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The Making and Breaking of Kinetic Empire: Mobility, Communication and Political Change in the Eastern Mediterranean, *c.* 900–1100 CE

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Abstract

This paper applies the concept of 'kinetic empire' to the eastern Mediterranean world in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The term 'kinetic empire' is borrowed from Hämäläinen's analysis of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century north American Comanche Empire. It refers to the way in which trans- and supra-regional power could be created, expressed and enforced through mobile means. The article focuses primarily on the role of mobility in the expansion of the Byzantine Empire between *c.* 900 and 1050, but also makes comparison with the contemporaneous Fatimid caliphate and other regional polities which we might usually regard as sedentary states. Recovering the role of the kinetic not only extends our understanding of the modalities of power in this crucial region of the medieval world, it also allows us to question the nature and degree of transformation wrought by mobile newcomers, such as Normans, crusaders and Turks in the later decades of the eleventh century. In this sense of developing and exploring concepts useful for the study of the transregional in premodernity and questioning standard periodisations, this article is also a practical exercise in medieval global history.

Keywords: kinetic; empire; Byzantium; Fatimid

Global history has been one of the most influential but also the most contested forms of historical enquiry in recent decades. For enthusiasts, a global approach provides the potential to rethink geopolitical frameworks and standard periodisations; for sceptics, the gains are few, particularly if the conceptual tools associated with the global entail the erosion of specific detail and precise context.[1] As a medievalist and a Byzantinist, I have been enthused by global

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[1] The literature promoting a more global approach to history is vast: important advocates are Kenneth Pomeranz, 'Histories for a Less National Age', *The American Historical Review*, 119 (2014), 1–22, and Richard Drayton and David Motadel, 'Discussion: The Futures of Global History', *Journal of Global History*, 13 (2018), 1–21; sceptical voices include David Bell, 'This Is What

approaches which privilege comparative study and the identification of connections across geographies, but I recognise that many pressing questions remain. Is 'medieval' too irredeemably Eurocentric for the analysis of premodern history on a transregional scale?[2] Were the defining characteristics of the 'global' in the medieval world similar to those detected in later contexts, or were they unique? Do concepts used to interrogate global phenomena in more recent centuries have much power when applied to earlier periods?[3] Debates about terminology and scope are, of course, important. But nuanced answers to such large-scale framing questions require the exploration of concrete case studies as well as abstract conceptualisations. And the potential of global history will only become evident if the deployment of concepts across space and time results in new ways of thinking about familiar topics; and if periodisations and standard geopolitical units of investigation are indeed challenged and reinvented.[4]

In this paper, I attempt to provide one such practical exercise with broader implications, focusing on a concept which current research suggests has traction for global history of all periods, including the centuries between *c.* 500 and 1500 CE. That concept is mobility.[5] My aim is to explore the implications of understandings of mobility in one relatively modern historical and geographical context – eighteenth- and nineteenth-century north America – for the study of another world region in a much more remote period, the eastern Mediterranean in the tenth and eleventh centuries. In making my case, I seek to break down the concept of mobility, conscious of the critique that global paradigms can be so capacious that they lose explanatory power. That we need to be alert to the different shades and forms inherent in the broad category of mobility is, for example, a point emphasised by Christopher Atwood in his analysis of the thirteenth-century Mongol Empire. As Atwood notes, the mobility of Mongol *qans*, measured in terms of their seasonal itineracy, the size of their camps and the routes they followed, was rather different to the quotidian movements of the steppe nomad pastoralist communities.[6] Following Atwood's lead, my paper does not try to elide all forms of mobility, but instead

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Happens When Historians Overuse the Idea of the Network', *New Republic* (October 2013); Stuart Alexander Rockefeller, '"Flow"', *Current Anthropology*, 52 (2011), 557–78.

