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THE MERCENARY IDENTITY IN BYZANTIUM: THE CASE OF WESTERN EUROPEAN MERCENARIES

Abstract

Throughout its history the Byzantine army relied heavily on foreign soldiers of diverse cultural and ethnic background. By focusing on the west-European soldiers who served in Byzantium from the eleventh through the fifteenth centuries, this paper investigates Byzantine ideas about mercenary service, as well as the self-concepts of mercenaries.

Keywords: Byzantium, mercenaries, Byzantine army

Introduction

This paper examines Byzantine attitudes towards mercenary service and ideas mercenaries had about themselves. It is well-known that since the Late Roman period and until the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453 large numbers of foreign soldiers were recruited frequently by the Byzantine emperors.¹ Many of them were mercenaries and the investigation of their role in the affairs of the empire provides useful insights into the military history of the Byzantine state. The present analysis focuses on Western European soldiers who served in Byzantium. The Byzantine empire recruited mercenary soldiers from the East and the steppe people such as Cumans, Petchenegs and Alans. However, significant differences in social structures and culture between these people and Western European political entities imply that the question of the role of mercenaries from nomadic peoples in Byzantium requires a separate study.

Most modern studies discussing the role of foreign troops in the Byzantine army are either chronologically based accounts of where mercenaries fought, or thematic studies which focus on specific sources or groups of soldiers. Two should be mentioned. Sigfus Blöndal's monograph on the Varangian imperial guard, translated and revised by

Benedikt Benedikz, provides a brilliant survey of the history of the unit through the analysis of Greek, Latin, Rus, Arabic, Armenian sources and most interestingly, through Scandinavian and Icelandic saga. Jonathan Sheppard's classic study of Frankish mercenaries is essential for understanding the role of mercenaries in the eleventh century and of great value to any historian of the period.²

Modern Ideas about Mercenaries in Byzantium

Definitions are crucial in identifying mercenaries and understanding their function in the army. They are also useful in understanding the differences between modern and medieval ideas about mercenaries. Article 47 of the Geneva Protocol which was published in 1977 to supplement the Geneva Convention of 1949 is a useful starting point for any discussion about the definition and identification of mercenaries. According to this article a mercenary is a person who

- a) Is specially recruited locally or abroad in order to fight in an armed conflict
- b) Does in fact take a direct part in the hostilities
- c) Is motivated to take part in the hostilities by the desire for private gain, and in fact, is promised by or on behalf of a party to the conflict, material compensation substantially in excess of that promised or paid to combatants of similar ranks and functions in the armed forces of that party.
- d) Is neither a national of a party to the conflict, nor a resident of a territory controlled by a party to the conflict.
- e) Is not a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict.
- f) Has not been sent by a state which is not a party to the conflict on official duty as a member of its military forces.³

This definition emphasizes the foreign identity of the mercenary soldier. He does not belong to the formal military structure of the state and receives a higher reward than the native warriors. This raises the question whether these qualifications can be applied to Byzantine and medieval mercenaries. The foreign identity of medieval mercenaries is emphasized by modern scholars. In his discussion of the role of mercenaries in the medieval period, M. Mallett states, "the concept of fighting for profit together the

gradual emergence of a concept of foreignness which distinguished the true mercenary from the ordinary paid soldier.”⁴ Describing the military organization of medieval England, M. Prestwitt states that, “the term mercenary applied to professionals who fought for pay, and who were not much concerned by whose money they were taking. They were hardened foreign soldiers not subjects of the English crown, but effectively stateless.”⁵

Scholars of Byzantine history do not provide a definition of mercenaries. It is taken for granted that they are foreigners who contributed to the political and military failures of the empire and are usually viewed as the opposite of peasant soldiers who had supposedly defended the empire successfully in its heyday. For instance, P. Charanis wrote, “the enrolled soldiers from among the free peasantry, neglected and reduced to poverty, had neither the will nor the equipment to fight. The mercenaries who replaced them helped to complete the disintegration of the state.” According to R. Jenkins, “the expensive and otherwise unsatisfactory system of importing foreign mercenaries was widely resorted to”. Similarly, S. Vryonis concluded that, the professional mercenaries who took the place of the indigenous thematic soldiers in this period of crisis (11th century) were ineffective replacements and were unable to stop the Turks and that after 1204 the army was transformed into agglomerates of foreign mercenaries seeking temporary employment. In her analysis of Andronikos II’s Palaiologos (1282-1328) decision to employ the Catalan Grand Company in 1303, A. Laiou commented that the reliance on pre-organized groups of mercenaries was disastrous, since groups of mercenaries whose business is war were a threat to any army and to any society.⁶ Although there are still scholars who consider the abandonment of what they identify as “the national army of Byzantium” as a detrimental factor to the affairs of the empire, negative comments about the employment of mercenaries are rarer in more recent studies.⁷ These attribute the military failures of the eleventh and twelfth centuries to mismanagement of resources and domestic political conflicts. The massive recruitment of mercenaries cannot be seen as a cause of the weakening of the Byzantine defenses in the second half of the eleventh century and the failure to fully restore the empire’s strength in the end of the twelfth century.⁸

