gulf of Syrtis in present-day Libya.<sup>52</sup> It is not excluded that Venetians were involved in that export.<sup>53</sup> Venetian trade with Tunisia in that period is illustrated by a Fatimid quarter dinar coined in 971 at al-Mansuriyah, in the vicinity of Qayrawan, found in the region of Padua.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>48</sup> R. Romano, ed., *Pseudo-Luciano, Timarione: Testo critico, introduzione, traduzione, commentario e lessico* (Naples, 1974), 53–5, paras. 5–6, and see esp. lines 147–57. Sound arguments for the dating of the text to c. 1110 by E.Th. Tsolakes, *Timariwn. Mia nea Anagnôse*, in *Mnêmê Stamatê Karatza* (Thessalonike, 1990) 109–17. See also Jacoby, 'Silk in western Byzantium', 462, 495.

<sup>49</sup> Tafel and Thomas, *Urkunden*, I, 17–25, esp. 20–21; Ibn Hawqal, *Kitâb surat al-ard*, ed. J.H. Kramers, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Leiden, 1938–39), 68, and Ibn Hawqal, *Configuration de la terre* (*Kitâb surat al-ard*), trans. J.H. Kramers, rev. by G. Wiet (Beirut–Paris, 1964), I, 64. Ibn Hawqal completed the second version of his treatise in 988: see *ibid.*, 'Introduction', XIII. On eunuchs created in Venice, see McCormick, *Origins*, 764.

<sup>50</sup> On this aspect, see Lombard, 'Arsenaux', 128–9.

<sup>51</sup> Tafel and Thomas, *Urkunden*, I, 25–30, esp. 26–7.

<sup>52</sup> Alum, a mineral, was used for the fixing of dyes on textiles, in the treatment of hides, and in medicine. On its trade via Surt, see D. Jacoby, 'Production et commerce de l'alun oriental en Méditerranée, XI<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècles', in Ph. Borgard, J.-P. Brun and M. Picard, eds., *L'alun de Méditerranée*, Collection du Centre Jean Bérard 23 (Naples–Aix-en-Provence, 2005), 220.

<sup>53</sup> For later evidence, see below.

<sup>54</sup> G. Gorini, 'Moneta araba del X secolo rinvenuta a Roncagette (Padova)', *Studi Veneziani* 12 (1970), 59–62.

The economy of Tunisia declined following the transfer of the Fatimid political centre to Egypt, conquered in 969.<sup>55</sup> The commercial function of Egypt was further enhanced by a major shift of trade routes in the Middle East. From the late 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the main westward flow of precious goods from the region of the Indian Ocean and the Far East was increasingly diverted from the Persian Gulf, plagued by political instability, to the Red Sea. The Fatimids encouraged, protected and controlled this lucrative trade. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Alexandria became the major Mediterranean outlet for oriental spices, dyestuffs and aromatics.<sup>56</sup> As a result, the flow of these goods to Trebizond must have gradually declined, and those reaching Constantinople were most likely absorbed by the internal Byzantine market without leaving surpluses for export.<sup>57</sup> As we shall see below, the Empire became increasingly dependent upon the supply of costly oriental commodities from Egypt. These processes limited the range of goods exported by Byzantium to the countries of the Mediterranean region and contributed to the intensification of its commercial exchanges with Egypt.

Venice's trade with Egypt also intensified. Maritime quality lumber was a major item in that framework. Between the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century and the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century, Egyptian forces had conducted frequent large-scale raids on the southern coast of Asia Minor aimed at the supply of timber, and occasionally had built ships on location. The importance of that region as a major source of timber for the Egyptian Navy is also attested later.<sup>58</sup> The Byzantine expansion in Asia Minor and northern Syria from 965 to 969 deprived Egypt of secure access to the timber outlets of these regions. It also coincided with the occupation of Egypt by the Fatimids in 969. The Fatimids inherited the political and territorial ambitions and the strategic goals of their predecessors; and, therefore, their confrontation with Byzantium was inevitable.