    [2] For scepticism about the appropriateness of 'medieval' for regions outside western Europe, see Daniel Martin Varisco, 'Making "Medieval" Islam Meaningful', *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue*, 13 (2007), 385–412; and Anthony Kaldellis, *Byzantium Unbound* (Leeds, 2019), 76–92. For the problems as well as the potential associated with global approaches to the medieval, see Kathleen Davis and Michael Puett, 'Periodization and "The Medieval Globe": A Conversation', *The Medieval Globe*, 2 (2016), 1–14; Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen, 'Introduction: Towards a Global Middle Ages', in *The Global Middle Ages*, ed. Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen, *Past & Present* supplement 13 (Oxford, 2018), 15–20; Geraldine Heng, *The Global Middle Ages: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 2021).

    [3] Holmes and Standen, 'Introduction: Towards a Global Middle Ages', 1–3.

    [4] Heng, *Global Middle Ages*, 11–53.

    [5] Naomi Standen and Monica White, 'Structural Mobilities in the Global Middle Ages', in *Global Middle Ages*, ed. Holmes and Standen, 158–89.

    [6] C. Atwood, 'Imperial Itinerance and Mobile Pastoralism: The State and Mobility in Medieval Inner Asia', *Inner Asia*, 17 (2015), 293–349.

focuses on just one facet: the way in which trans- and supra-regional power could be created, expressed and enforced through mobile means – a facet of mobility I refer to as 'kinetic empire'.

In discussing 'kinetic empire' I am exploring ideas developed by Pekka Hämäläinen in his examination of the indigenous Comanche Empire in the south-west of North America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For Hämäläinen, the Comanche polity was a kinetic empire in the sense that it was a nomad power regime which revolved around 'a set of mobile activities: long-distance raiding, seasonal expansions, trans-national diplomatic missions, semi-permanent trade fairs, recurring political assemblies and control over shifting economic nodes'.[7] At this point, I should make it clear that I am not arguing that all the principles and structures that Hämäläinen identifies were visible in the high medieval eastern Mediterranean; to suggest that would be unhelpfully reductive. Instead, in elaborating what *was* kinetic about this medieval example, I develop two broad points which take inspiration from Hämäläinen's work on the Comanches. First, that thinking about kinetic power allows us to expand the ways in which empire as a diachronic historical category is conceptualised; and second, that thinking about empire in an 'expanded and more elastic form' can, perhaps paradoxically, allow us to gain more analytical precision.[8] In this second sense, I argue that distilling out evidence for kinetic empire in this particular medieval context can shed new light on a crucial watershed period in medieval Eurasian history.

It is something of a commonplace among medieval historians that in the half-century between *c.* 1050 and *c.* 1100 the geopolitics of the eastern Mediterranean region were completely transformed, as two sedentary empires suddenly came under immense political and military pressure from a variety of highly mobile newcomers.[9] The sedentary empires in question were Byzantium in the north, with its capital at Constantinople, and the Fatimid (Shia) caliphate in the south, with its capital at Cairo. Among the mobile and predatory newcomers were Latins, especially Normans, from the north and west who were joined later by crusaders, and Turks from the east, although we should always be aware that the ethnic descriptors I use here are very general labels of convenience under which nestled an enormous variety of different groups. In the short term neither Byzantium nor the Fatimid caliphate was immediately destroyed by these newcomers. Indeed, it proved to be the case that the recent arrivals were able to convey some temporary benefits to existing regimes, as when the passage of the armies of the first crusade in the late

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[7] P. Hämäläinen, 'What's in a Concept? The Kinetic Empire of the Comanches', *History and Theory*, 52 (2013), 81–90, at 85; see also *idem*, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven, 2008).

[8] Hämäläinen, 'What's in a Concept?', 83.

[9] M. Brett, *The Rise of the Fatimids: The World of the Mediterranean and the Middle East in the Fourth Century of the Hijra, Tenth Century CE* (Leiden, 2001), 15–16, makes a similar point with reference to the entire Mediterranean, but with a primary focus on the Fatimids; for the twin threat of Turks and Normans to Byzantium in the later eleventh century, see also Anthony Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood: The Rise and Fall of Byzantium, 955 A.D. to the First Crusade* (New York, 2017), especially at 228.