The contrast between “national or peasant army” and mercenaries, implies that the former were thinking of themselves as citizens fighting for their country, and therefore, they were more willing to fight than soldiers who were recruited from outside the frontiers of the empire and lacked bonds to Byzantine society. However, it is questionable whether it is

possible to talk about any form of conscript and volunteer military service in Byzantium and in pre-industrial societies in the modern sense of the world. What was foreign in multiethnic empires, geographical mutable kingdoms and across multivalent political and cultural boundaries is not easy to determine and can be subjected to anachronisms. The dominant role of citizen armies began in the nineteenth century and is seen as the result of the development of Enlightenment ideas, material shifts and domestic conditions in the most powerful European states.⁹

Moreover, the connection of mercenaries to military failures exaggerates the role of what scholarship has traditionally seen as the national army of Byzantium. These were the armies of the *themata* and the assumption is that they were both more loyal to the empire and their homelands, hence more reliable, as well as cheaper, than mercenaries. The origins and connection of these armies to the provincial administration of the Byzantine empire has been the subject of a long and largely inconclusive debate.¹⁰ These armies were mostly made up of what can be called seasonal local militia. Traditionally, they have been seen as the armies which succeeded in stopping the Arab expansion and successfully defending the empire in the ninth century and tenth centuries. Nevertheless, during the course of the tenth century Byzantine emperors began to increasingly to fiscalize military service. They passed laws which fixed the value of military lands which supported their military service. For instance, between 945 and 959 the minimum value of military properties supporting military service was fixed at four pounds of gold for cavalymen and two pounds of gold for sailors. In a well-known passage the twelfth-century historian Zonaras comments that in the 960s the Nikephoros II made everything to register the lands of his subjects and extract from them the highest level of military service they could support.¹¹

Furthermore, the provincial armies were not capable in pursuing the expansionist military policy adopted by the Byzantine rulers in the second half of the tenth century.¹² The aggressive military operations of the Byzantine army against the Arabs were spearheaded by the so-called *tagmata*. These were elite units made up of better trained and permanent soldiers. The first of the *tagmata* were created probably in the 740s by Constantine V (741-775). They gradually evolved and became the central and most effective part of the Byzantine campaigning army.¹³ The soldiers of these units were maintained through salaries and many of them were recruited from outside the borders of the empire.¹⁴ However, they are never identified as mercenaries by the sources of the period. This reflects

that these soldiers were seen as integral part of the Byzantine society and were deeply embedded in the social networks of Byzantium. Their service was at least partly a social obligation. They were not groups of adventurers who sold their military skills to the highest bidder. Instead, they had a stake in the well-being of the empire.

Therefore, by the middle of the tenth century the state preferred military revenues to personal military service, and the employment of permanent salaried soldiers. The same period witnessed internationalization of the army. The multiethnic character of the Byzantine army is pointed out by tenth-century Arab authors who mention the presence of Slavs, Bulgarians, Hungarians, Chazars and possibly Georgians in the Byzantine army, while a military treatise analyzing the battlefield tactics of the Byzantine army mentions the presence of Rhos.¹⁵ However, these foreigners can hardly be seen as mercenaries. States like Armenia and the neighboring principalities in the Caucasus, Bulgaria and Kiev were not only neighbors. They were either in close relations with Byzantium or were depended upon their trading agreements or were simply satellite or vassal states of the empire. In order to raise units from these people, the Byzantine emperor had to have the permission and active co-operation of their respective leaders and lords. In other words, more often than not these were allies.