Emperor John I Tzimiskes, who ascended the imperial throne in that year, was determined to pursue the Byzantine offensive launched by his

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<sup>55</sup> On the earlier prosperity of Tunisia and its decline, see Goitein, *Cairo Geniza*, vol. 1, 30–32, 44–5. The decline was compounded by political and military disasters in the 11<sup>th</sup> century: *ibid.*, 32, 41–2.

<sup>56</sup> Jacoby, 'Byzantine trade with Egypt', 30–31.

<sup>57</sup> On Trebizond, see above, note 7. Symeon Seth, writing under Michael VII Doukas (reigned 1071–78), refers to the cinnamon of Mosul, which must have still arrived in Trebizond: Symeon Seth, *Syntagma de alimentorum facultatibus*, ed. B. Langkavel (Leipzig, 1868), 96.

<sup>58</sup> Lombard, 'Arsenaux', 113–16, 134–7; Jacoby, 'Byzantine trade with Egypt', 35–6; Jacoby, 'The supply of war materials', 109–10, 113, 119–22, 124. Neither Crete nor Cyprus seems to have been timber suppliers to Egypt, contrary to common belief and to what I have stated in the past.

predecessor. As noted above, he pressured Venice within the following two years to prohibit the delivery of war materials to the Muslims in order to curb Muslim naval and military power, yet the ban was not effective. Doge Pietro IV Candiano issued in 971 another decree that categorically prohibited the shipping of naval lumber, oars, offensive arms or shields from Venice to Muslim countries. The decree also refers to the loading of timber along the way, a hint at the Dalmatian coast and possibly even at Asia Minor. The shipping of beams, boards and wooden containers up to 1.75m long was nevertheless allowed.<sup>59</sup> The embargo was presumably enforced for a short time only. The forceful Byzantine intervention implies that the Venetian deliveries of lumber and other 'war materials' to the Fatimids were quite significant. Venice's intimate commercial and political relations with Byzantium did not prevent Venice from pursuing that traffic. Two pieces of evidence, adduced below, imply it for the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and it is well documented for the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>60</sup> Venice clearly benefited from the Byzantine–Fatimid confrontation.<sup>61</sup>

The continuation of Venetian trade with Egypt after the embargo of 971 is indirectly attested by the passage of a Fatimid embassy to Otto I through Venice shortly before the emperor's death in 973.<sup>62</sup> The envoys must have sailed on a Venetian ship. Thietmar of Merseburg records the loss of four large Venetian vessels carrying 'pigmenta' or spices in 1017.<sup>63</sup> The Egyptian provenance of the goods may be safely assumed, in view of additional evidence from that period adduced below. The report by the German chronicler suggests that regular supplies of spices and dyeing materials from Egypt were expected in Germany. It also underscores Venice's function as commercial intermediary between that region and the eastern Mediterranean. High-value, low-bulk commodities required limited shipping-space. As hinted by their size, the lost ships did not exclusively carry spices and dyestuffs. Merchants generally diversified their shipments and split them between several vessels in order to minimize losses resulting from shipwreck or piratical attacks. It is likely,

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<sup>59</sup> See above, note 51.

<sup>60</sup> Jacoby, 'The supply', 105–11.

<sup>61</sup> This was also the case of Amalfi: see Jacoby, 'Byzantine trade', 28, 37, 47.

<sup>62</sup> Widukind, *Res Gestarum Saxonicarum libri tres*, III, 75. ed. G. Waitz, rev. by K.A. Kehr, MGH, *ScriptRerGerm* 60 (Hanover–Leipzig, 1904), 126. The embassy came from Africa, and Egypt was then the Fatimid political centre.