1090s enabled Byzantine forces to regain some ground in coastal Anatolia lost to the Turks during the previous decades.[10] Nonetheless, it is clear that the military and political weather of the eastern Mediterranean was irrevocably changed in the longer term by the presence of these mobile newcomers. During the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, these two empires with their carefully curated ceremonial centres were taken over and radically refashioned by rulers whose political culture derived much from the religio-social structures and political symbolisms of the warlord migrants of the eleventh century. Between 1169 and 1171 the Fatimid caliphate was dismantled by Saladin, a Kurdish commander whose career was shaped by the military power structures associated with the Turkish warlord regimes of twelfth-century Syria and Mesopotamia; in 1204 the sack of Constantinople by the armies of the fourth crusade shattered Byzantium irrevocably.[11]

Such a chronology obviously includes much oversimplification, and one could argue that the extent of the transformation wrought by the Latins and Turks requires nuance. It is clear, for instance, that incoming peoples and the regimes they established actively borrowed from the political cultures of those they either replaced or rivalled. The Latin emperors of Constantinople chose to adopt the dress and insignia of the former Byzantine emperors; Saladin and his family invested heavily in the built environment of the Fatimid city of Cairo.[12] But in this paper, my focus is not on the ways in which the political culture of incomers with kinetic power came to be legitimised in more local contexts. Instead, my concern is with the period *before* incursions from Turks and Latins became so destabilising for this region. Above all, I consider the ways in which the kinetic was *already* an integral ingredient in the exercise and creation of power in the eastern Mediterranean in the century *before* 1050, a period when both Byzantium and the Fatimid empires were not weakening and contracting but were instead apparently stable and even expanding. I suggest that this kinetic dimension to regional power stemmed partly from the fact that some of the newcomer peoples and practices so visible after 1050 were already present in the eastern Mediterranean region. From the tenth century onwards this region was becoming increasingly locked into a series of wider geographies through which kinetic people and their goods were liable to travel, forming the kinds of 'circuits' that Jonathan Shepard has suggested saw many from northern and western Europe move south-eastwards to take up military service and engage in

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[10] Peter Frankopan, *The First Crusade: The Call from the East* (2012).

[11] Anne-Marie Eddé, *Saladin* (Paris, 2008) [Eng. tr. published in 2012]; Michael Angold, *The Fourth Crusade: Event and Context* (Harlow, 2003).

[12] On the Latin emperors: Teresa Shawcross, 'Conquest Legitimised', in *Byzantines, Latins, and Turks in the Eastern Mediterranean World after 1150*, ed. Jonathan Harris, Catherine Holmes and Eugenia Russell (Oxford, 2012), 181–220; on Ayyubid and Mamluk patronage of Cairo, Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (Edinburgh, 1999); Laila ʿAli Ibrahim, *Mamluk Monuments of Cairo* (Cairo, 1976). For the relationship between the Fatimid caliphate and Ayyubids (and later the Mamluks) concerning the use of architecture and ceremonial to express power and legitimacy, see R. Stephen Humphreys, 'The Expressive Intent of the Mamluk Architecture of Cairo: A Preliminary Essay', *Studia Islamica*, 35 (1972), 69–119.

trade.[13] But the argument I advance here is not simply that there were more kinetic newcomers in the eastern Mediterranean region in the century and a half up to 1050, but that the creation, sustenance and communication of power by the so-called sedentary empires into which these newcomers moved was *already* strongly kinetic.

The crucial point, then, is that it was the so-called sedentary empires themselves which demonstrated kinetic attributes from as early as the tenth century rather than simply the more obviously kinetic new arrivals. If viable, this insight has two notable implications: first, for the way in which we think about military and political frontiers in this region; and second, for how we interpret the incursions into the eastern Mediterranean by mobile newcomers in the later eleventh century and the regional political reordering which those invasions are said to have precipitated.