Byzantine Views about Mercenaries

Although foreign and salaried soldiers had been serving in Byzantium since the late Roman times, the term mercenary (*misthophoros*) to refer to soldiers hired for pay appears for the first time in the sources in the eleventh century. More specifically, the term appears for the first time in the work of the twelfth-century historian John Skylitzes to refer to events that occurred in the second half of the tenth century. Since the precise term used by Skylitzes' source remains unknown, it is impossible to know whether these soldiers were mercenaries, or that the author was using a term that was rather common in the twelfth century.¹⁶ The campaign against the Arabs in Sicily in the 1030s to be the first military operation in which the Byzantine army appears to have relied significantly on materialistic volunteers, who served for pay.¹⁷ Some of them must have travelled significant distances in search of good pay and the opportunity to make a profit through pillaging. These men were mercenaries not only because they received payments for their remunerations but rather because

there were available to them market options which were unconstrained by limited numbers of potential employers.

The influx of mercenaries of diverse background raises the question whether they posed a threat to the stability of the government. The prevailing view, which is heavily influenced by modern ideas that reject any form of military service outside patriotic duty, is that mercenaries are fickle, ill-disciplined materialistic individuals who were ready to betray their paymasters. However, Byzantine emperors hired mercenaries to impose a stricter control over the imperial army. Unlike provincial native soldiers, mercenaries had not developed a strong local identity. They were not prone into getting involved in local politics and it was less likely to support and join revolts of provincial magnates against the throne. The recruitment of mercenaries reflects the mistrust between the throne and native commanders. Describing the arrival of the Varangians in Constantinople in 988, Michael Psellos remarks,

the emperor Basil (Basil II 976-1025) was well aware of the disloyalty of the Byzantines, but not long before this a picked band of Scythians had come to help him from Taurus. These men, fine fighters, he had trained in separate corps and put them in a division with other foreign troops, and sent them out against the enemy.¹⁸

Similarly, it is not a coincidence that the first emperor to systematically recruit foreign mercenaries appears to be Constantine IX Monomachos (1042-1055), who faced a series of revolts which nearly cost him his throne. Moreover, in the first decade of the fourteenth century, the mistrust of the throne towards native soldiery prompted the employment of Alan mercenaries in 1301 and of the Catalan Grand Company in 1302.¹⁹

The expansionist policy which prompted the employment of mercenaries in the eleventh century was irrelevant in the period from the twelfth until the fifteenth centuries. Nevertheless, apart from the continuous need of rulers to employ soldiers who were depended on them, there were other important factors which prompted the continuous reliance on mercenaries. Financial factors should be taken into consideration. Many mercenaries were employed only for the purpose of individual campaigns and not year round. They would be discharged immediately after an operation ended at no additional cost. Furthermore, the increasing use of weapons which required long practice and training to be used effectively, such as the crossbow, the increasing use of heavier armor and

developments in siege warfare and architecture encouraged specialization which was provided by mercenaries. For instance, in 1138 during the siege of the city of Shayzar in Syria, the Byzantine emperor John II Komnenos (1118-1143) hired a group of Armenian engineers who were famous for their skills in siege warfare.²⁰ In 1323, the Byzantine army besieged Philipoupolis. The emperor and historian John Kantakouzenos (1347-1354) reports that a German mercenary, who was trained in the construction of siege engines, supervised the construction of five-storey wheeled siege tower. This tower was manned by crossbowmen who almost certainly were mercenaries.²¹

The vast majority of mercenaries were recruited from outside the frontiers of the empire and oftentimes Byzantine authors identify them with their ethnic names or with general terms such as *ksenikon* or *ethnikoi* (foreigners). However, the concept of foreign identity within the armed forces seems to have been different from the modern idea of foreign mercenary service. Byzantine military ideology did not make any distinction between native and foreign soldiers. It was the emperor's prerogative to recruit soldiers and organize the defense of the empire. In the preamble of an imperial *chrysobull* issued by the emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos in the 1290s it is stated that it is an imperial duty to look after the forces of the empire, to organize the military roles and make the necessary arrangements for the of weapons.²² Moreover, John Kantakouzenos defines mercenaries as soldiers who serve for pay and are always ready to campaign and are not allowed to be involved in commerce or agriculture, since they should not have any hindrance that would force them to stay at home and prevent them from campaigning.²³ He makes no reference to the ethnic background of mercenaries. In his account of a clash between an imperial army and Alan mercenaries in 1302, the historian George Pachymeres comments that, "a dispute and a battle broke out. Although the armies were of different race, they were placed under a single authority, the imperial one. Therefore, this was a civil war."²⁴ The same author considers the conflict between the imperial government and the Catalan Grand Company a civil war.²⁵ This reflects the fact that Byzantine imperial ideology emphasized the ecumenical character of the imperial office and therefore there was no distinction between natives and foreigners in the eyes of the emperor. Mercenaries might have been recruited from outside the frontiers of the empire but once they entered imperial service they became imperial subjects. The real categorization of mercenaries is one of length of service; long service

established personal bonds and created binding commitments and blurred any tide distinction between native and foreigner.