<sup>63</sup> 'Thietmari Merseburgensis episcopi Chronicon', VII, 76, ed. R. Holtzmann, in MGH, *ScriptRerGerm*, n.s., IX (Berlin, 1955), 492. 'Pigmenta' was often used as a collective term for spices, aromatics and dyestuffs.

therefore, that these large ships conveyed lumber to Egypt, and returned to Venice with alum, another bulky cargo.<sup>64</sup>

Venetian trade with Egypt is further illustrated during the reign of Henry II, which extended from 1002 to 1024. The German emperor presented to the cathedral of Aachen an ambo adorned with a highly prized rock-crystal dish carved in Fatimid Egypt.<sup>65</sup> Regardless of the circumstances in which this piece left Egypt, it must have transited through Venice on its way to the German imperial court. In 1026, a Venetian ship returning from Cairo was attacked while sailing on the Nile.<sup>66</sup> Vessels of small tonnage engaging in trans-Mediterranean voyages could sail through the canal leading from Alexandria to the Nile, except during the low-water season, and reach Cairo, the hub of Egypt in that period.<sup>67</sup> One of two Fatimid rock-crystal ewers from the late 10<sup>th</sup> century, presently in the treasury of the basilica of San Marco in Venice, bears the name of al-Aziz bi'llah, the fifth Fatimid Caliph of Egypt (reigned 975–96).<sup>68</sup> The two ewers were apparently kept in the palace of the Fatimid rulers in Cairo. In 1062, Turkish mercenaries pillaged the treasury of the caliph al-Mustansir; many of its pieces were scattered and sold, and the two mentioned above must have reached Venice in the 1060s or somewhat later. As noted below, Venetian merchants were reaching Alexandria by that time.

For Venetian carriers, the growth of timber shipments to Egypt after 969 was profitable only if a bulky cargo were available for the return voyage. Egypt produced natural alum, yet its internal consumption was rather limited. The sale of alum was a state monopoly, the establishment or the tightening of which at an unknown date was clearly prompted by a significant increase in external demand, in turn generated by the expanding wool industries of the Christian West.<sup>69</sup> The Venetian export of Egyptian alum is first attested in 1071 in a way suggesting that it was

<sup>64</sup> On Venetian exports of Egyptian alum, see below.

<sup>65</sup> D. Alcouffe, 'Islamic hardstone-carving', in the catalogue *The Treasury of San Marco* (Milan, 1984), 207, 215.

<sup>66</sup> The event was reported by the Greek monk Symeon, who escaped from the ship and fled to Antioch, where he met pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem in the spring of 1027: 'Vita S. Symeonis auctore Eberwino abbate S. Martini Treviris', in *ActaSS*, Iun. I, 88–9. On occasional attacks on ships by bandits, see Goitein, *Cairo Geniza*, vol. 1, 299.

<sup>67</sup> On sailing in the canal, see Goitein, *Cairo Geniza*, vol. 1, 298; P.M. Sijpesteijn, 'Travel and trade on the river', in Sijpesteijn and L. Sundelin, eds., *Papyrology and the History of Early Islamic Egypt* (Leiden–Boston, 2004), 116–18. On ships reaching Cairo, see Jacoby, 'Byzantine trade with Egypt', 33–4, 37 n. 51, 44; and on Cairo's economic function, *ibid.*, 33 n. 26.

<sup>68</sup> Alcouffe, 'Islamic hardstone-carving', 216–27, nos. 31–2.

<sup>69</sup> Jacoby, 'Production et commerce de l'alun oriental', 220–28.



common practice by that time.<sup>70</sup> Incidentally, the alum cargo suggests that the ship had carried lumber on its way to Egypt.

Not surprisingly, over time the Venetians extended their trading, transportation and supply network based on cabotage and tramping from Byzantine waters to Egypt. A Jewish letter dated to the 1060s or early 1070s reports that merchants from Venice and Crete trading in Alexandria shared the same business approach, different from the one displayed by merchants from Constantinople. Most likely the interests of the Venetians and the Cretans coincided because they exported the same Cretan pastoral and agricultural products and possibly even conducted joint business ventures. The wording of the letter suggests that the arrival of these merchants from Crete was not exceptional.<sup>71</sup> The shipping of Cretan cheese to Egypt is well attested for the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>72</sup> In 1135, some Venetian merchants exported more than 1,200 litres of olive oil from Sparta to Alexandria.<sup>73</sup> Such shipments, like those of cheese from Crete, may have already reached Egypt by the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, alongside oil imported from Tunisia, Syria and Palestine.<sup>74</sup>