In unravelling the kinetic, my principal focus is on Byzantium, a polity and territorial empire of considerable antiquity. Members of the political and intellectual elite who produced the written records so crucial to understanding the history of this empire regarded themselves as Romans.[14] In the Constantinopolitan focus of so many of their writings, the Byzantines can appear to be the ultimate, stay-at-home sedentary imperialists, with many famously reluctant to countenance the indignity of exile on government service in the provinces or at the frontiers.[15] Such a political culture may seem a very unlikely candidate for scrutiny at a kinetic level. However, some recent research has begun to connect issues of mobility to the governance of the Byzantine Empire. Monica White has commented on the ways in which predictable patterns of movement were built into the structures and operation of the thematic (provincial) armies of Byzantium in the later seventh to mid-tenth centuries, particularly the routine practice of mustering and reviewing provincial troops at fixed gathering points, a practice which inevitably required individual soldiers, *stratiotai*, to travel.[16] The realities of the movement of people, products and information have also been integral to other

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[13] J. Shepard, 'Storm Clouds and a Thunderclap: East–West Tensions towards the Mid-Eleventh Century', in *Byzantium in the Eleventh Century: Being in Between*, ed. Marc D. Lauxtermann and Mark Whittow (Abingdon, 2017), 127–53.

[14] Helpful introductions to Byzantine politics and governing structures of the tenth and eleventh centuries are Mark Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600–1025* (Basingstoke, 1996), especially chs. 9–10; Michael Angold, *The Byzantine Empire: A Political History*, 2nd edn (New York, 1997), 1–170. How the Roman identity of the Byzantines should be interpreted in this period is a matter of debate: see Ioannis Stouraitis, 'Roman Identity in Byzantium: A Critical Approach', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 107 (2014), 175–220, who interprets 'Roman' in terms of a political identity for a multi-ethnic elite; and Anthony Kaldellis, *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium* (Cambridge, MA, 2019), for whom 'Roman' is more of a widely shared, almost national, identity.

[15] Margaret Mullett, 'Originality in the Byzantine Letter: The Case of Exile', in *Originality in Byzantine Literature, Art and Music*, ed. A. R. Littlewood (Oxford, 1995), 39–58, although as Mullett points out, many writers invoking the topos of exile could also promote the interests of the localities to which they were sent; see also *eadem*, *Theophylact of Ochrid: Reading the Letters of a Byzantine Archbishop* (Aldershot, 1997), 247–77; Dimitri Obolensky, *Six Byzantine Portraits* (Oxford, 1988), 34–82.

[16] Naomi Standen and Monica White, 'Structural Mobilities in the Global Middle Ages', in *Global Middle Ages*, ed. Holmes and Standen, 176–80.

analyses of sociopolitical and cultural relations in Byzantium. For instance Anthony Kaldellis describes the waves of provincials in the tenth and eleventh centuries who regularly went to seek their political fortunes in Constantinople, still susceptible to the magnetic attraction that service to the emperor in the capital had exercised over provincial elites since late antiquity.[17] Implicit in work done on Byzantine letter writing and the lead seals which authenticated letters is a sense that long-distance communication of information was integral to the sociability and political culture of the governing elite.[18]

In these senses then, there are many ways in which mobility can be studied in relationship to the operation of power in Byzantium. However, what I want to stress here are *other* aspects of the kinetic, those which did not rely on routine forms of movement and communication rooted in much earlier medieval traditions of governance. Above all, I am interested in how the kinetic was expressed and utilised in the dynamic expansion of Byzantium between the mid-tenth and mid-eleventh centuries, a period often regarded as the high-water mark of the medieval empire, when the territorial frontiers were restored in regions of the Balkans, Syria and Mesopotamia which the Byzantines had vacated several centuries earlier.[19]

In making this primarily Byzantium-based case I draw some parallels with the Fatimids of Egypt, a neighbouring power with imperial credentials, which was encountered with ever increasing frequency by the Byzantines across the tenth and eleventh centuries. In comparison to Byzantium, the Fatimids can seem like relative newcomers. Their geopolitical prominence in the Mediterranean only began in the early tenth century and from an original power base located somewhat further west, in modern-day Tunisia. When the Fatimids arrived in Egypt in 969, they did so as self-proclaimed caliphs, their Shia regime differentiating itself clearly from the Sunni Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad.[20] However, they serve as a very useful point of comparison to Byzantium, in part because their control of Egypt made them simply the latest in a series of independent-minded regional regimes which governed the eastern Mediterranean in a type of modus vivendi with Byzantium: earlier examples included the ninth-century Tulunids, and the tenth-century Ikshidids,

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[17] Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood*, 5; on the attractions of Constantinople to provincials in late antiquity see Peter Heather, 'New Men for New Constantines? Creating an Imperial Elite in the Eastern Mediterranean', in *New Constantines*, ed. Paul Magdalino (Aldershot, 1994), 11–44.