Modern scholarship tends to view foreign troops as prone to rebellion and betrayal. However, Byzantine historians portray a different picture of mercenaries and view the idea of serving for pay as absolutely acceptable. According to John Skylitzes, in 1040 the mercenaries of the general Michael Dokeianos in Sicily revolted when he failed to provide them with their monthly salary. Skylitzes comments that when their leader asked kindly Dokeianos, "not to deprive them of the rewards of their labor," the Byzantine general reviled him and had him flogged. This caused the Frankish mercenaries to revolt.²⁶ Similarly, Kantakouzenos remarks that it is inhumane brutal and unjust for mercenaries not to receive their payments on time.²⁷ The modern idea that foreign mercenaries were rebellious and unreliable is reinforced by the rebellions which were led by Robert Crispin, Hevre and Roussel of Bailleul in the eleventh century.²⁸ These should be examined in the context of the conflicts between clans of the ruling elite and of the numerous rebellions of native military commanders. They should not be seen as actions which were motivated only by the greed of mercenary leaders.

In addition, the authors of the period do not portray a negative image of mercenaries. For instance, Skylitzes, or the source he used, portrays Hevre as a competent general who was obedient to the Byzantines. He was led to revolt because the emperor did not keep his promises towards him.²⁹ In his account of Crispin's revolt during the reign of Romanos IV Diogenes (1068-1071), Attaleiates comments that the rebel general did not kill any Byzantines and treated his prisoners with respect. When he asked an amnesty, the emperor granted it, "because of the man's courage and his reputation for martial deeds and command. In fact he had previously encountered great multitudes of Turks and had accomplished exceptionally valiant deeds in close combat." Attaleiates seems not to be convinced that Crispin's final dismissal was fair. As he comments, "he was not so much convicted legally as suspected because of his former depravity and the strong accusations made by a prominent figure, a German."³⁰

Moreover, the authors of the period are not reticent in pointing out the martial achievements of mercenary soldiers. For instance, in his account of the defeat of the imperial army loyal to Michael VI (1056-1057) at the hands of the rebel and future emperor Isaak Komnenos (1057-1059) in the battle of Haides in 1057, Skylitzes reports that after the end of the battle, Randolph the Frank was seeking "someone of rank with whom to fight."

Eventually he was engaged in single combat with the future emperor Nikephoros Botaneiates.³¹ Robert Crispin is called, “extremely brave in hand-to-hand combat and seemed to be the strongest man alive, having given proof of the superior mettle in the noble things he had accomplished. He greatly raised the morale of the soldiers by arriving at the moment when the conflict reached its climax.”³² In another example, describing the battle of Antioch-on-the-Maeander in which the army of Theodore I Laskaris (1204-1221) defeated the Seljuks, the thirteenth-century historian Geroge Akropolites remarks that emperor’s army included 800 “Italians” who were noble men and strong of arm. They were the first to attack the enemy and exhibited deeds of great prowess and noble soul.³³

Unlike historians, authors of theoretical works appear to be critical of the employment of mercenaries than historians. However, their criticism does not focus on the idea of serving for pay. They disapprove the employment of soldiers who were recruited on a temporary basis and lack any bonds to the Byzantine society. In his *Strategikon*, which he compiled in the 1070s the general Kekaumenos advises the emperor no to appoint foreigners (*ethnikoi*) to high offices. As he writes, “the foreigners, if they do not come from the royal family of their land, do not raise them in great offices nor trust them with important titles. Because if you honor the foreigner with the office of *primmikerios* or *strategos*, then what is the point of giving the generalship to a Byzantine? You will turn him into an enemy.”³⁴ It is possible that this statement reflect the dissatisfaction of native generals to the restoration and favoritism of Michael VII Doukas towards Robert Crispin.³⁵ Kekaumenos does not object the employment of foreigners and uses as a good example the future king of Norway, Harald III Hardrada, who had served in the Varangian guard from 1034 until 1042. According to Kekaumenos, Harald did many notable things in Sicily and performed great deeds of valor against the Bulgarians, which was fitting for one of his nobility and personal ability.³⁶