The intensification of traffic between Italy and Egypt in the 11<sup>th</sup> century also promoted trading along the way in Byzantine and Fatimid ports, visited as transit stations or as destinations of business ventures. 'Frankish' or western merchants passed through Antioch to reach Aleppo before 1040/41, when the city's Fatimid governor expelled them.<sup>75</sup> The 10<sup>th</sup>-century Hamdanid rulers of Aleppo had encouraged cotton cultivation in the region. One may wonder, therefore, whether western merchants purchased there raw cotton or, more likely, cotton cloth.<sup>76</sup> In 1047, the Persian poet Nasir-i Khusrau noted in the Lebanese city of Tripoli, an important port of call and trans-shipment station, vessels from *Rum* (Byzantium), Andalusia and the Maghreb, as well as from the land of the *Farang*, or 'Frankish' ships. The identity of the Franks is not stated in these

<sup>70</sup> DCV, I, 10, no. 11. It may have already been the case on board the large ships lost in 1017 during their return voyage from Alexandria: see above, note 63.

<sup>71</sup> Jacoby, 'Byzantine Crete', 521–3. Genoese merchants were involved in a similar traffic from Crete around the same time: Jacoby, 'Byzantine trade', 43.

<sup>72</sup> Jacoby, 'Byzantine Crete', 528–30, 536.

<sup>73</sup> DCV, I, 69, no. 65.

<sup>74</sup> Goitein, *Cairo Geniza*, vol. 1, 153–4, 268, 272.

<sup>75</sup> Th. Bianquis, *Damas et la Syrie sous la domination fatimide (359–468/969–1076): essai d'interprétation de chroniques arabes médiévales* (Damascus, 1986–89), II, 554. On caravans between the two cities in that period, see W. Heyd, *Histoire du commerce du Levant au moyen-âge* (Leipzig, 1885–86), I, 43–4.

<sup>76</sup> The earliest testimonies on western cotton imports and cotton manufacture in Italy appear in the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century: M.F. Mazzaoui, *The Italian Cotton Industry in the Later Middle Ages, 1100–1600* (Cambridge, 1981), 21, 63–4.

two cases, yet they must have either been Venetian or Amalfitan, or else belonged to both Italian groups, the only ones apparently trading in the Muslim countries of the Levant in the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>77</sup>

Antioch was an important transit station along the pilgrimage routes to the Holy Land in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>78</sup> Around 1071, the Amalfitans established in the city a hospice to help pilgrims.<sup>79</sup> It is likely that Venetian ships involved in trade between their home city, Constantinople, Crete, Asia Minor and Egypt, occasionally carried western as well as Byzantine pilgrims. In 1052, Patriarch Petros III of Antioch entrusted a letter addressed to Pope Leo IX to a pilgrim returning home. He was to deliver it to Argyros, Byzantine *doux* of Italy, who would send it to Rome. It is unclear aboard which ship the letter travelled. In any event, the exchange of letters between Domenico Marango, Patriarch of Grado and Petros III in the following two years was clearly carried out with the help of Venetians sailing on Venetian vessels. Marango complained about the attitude of the Byzantine Church regarding the use of unleavened bread in the celebration of the Eucharist by the Roman Church.<sup>80</sup> Yet the choice of the addressee may have also been prompted by the activity of Venetian priests providing both liturgical and notarial services to Venetian merchants active in Antioch.<sup>81</sup> Thanks to their local connections and presumably with the help of bribes, some Venetian merchants operating in Antioch around 1074 freed from Byzantine captivity Constantine Bodinus, son of Michael, Serbian prince of Zeta, who had been exiled by Emperor Michael VII to the city.<sup>82</sup> A Venetian commercial contract of 1083 mentions the *taxegium* of Tripoli, a term implying regular sailings to this Levantine port and

<sup>77</sup> Naser-e Khosraw's *Book of Travels (Safarnama)*, trans. W.M. Thackston, Jr. (Albany, NY, 1986), 13. See also Jacoby, 'Byzantine trade', 38–9. The reference to the Franks is entirely reliable, although reported in late manuscripts: see B.Z. Kedar and R. Amitai, 'Franks in the Eastern Mediterranean, 1047', in F. Cardini and M.L. Ceccarelli Lemut, eds., *'Quel mar che la terra inghirlanda': studi mediterranei in ricordo di Marco Tangheroni* (Pisa, 2007), vol. 2, 465–7.