[18] Margaret Mullett, 'Writing in Early Medieval Byzantium', in *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge, 1990), 156–85; Jean-Claude Cheynet and Cecile Morrisson, 'Lieux de trouvaille et circulation des sceaux', in *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography*, ed. Nikolaos Oikonomides (Washington, DC, 1990); Peter Frankopan, 'The Workings of the Byzantine Provincial Administration in the 10th–12th Centuries: The Example of Preslav', *Byzantion*, 71 (2001), 73–97; Jonas Nilsson, 'Aristocracy, Politics and Power in Byzantium, 1025–1081' (D. Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 2017).

[19] Jonathan Shepard, 'Equilibrium to Expansion (886–1025)', in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c. 500–1492*, ed. Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge, 2008), 493–536.

[20] Brett, *Rise of the Fatimids*, 269–316; *idem, The Fatimid Empire* (Edinburgh, 2017); Paul E. Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and Its Sources* (2002).

whom the Fatimids replaced.[21] In common with (perhaps even drawing some inspiration from) Byzantium, the Fatimids invested much time and resource into developing and sustaining a very elaborate ceremonial focused on a purpose-built capital city.[22] But they also represent an interesting point of comparison in that, as we shall see, their rise to prominence in North Africa and their eventual seizure of power in Egypt relied extensively on the mobilisation of various forms of the kinetic.

One further framing point: I should also make it clear from the outset that in invoking the kinetic I am not trying to suggest that the expansion and consolidation of imperial power in either the Byzantine or Fatimid cases owed nothing to traditional sedentary modes of governance: the collection of taxes by an imperial bureaucracy from an agrarian peasantry; the use of taxation to pay professional armed forces, including navies; the use of written records to govern the distribution and allocation of resources. All of these aspects of power mattered. But what I do want to suggest is that these modes existed in a complex relationship with the kinetic, and that the presence and importance of that kinetic is something which has all too often been overlooked.

In the case of Byzantium the reason why a kinetic dimension to empire has been overlooked is not hard to detect. This is because the imperial expansion of the tenth and early eleventh centuries has usually been analysed in terms of the acquisition, control and exploitation of territory. Central to this scholarly preoccupation have been contemporary administrative sources produced in Constantinople such as banqueting lists and military handbooks that focus on official hierarchies, and the lead seals struck by civil and military officials appointed by the emperor. Both types of evidence have been scrutinised to describe the apparent creation and management of new territorial divisions, particularly those associated with the frontiers.[23] Historians of the evolution of the Byzantine frontier differ in their sense of how intensively that administrative imprimatur was applied in practice, with some arguing for an intense roll-out of a centralised administration and others suggesting that there was more devolution to local agents.[24] But what both approaches have in common

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[21] For precursor regimes in Egypt, see Thierry Bianquis, 'Autonomous Egypt from Ibn Tūlūn to Kāfūr, 868–969', in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, I, ed. Carl Petry (Cambridge, 1998), 86–119.

[22] Paula Sanders, *Ritual Politics and the City in Fatimid Cairo* (Albany, 1994); Irene A. Bierman, *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1998); Jenny Rahel Oesterle, *Kalifat und Königtum: Herrschaftsrepräsentation der Fatimiden, Ottonen und frühen Salier an religiösen Hochfesten* (Darmstadt, 2009).

[23] J. B. Bury, *The Imperial Administrative System in the Ninth Century: With a Revised Text of the Kletorologion of Philotheos* (1911), was a foundational study; for change in the tenth and eleventh centuries, see Nikolaos Oikonomides, *Les Listes de préséance byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles* (Paris, 1972); *idem*, 'L'Évolution de l'organisation administrative de l'empire byzantin au XIe siècle', *Travaux et Mémoires*, 6 (1976), 125–52; also relevant Whittow, *Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, 96–133, 193; J.–C. Cheynet (ed.), *Le Monde Byzantin II. L'Empire byzantin (641–1204)* (Paris, 2006), 125–74.