In his treatise entitled *On Kingship*, which he compile in the early fourteenth century, the scholar Thomas Magistros comments that foreign mercenaries always prove to be weaker than it is thought and remain loyal only as long as the Byzantines are victorious. He suggests that the army should be composed of native soldiers who are property owners and well established in their hometowns, where the tombs of their fathers are. As Magistros concludes, “those who own nothing, have nothing to protect and would easily submit in the manner of traitors for the sake of profit.”³⁷ Magistros must have witnessed the catastrophic conflict between

the Byzantine state and the Catalan Grand Company. This experience could have influenced his negative views about foreign soldiers who were employed on a temporary basis.³⁸ Moreover, his rejection of the employment of mercenaries is in agreement with his strong views against tax increases. It is also probable that Magistros was influenced by Synesius' of Cyrene (ca.370-413) *On Kinship* who had suggested the emperor Arcadius (395-408) to rid the Byzantine court of German generals.³⁹

Another critic of mercenaries was the fifteenth-century philosopher, Gemistos Pletho. He proposed measures for the re-organization of the Byzantine Peloponnese which in the 1410s was threatened by the Ottomans. In his address to the emperor Manuel II Palaiologos (1391-1425), Pletho protests that although the taxes imposed on the local population were small, they were numerous, and objected their raising in order to hire mercenaries. He proposed that the population should be divided into soldiers and taxpayers because, as he believed, these two functions cannot be combined. He expected that as a result of this reform the army will be sound psychologically and have high morale. Mercenaries, should be removed because they fulfill neither qualification.⁴⁰ Consequently, while he opposes the employment of mercenaries, Pletho suggests the creation of a fully professional army made up of soldiers who would be maintained exclusively through salaries. His ideas have been the subject of debate. Scholars argue that his proposals offered a genuine solution to the problem of the defense of the Peloponnese, while others considered his views heavily influenced by classical authors or the Ottoman military organization.⁴¹

It is rather difficult to understand how the local population viewed mercenaries, due to the very limited available sources. Large groups of mercenaries, which were not completely dismissed after the end of the campaign, spent the winter and non-campaigning season in the provinces. The local population bore much of the brunt of their maintenance. Exemptions the emperor granted monastic properties indicate the large number of taxes and other burdens imposed on the local population for the maintenance of passing armies. In addition, these exemptions reflect the polyglot character of the Byzantine army since they mention the presence of Rus, Varagians, Koulpigoi, English, Franks, Nemitzoi, Bulgarians, Saracens.⁴² The most common tax was the so-called *mitaton*, an army levy in the form of purchases of provisions at nominal prices or requisition of supplies. A characteristic example of the imposition of mercenaries on the local population is provided by the Catalan Grand Company,

the soldiers of which were billeted in houses in Kyzikos from October 1303 until April 1304. The chronicler of the company Ramon Muntaner admits that the maintenance of the Company imposed a heavy burden to the local population.⁴³ It can be speculated that the local population did see mercenaries as a burden and there is evidence suggesting that ill-disciplined mercenaries could pillage Byzantine territory.⁴⁴

However, when the throne proved unable to provide the local population with the necessary protection, it was possible for mercenary commanders to gain popularity among the locals. The career of Roussel of Bailleul provides a characteristic example. He took advantage of the anarchy that followed the Byzantine conflicts between clans of the Byzantine elite in the 1070s and together with 400 Frankish soldiers established his own independent authority in Anatolia. He proved victorious against the Turks as well as the imperial army, and as a result he attracted a significant number of warriors who joined his forces and augmented his army.⁴⁵ He challenged the imperial authority of the Doukas family and attempted to cause confusion in the capital by declaring the emperor's (Michael VII Doukas) uncle, John Doukas, who had become his prisoner, emperor. He was also able to levy taxes on Amaseia and it is obvious that he succeeded in providing a high degree of order in his dominions by protecting them against the raids of the Turks.⁴⁶ As a result he seems to have become popular, since he was seen able to defend the area from Turkish raids. According to the sources, the people of Amaseia rioted and tried to set him free when he was eventually captured by the future emperor Alexios Komnenos.⁴⁷