<sup>78</sup> See D. Jacoby, 'Bishop Gunther of Bamberg, Byzantium and Christian Pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the Eleventh Century', in L. Hoffmann with the cooperation of A. Monchizadeh, eds., *Zwischen Polis, Provinz und Peripherie. Beiträge zur byzantinischen Geschichte und Kultur*, *Mainzer Veröffentlichungen zur Byzantinistik* 7 (Wiesbaden, 2005), 281, 283.

<sup>79</sup> R. Hiestand, 'Die Anfänge der Johanniter', in J. Fleckenstein and M. Hellmann, eds., *Die geistlichen Ritterorden Europas*, *Vorträge und Forschungen* 26 (Sigmaringen, 1980), 33–7; B. Figliuolo, 'Amalfi e il Levante nel medioevo', in G. Airaldi and B. Z. Kedar, eds., *I Comuni italiani nel Regno crociato di Gerusalemme*, *Collana storica di fonti e studi*, diretta da Geo Pitarino 48 (Genoa, 1986), 589–91.

<sup>80</sup> G. Bianchi, 'Il patriarca di Grado Domenico Marango tra Roma e l'Oriente', *Studi Veneziani* 8 (1966), 19–125, esp. 55, 62–81, 99–102.

<sup>81</sup> On this dual function of Venetian priests in the eastern Mediterranean, see S. Borsari, *Venezia e Bisanzio nel XII secolo. I rapporti economici* (Venice, 1989), 54–5.

<sup>82</sup> *Ioannes Skylitzes continuatus*, ed. E.Th. Tsolakes (Thessalonica, 1968), 165.24–166.2.



a stopover at St Symeon, Antioch's port.<sup>83</sup> Silk textiles produced in Tripoli and Antioch were presumably the main incentive for trade in these two cities.<sup>84</sup> The costly oriental commodities traveling through Egypt were also available there.<sup>85</sup>

Trade between Byzantium and the Fatimid state, carried out by merchants and ships from both parties, was practically continuous throughout the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, despite occasional interruptions by warfare or Byzantine blockades.<sup>86</sup> However, the nature of that trade changed in the course of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, following the shift in the flow of costly oriental commodities from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea mentioned above. Byzantine purchases of oriental spices, aromatics and dyestuffs in Egypt and in Levantine ports under Fatimid rule, some massive, are documented from 1035 onwards, although they presumably started earlier.<sup>87</sup> A *nomisma histamenon* of the emperors Basil II and Constantine VIII minted in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century, found in the harbour of Acre, may have been lost by a Byzantine trader on his way to Egypt.<sup>88</sup> Rich Byzantine merchants from Constantinople are attested in Cairo in 1102 in a way that appears to have been routine, while Egyptian traders operated at the same time in the Byzantine Empire.<sup>89</sup>

The intensification of commercial exchanges between Byzantium and Fatimid territories in the 11<sup>th</sup> century created new opportunities for Venetian and Amalfitan merchants and carriers. They progressively extended the geographic range of their activities both from Constantinople and from Alexandria, and integrated within the trade network connecting both cities. Amalfitan sailings between the latter are suggested or attested

<sup>83</sup> DCV, vol. 1, 14-16, no. 15. Schaub, *Handelsgeschichte*, 24, mistakenly refers to Tripoli in Libya, which may be safely dismissed considering that city's decline as trading centre and the Levantine context described here.

<sup>84</sup> Their production continued in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries: Jacoby, 'Silk crosses the Mediterranean', 63-5. On the purchase of silk textiles in Antioch, see also below,

<sup>85</sup> See below.

<sup>86</sup> Jacoby, 'Byzantine trade with Egypt', 33-47. I do not deal here with small-scale trade such as illustrated by the well-known Serçe Limanı ship.

<sup>87</sup> Jacoby, 'Byzantine trade with Egypt', 42-5.

<sup>88</sup> On this coin, see R. Kool, 'A thirteenth century hoard of gold florins from the medieval harbour of Acre', *NC* 166 (2006), 306-7. However, contrary to the author (*ibid.*, 307, n. 35), one should take into account that Acre was neither an important trading centre nor the port of destination of pilgrims before the Frankish conquest of 1104.

<sup>89</sup> Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. M. Chibnall (Oxford, 1969-80), vol. 5, 351-2. See A.E. Laiou, 'Byzantine trade with Christians and Muslims and the Crusades', in Laiou and R.P. Mottahedeh, eds., *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World* (Washington, DC, 2001), 188. However, the 'Babilonicos institores et stipendiarios' active in Byzantium mentioned by Orderic Vitalis were not 'Egyptian factors and mercenaries', as stated by Laiou, but merchants from Cairo and their salaried employees.

by Jewish letters from the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century onwards.<sup>90</sup> Similar Venetian sailings may be safely assumed for that period. In any event, as we shall see below, they were already common before 1082, the year in which Emperor Alexios I granted extensive privileges to Venice. The Venetians presumably handled the same commodities as their counterparts from Byzantium and Fatimid territories, exporting from the Empire to Egypt foodstuffs, aromatic and medicinal herbs, storax resin, silk thread, silk textiles, mastic from Chios, Russian linen, presumably also timber, and possibly grain. From Fatimid territories, they most likely conveyed to the Empire spices, aromatics and dyestuffs, high-quality linen cloth, and specific types of silks manufactured in Tinnis.<sup>91</sup>

The chrysobull of 1082 issued by Alexios I granted freedom of trade and tax exemption to the Venetians throughout the Empire, yet nevertheless mentions 30 cities and two islands.<sup>92</sup> The Venetians themselves must have requested the inclusion of that list, which reads like a passage from a nautical guide. It reflects the perspective and course of navigation of Venetian sailors and merchants travelling from the Adriatic or from the Levant to Constantinople, rather than the outlook of Byzantine officials established in the imperial capital. The list strikingly illustrates the Venetians' acquaintance with Byzantine ports of call and markets. Except for Adrianople, all the listed cities are either situated along the coast or close to it, like Thebes and Antioch. The Venetians were already trading in several of these places, as in Dyrrachion, Thebes and Antioch, for

<sup>90</sup> D. Jacoby, 'What do we learn about Byzantine Asia Minor from the documents of the Cairo Genizah?', in S. Lampakēs, ed., *Byzantine Asia Minor (6<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> cent.)*, Institute for Byzantine Research, National Hellenic Foundation (Athens, 1998), 91–2, 94, repr. in Jacoby, *Byzantium*, no. I; also D. Jacoby, 'Amalfitan trade and shipping in eleventh-century Genizah documents', *Rassegna del Centro di Cultura e Storia Amalfitana*, n.s. 18 (2008) (in press).

<sup>91</sup> Jacoby, 'Byzantine trade with Egypt', 35, 39–40, 45–6. On textile manufacture in Tinnis, see R.B. Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles: material for a history up to the Mongol Conquest* (Beirut, 1972), 138–47, and especially on the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Y. Lev, 'Tinnis: an industrial medieval town', in M. Barrucand, ed., *L'Égypte fatimide: son art et son histoire* (Paris, 1999), 87–91.

<sup>92</sup> Tafel and Thomas, *Urkunden*, vol. 1, 51–4; new edn by Pozza and Ravegnani, *I trattati con Bisanzio*, 35–45. The latest studies supporting the date of 1082: Th.F. Madden, 'The Chrysobull of Alexius I Comnenus to the Venetians: the date and the debate', *Journal of Medieval History* 28 (2002), 23–41, and D. Jacoby, 'The chrysobull of Alexius I Comnenus to the Venetians: the date and the debate', *Journal of Medieval History* 28 (2002), 199–204. A renewed attempt in favour of 1092 has been made by P. Frankopan, 'Byzantine trade privileges to Venice in the eleventh century: the chrysobull of 1092', *Journal of Medieval History* 30 (2004), 135–60, yet his main arguments remain unconvincing. I shall return to the issue in the near future. Against a restrictive interpretation of the privileges, based on the list, see Jacoby, 'Italian privileges', 349–52.