Self-Concepts of Mercenaries

The most important problem in examining the ideas mercenaries had about themselves is that almost everything that we know about them is written by others. Moreover, the modern rejection of any form of military service outside national service has prevented any thorough discussion about the self-portrayal of mercenaries. Instead, it is taken for granted that all of them were materialistic volunteers, without any ties to the Byzantine society. There is no doubt that the Byzantine emperors employed large numbers of mercenaries for the purpose of specific campaigns for whom we know nothing. It is likely that such troops made up the majority of the mercenaries who served in Byzantium. For instance, the Byzantine

campaign in Italy in 1154 relied heavily on mercenaries who probably never set foot on Byzantine soil. The general Michael Palaiologos was sent to Italy by the emperor with a military and a large amount of money in order to recruit locally.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, it seems that a significant number of mercenaries could not be seen as individuals who lacked any connection with Byzantine society. The aforementioned leading mercenary figures Hevre, Robert Crispin and Roussel of Bailleul had received properties on the eastern frontier and were granted court titles, which provided them with significant financial profits and influence on the court. It is not a coincidence that the revolts of Hevre and Crispin are attributed to their dissatisfaction about the titles they received from the emperor.⁴⁹ These mercenaries and their followers entered the hierarchy of the Byzantine aristocracy and had a stake in the well-being of the Byzantine society. Moreover, the fact that their possessions were situated on the eastern frontier indicates that the emperors of the period trusted them more than the native military commanders. Herve's seal shows that he had been appointed "*stratelates* of the east."⁵⁰ This indicates that he was the highest military officer in the eastern frontier. It might be not a coincidence that one of his immediate predecessors was the general Katakalon Kekaumenos who had been involved in a revolt against the emperor.⁵¹

The practice of granting land and other privileges to mercenaries was intensified in the thirteenth century. Documentary evidence suggests that many western European soldiers received grants of *pronoia*. This was a grant of a certain amount of tax revenue derived from specific properties.⁵² These grants reflect an attempt to reduce the cost of mercenary service and at the same time to secure their long-term commitment. It is impossible to know the percentage of mercenaries who received these grants. Nevertheless, from the thirteenth-century until the end of the empire this type of grant was the main means through which the Byzantine state rewarded the most effective part of its native soldiery. Therefore a good deal of mercenaries and the best part of the native soldiers were maintained through payments they receive from the value of properties. This blurred the already not sharp distinction between foreign and native troops.

The difficulty in making the distinction between native and foreign troops is well-reflected in the various palace guard units the most famous being the Varangian guard. Almost all palace guard units in Byzantium were made up of foreigners and they were identified according to the ethnicity of their soldiers; The Vardariots were originally Hungarians

who were established along the Vardar River in the twelfth century, the fourteenth-century Mourtatoi were of mixed Turkish and Byzantine Greek origin. While, theoretically the typical mercenary has no ties to the society of the state he is fighting for, the palace guard units, and the Varangians in particular, were deeply embedded in the political structures and developments of the state. For instance, they played an important role in civil wars and succession disputes. On the other hand, they were intentionally set off from society through having special status and privileges as well as restrictions designed to guarantee their loyalty to the ruler over against the interests of powerful groups. Moreover, the long existence of the Varangian guard in Byzantium- it survived for almost four and a half centuries- reflects that it was not uncommon for soldiers of diverse ethnic background to serve under a unit with a generic foreign name. The early Varangians were Scandinavians, Rus and probably some of them were Slavs. After the Norman invasion of England, Anglosaxon warriors entered the Varangian guard.⁵³

Moreover, the knightly class in western Europe despised mercenaries, whom it viewed as incompetent soldiers capable only for the most sordid aspects of warfare. Unlike knights, mercenaries were supposed to lack any sense of social responsibility and loyalty and were not seen as participants in the community of interlink loyalties that helped define noble society in European west.⁵⁴ Furthermore, by the early thirteenth century there was a legal and theological tradition which condemned mercenaries. Most notably, in 1179 Canon 27 of the Third Lateran Council condemned mercenaries and laid down penalties for them, while theologians made the distinction between mercenaries and *milites stipendiarii*, or salaried knights, who fought just wars and received their due wages.⁵⁵ This moral and religious objection to mercenary service was also based on a famous passage in the Gospel of St John in which Christ contrasts himself, the Good Shepherd with the "hireling whose own the sheep are not who flees at the first sign of trouble because he is a hireling and cares not for the sheep."⁵⁶ However, in practice there were many similarities between landless household knights and mercenaries, since both they expected to receive payments and oftentimes equipment and knights were not less violent than mercenaries.⁵⁷ Plundering and pillaging was as much the preserve of the knight as of the mercenary and was not strictly speaking contrary to the chivalric code. The common peasant who is the usual victim of raids did not figure in the chivalric code.