which evidence survives.<sup>93</sup> Had more documents been preserved, other localities could have certainly been added. The inclusion of Chrysopolis in Macedonia, Demetrias in Thessaly, and Rhaidestos on the Sea of Marmara, three cities serving as major maritime outlets for grain, raises the question whether the Venetians were also involved in the trade and transportation of this commodity to Constantinople, or whether they merely contemplated such activity.<sup>94</sup> Dyrrachion in the Balkans and Laodikeia in Syria, the first Byzantine stations encountered by Venetians on their way to the capital, were obviously reached from more distant ports, respectively Venice and Alexandria. Most importantly, the junction of the two sea-routes in Constantinople strikingly illustrates the link between the Byzantine and Egyptian commercial networks and Venice's integration within their interaction.

The continuity of the commercial patterns existing by 1082 is attested in the following years. Venetians traded in Antioch in 1087, three years after the city's fall to the Seljuks. According to an account on the transfer of the relics of St Nicholas to Bari, which occurred in that year, the merchants from this city trading in Antioch were well acquainted for a long time with their Venetian counterparts and apparently conducted with them some joint trading operations. The same source reports that rich Venetian merchants financed with much gold and silver their purchases in Antioch, which included purple and other silks, carpets and gems, in response to the demand of Venetian women belonging to the social elite.<sup>95</sup> In 1095, a merchant travelled from Venice to Constantinople and proceeded from there to Antioch.<sup>96</sup> Such a voyage via the Byzantine capital does not appear to have been unusual. In 1111, Kalopetrus Xanthos, a *vestioprates* or merchant of silk garments in Constantinople, entrusted the Venetian

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<sup>93</sup> On Dyrrachion, see A. Ducellier, *La façade maritime de l'Albanie au Moyen Age. Durazzo et Valona du XI<sup>e</sup> au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Thessalonica, 1981), 70–72, yet instead of 1084, read 1082 for the chrysobull of Alexios I in favour of Venice. For Thebes and Antioch, see above.

<sup>94</sup> P. Magdalino, 'The grain supply of Constantinople, ninth–twelfth centuries', in Mango and Dagron, eds., *Constantinople*, 35–47, esp. 43–6, repr. in P. Magdalino, *Studies on the history and topography of Byzantine Constantinople* (Aldershot, 2007), no. IX, refers only to the Amalfitans in that context and fails to take into account the Venetian role in the foodstuff trade. Venetian involvement in the grain trade is implied by mid-12<sup>th</sup>-century evidence and may have begun much earlier: see D. Jacoby, 'Byzantium, the Italian maritime powers, and the Black Sea before 1204', *BZ* 100 (2007), 693–4

<sup>95</sup> 'De translatione S. Nicolai' by Nikephoros of Bari, in *Analecta Bollandiana* 4 (1885), 169–87, esp. 173.

<sup>96</sup> DCV, vol. 1, 27–8, no. 24.

Enrico Zusto with the sale of several silk pieces in Alexandria. The deal was to be completed after the Venetian's return.<sup>97</sup>

Two major developments, almost contemporaneous, generated decisive changes in the orientation, nature and pattern of Venice's Mediterranean trade. These developments have been largely overlooked so far. One of them was an economic and social process in Byzantium, already underway in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century, which furthered Venetian integration within the Empire's networks of short- and medium-range trade, maritime transportation, and distribution. The sporadic sources of the 11<sup>th</sup> century do not illustrate isolated instances of business ventures, cabotage and tramping, yet once they are inserted within a proper context, it is clear that they illustrate consistent patterns. These are reflected by the somewhat richer documentation of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, for instance by the four business deals in Peloponnesian oil of the 12<sup>th</sup> century mentioned above, the only surviving ones. The export of silks from the provinces reveal that Venetian trade was not exclusively geared towards Constantinople, the Empire's main consumption centre. The Venetians traded freely throughout the Empire, both in Constantinople and in the provinces, where control was less stringent,<sup>98</sup> except for Thebes, where the purchase of high-grade silk textiles was strictly controlled.<sup>99</sup> An anonymous Latin visiting Constantinople after 1070 failed to mention Venetians among the city's residents,<sup>100</sup> yet the chrysobull of Alexios I refers in the present tense to Greeks and Venetians established within the urban area allocated to Venice in 1082. The reference to the Greeks leaves no doubt that the residence of the Venetians was also stable and not temporary.<sup>101</sup> In addition, Venetians were established at Dyrrachion by 1081, at the time of the Norman attack

<sup>97</sup> L. Lanfranchi, ed., *Famiglia Zusto*, Fonti per la storia di Venezia, Sez. IV: Archivi privati (Venice, 1955), 23–4, no. 6.

<sup>98</sup> On the contrast with the provinces, see N. Oikonomides, 'The economic region of Constantinople: from directed economy to free economy, and the role of the Italians', in G. Arnaldi and G. Cavallo, eds., *Europa medievale e mondo bizantino. Contatti effettivi e possibilità di studi comparati*, Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, Nuovi studi storici 40 (Rome, 1997), 221–38.

<sup>99</sup> Jacoby, 'Silk in western Byzantium', 466–7, 488, 490–92.

<sup>100</sup> K.N. Ciggaar, 'Une description de Constantinople dans le *Tarragonensis* 55', *REB* 53 (1995), 119. The omission of the Venetians has prompted the editor to date the description between 1070 and 1082: see *ibid.*, 127–31.

<sup>101</sup> Pozza and Ravegnani, *I trattati con Bisanzio*, 39, para. 5: grant of *ergasteria* 'in quibus Venetici permanent [other version: 'manent'] et Greci'. As a result, the *terminus ad quem* of 1082 for the description of Constantinople mentioned in the previous note may be questioned.

on the city.<sup>102</sup> Since free Venetian trading and permanent residence in the Empire are already attested before 1082, they call for a drastic re-evaluation of the privileges granted to Venice in that year. The freedom of movement and trade throughout the Empire and the lifting of time limitation on residence implied by the chrysobull of Alexios I seem to have been merely an official confirmation of existing practice. In other words, a relaxation of state control had already taken place earlier and, therefore, the grant of 1082 was not decisive in that respect, as generally assumed.<sup>103</sup> New and more significant, then, were two other provisions of 1082: the total exemption from commercial and shipping taxes throughout the Empire, and the grant of a quarter in Constantinople.

The second major development affecting early Venetian trade was generated by the Fatimid conquest of Egypt in 969, followed by the reorientation of costly oriental goods towards that region. This process had a profound impact upon the Mediterranean trade system. More specifically, it altered the parameters of commercial exchanges between Byzantium and Egypt, Venice's main trading partners in the eastern Mediterranean, and, as a result, promoted Venetian commercial expansion. Egypt's dominant function in the distribution of commodities imported from the Indian Ocean and the Arabian peninsula, the growing western market for these commodities, and the increasing demand for alum from the western textile industries, generated a shift in Venetian maritime trade, which has been overlooked so far. Byzantium could not offer these commodities and, despite the western demand for its luxury products, seems to have lost its primacy in Venetian trade in favour of Egypt in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, both with respect to the value of goods and the volume of shipping. The growing importance of bulky commodities such as timber and alum, not ranked among the 'noble' goods, was a distinctive feature of Venetian–Egyptian trade that required a new approach and new solutions to transportation problems.

Most commodities imported from the eastern Mediterranean commanded a high price per unit of weight and, although still traded in limited quantities compared with late medieval shipments, required substantial payments. The range of goods that the Venetians could offer in exchange was fairly restricted and mostly of lower value. It is generally assumed that the West supplemented its shipments of goods with bullion and specie to finance its purchases of oriental commodities. So far, cabotage, tramping, and related trade and transportation have been

<sup>102</sup> Anna Comnena, *Alexias*, V, 1, eds. D.R. Reinsch and A. Kambylis, CFHB 40 (Berlin–New York, 2001), vol. I.

<sup>103</sup> This vindicates my interpretation of the list of cities and islands as non-restrictive, presented in Jacoby, 'Italian privileges', 349–52.