Chivalric ideals and mercenary service could overlap and many mercenary leaders throughout Europe were of noble birth, while oftentimes, the names of pre-organized Companies of mercenaries echoed those of chivalric orders.⁵⁸ Mercenaries of noble birth served in Byzantium. In his account of the civil war between Andronikos II Palaiologos and his grandson Andronikos III (1328-1341), Kantakouzenos reports the presence of German mercenaries who were noble.⁵⁹ According to a French chronicle, in 1347, the noble citizens of Metz, William Poujoize and John Braidy requested the permission of John Kantakouzenos to change the swallows in their arms into eagles, in recognition of their service to him.⁶⁰ The chronicle's statement that the Byzantine civil war between John Kantakouzenos and the regency of John V Palaiologos (1341-1391), which was fought from 1341 until 1347, attracted many young European warriors is an allusion to the fact that it was very common for young nobles throughout Europe to serve as mercenaries abroad, in the hope of enriching themselves by exploiting the endemic warfare of the period. These were trained military men who, due to the social and economic conditions in their lands, were forced to search for employment and patrons abroad.

That the contradiction between mercenary service and chivalric ideals was superficial is shown by the fact that Crusaders could be turned into mercenaries. Since the 13th century, crusading armies were composed largely of mercenaries and often the distinction between a mercenary and a crusader was not easy, particularly as there were professionals who were attracted by indulgences.⁶¹ For instance, the army of the so-called empire of Nicaea, which was the strongest of the successor state to Byzantium after the capture of Constantinople by the armies of the Fourth Crusade in 1204, relied heavily on western European mercenaries. Many of them had been soldiers of the army of the Latin empire of Constantinople who due to lack of funds joined the armies of Nicaea as mercenaries. They were subsequently excommunicated by the Pope Innocent III, who in the 1190s had used mercenaries against Markward of Anweiler.⁶²

The Nicaeans seem to have enhanced the religious motivation of these mercenaries by adopting practices that contradicted Byzantine traditions. Between 1208 and 1210, the Patriarch Michael Autoerianos compiled a letter which was addressed to the soldiers of Nicaea. The letter concludes with the statement,

Let the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you. Amen. Receiving the Grace of Christ we forgive all the trespasses committed by those of

you who defended the people of God and happened to suffer death and bore the brunt of battle for their homes, and for the common salvation and redemption of the people.⁶³

If the conclusion of Autoreianos' letter is authentic, it contradicts Byzantine canon. Moreover, in the imperial oration which he compiled on the occasion of the victory of Theodore I Laskaris against the Seljuks in 1211 in Antioch-on-the-Maeander, Niketas Choniates states that the emperor achieved his victory by the sign of the Cross, which he enjoyed his soldiers to wear as an ensign.⁶⁴ This is attributed to the large number of western mercenaries who fought in this battle. It is interesting that around 180 years later these mercenaries were portrayed by the Aragonese version of the *Chronicle of Morea* as Crusaders and martyrs. This was compiled in 1393 under the patronage of the Master of the Knights of St John of the Hospital, Juan Fernández de Heredia. It reports that the Byzantine victory was achieved by Spanish soldiers who were heading to Jerusalem.⁶⁵ Consequently, military deeds of soldiers for hire are described as acts of valor carried out by Spanish pilgrim warriors, many of whom achieved martyrdom by falling on the battlefield defending Christendom. By claiming that they were Spanish soldiers, the *Chronicle* wished to provide an ideological and historical basis for the presence of the Hospitallers in the Balkans.

Furthermore, the chronicler and leading member of the Catalan Grand Company, Ramon Muntaner emphasizes the ideological and religious justification of the activities of this large self-interested group of mercenaries in Anatolia. He claims that to the great dishonor of Christendom, the Byzantines in Asia Minor were forcibly converted, oppressed and tormented by the Turks. Therefore, as he concludes, it was absolutely necessary for the Company to campaign against them. This religious aspect of the war against the Turks justifies the decision of the leader of the company Roger de Flor not to give quarter to any man above ten years of age and to enslave the wives of the defeated after the first victory of the Catalan Grand Company over a Turcoman tribe. In a similar fashion, Muntaner praises the soldiers of the Company for slaughtering many Turcomans who belonged to the emirate of Aydin.⁶⁶ Moreover, in his account of the conflict between the Catalans and the Genoese, which broke in 1307, Muntaner depicts the Catalan Grand Company as an army that defended Christianity and promoted the interests of the Holy See. Muntaner relates that the Genoese demanded that the Catalans leave the

Byzantine Empire. They officially challenged the Catalans three times. The Catalans demanded that the Genoese stop challenging them in the name of the Catholic faith, which the Catalans had come to Byzantium to exalt. Muntaner claims that he made his request to the Genoese envoy in the name of the Holy Apostolic father whose standards the Catalan Grand Company carried against the Byzantine emperor and his soldiers, who were schismatic and had most treacherously slain the Company's leaders, though they had come to aid them against the infidels.⁶⁷ It is likely that the depiction of the fighting against the Turks as a religious war served the interests of high-ranking members of the Company, many of whom were Catalan and Aragonese knights. It is reasonable to infer that in spite of serving as mercenaries, these knights would have been attracted to the idea of promoting their war against the Turks as a war against the impious for the defense of Christendom.

Furthermore, the concern of foreign soldiers about their reputation is reflected in the case of Western European individuals who in a number of thirteenth-century documents are identified as *lizioi kavallarioi* of the emperor.⁶⁸ Pachymeres relates that the title was conferred by the emperor upon foreigners and John VI Kantakouzenos writes that he awarded the title *kavallarioi* upon the most illustrious of his western European mercenaries in the ceremony of his coronation in 1341.⁶⁹ That they received their titles from the emperor implies that they entered the hierarchical system of the Byzantine aristocracy and that they were seen by the Byzantine rulers as nobles who shared their ideals and had political and personal ties with them and the empire. The use of the epithets "the bravest," "the most loyal," "the well-born," which accompany the title *kavallarios* may be seen as a response to the criticism that foreign soldiers were fickle and unreliable soldiers.⁷⁰ By being identified as proud and loyal "knights", these soldiers were dissociated from the stereotypical image of the mercenary as a greedy and rootless individual who lacked any sense of duty.

Moreover, in the early years of the civil war of 1341-1347 Kantakouzenos relied heavily on the support of the Serbian ruler Stefan Dušan. In 1343, Kantakouzenos marched on Byzantine territory leading German mercenaries whom he had borrowed from the Serbian ruler. Kantakouzenos reports an incident which sheds important light on the attitudes of these soldiers. He claims that when the civil war started turning in his favor, Stefan Dušan began to fear that he would lose control over Kantakouzenos's movements. Therefore, he recalled the German mercenaries he had given Kantakouzenos. However, they refused to obey

their paymaster's order. They accused the Serbian ruler of being malign and assured Kantakouzenos that, in the case of a Serbian attack, they would defend him. They justified their decision by arguing that if they were ordered by their paymaster to aid someone, they would obey his order to abandon him only if he were in a safe position. However, since they were ordered to desert Kantakouzenos, while he was on campaign and ready to fight a battle, to desert him would be treachery, which they considered a shameful act.⁷¹

Kantakouzenos's description of the Germans' attitude towards him indicates that they had established a particular code of conduct which they observed and according to which they circumscribed their actions. It is expected that continuity of service was a key factor in the development of a set of rules that the members of a company of soldiers felt compelled to follow. Moreover, the Germans' statement that they would not abandon Kantakouzenos before the completion of their mission and that to desert him would be considered a shameful act indicates their concern to promote themselves as loyal, competent and reliable soldiers.

In conclusion, modern concepts and definitions of mercenary should not be applied to the study of mercenaries in Byzantium. Foreign identity and cash payments are problematic criteria in identifying mercenaries in Byzantium. While it is certain that many mercenary soldiers were materialistic volunteers who served only for the purposes of a specific campaign, a significant number of them served long-term, created bonds to the society of the Byzantine state. They received properties and titles and they cannot be seen as materialistic unreliable volunteers. Moreover, from the Byzantine point of view, once they entered service in the Byzantine army they became subjects of the emperor like the native troops. Furthermore, the historians of the period do not hesitate to point out the martial virtues of foreign mercenaries and do not object their employment. Criticism directed against mercenaries can be found in theoretical texts, and is influenced by the personal experiences of the individual authors and classical prototypes. In addition, many groups of mercenaries which were employed in Byzantium had developed a complex attitude and a code of conduct which reveals their concern to maintain their reputation as competent and loyal soldiers.

NOTES

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