[24] A more maximalist approach is taken by Oikonomides, 'L'Évolution de l'organisation administrative de l'empire byzantin', and James D. Howard-Johnston, 'Crown Lands and the Defence of Imperial Authority in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries', *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 21 (1995), 76–99; for the involvement of local agents, see Vera von Falkenhausen, *Untersuchungen über die*

is the degree to which they interpret the exercise of power in terms of the sedentary state; that is to say in terms of the organisational logic of Constantinopolitan bureaucrats, or at least in terms of what modern historians assume the logic of Constantinopolitan bureaucrats to have been. But adopting this approach means ignoring a number of aspects of the extension and application of Byzantine governance which can certainly be equated with empire building, but which were not necessarily about permanent control of territory and the direct imposition of the administrative machinery of the sedentary state. Many of these aspects were kinetic, and tend to be more visible in narrative sources rather than administrative ones, especially texts written by those on the receiving end of Byzantium's kinetic power.

One of the most striking aspects of the Byzantine kinetic in this period was the empire's propensity for engaging in long-distance campaigns which had little to do with establishing permanent military bases or new settlements, but which were instead about making hitherto distant and even invisible imperial power suddenly very present. This effect was achieved either by imperial armies resorting to unexpected and extreme violence, in the form of punitive raiding; or by conducting something akin to an imperial triumph, which enabled emperors or their commanders to engage in ceremonies of subjugation. Lightning strikes from distance include land raids against the emirates of Dvin in Armenia in 922 and 928 and Edessa in 944. Against Dvin in 928, the Byzantines took with them the shock technology of Greek fire which could be blasted out of handheld devices.[25] Meanwhile, even those military emperors of the third quarter of the tenth century who took some interest in permanent territorial occupation and the creation of pliant frontier client states, such as Nikephoros Phokas and John Tzimiskes, still used raiding as a means to that objective. The incursions which preceded the fall of Antioch in 969 are a prime example.[26] Even in these years of permanent conquest, long-distance raids beyond the frontiers which had little territorial ambition also occurred, as with the attack on Damascus in 975 by John Tzimiskes which resulted in a one-off tribute payment.[27] Nor does the advancing of direct

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byzantinische Herrschaft in Süditalien vom 9. bis ins 11. Jahrhundert (1967), 84–7; P. Stephenson, Byzantium's Balkan Frontier (Cambridge, 2000); Catherine Holmes, Basil II and the Governance of Empire, 976–1025 (Oxford, 2005), 299–447.

[25] For Dvin in 922, see Stephen of Taron, The Universal History of Stepʿanos Tarōnecʿi. Introduction, Translation and Commentary, tr. Tim Greenwood (Oxford, 2017), 221–2; for Dvin in 928, see Ibn al-Athīr, in A. A. Vasiliev, Byzance et les arabes II: La Dynastie Macédonienne (867–959), Deuxième partie: Extraits des source arabes, tr. (French) Marius Canard (Brussels, 1950), 150; for Edessa, see Ibn al-Athīr, in Byzance et les arabes II, 156–7; Yahya ibn Saʿid al-Antaki, 'Histoire', ed. and tr. (French) I. Kratchkovsky and A. Vasiliev, Patrologia Orientalis, 18 (1924), 730–2.

[26] John Skylitzes: Ioannis Skylitzae Synopsis Historiarum, ed. Hans Thurn (CFHB v, Berlin and New York, 1973), 267–73; tr. John Wortley, John Skylitzes, A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811–1057 (Cambridge, 2010), 256–62; Leo the Deacon: Leonis Diaconi Caloënsis Historiae Libri Decem, ed. C. B. Hase (Bonn, 1828), 70–83; tr. Alice-Mary Talbot and Denis F. Sullivan, The History of Leo the Deacon (Washington, DC, 2005), 119–34.

[27] Yahya ibn Saʿid, 'Histoire', Patrologia Orientalis, 23 (1932), 368–9; Marius Canard, 'Les Sources arabes de l'histoire byzantine aux confins des Xᵉ et XIᵉ siècles', Revue des Études Byzantines, 19 (1961), 293–5.

territorial control seem to have been the principal concern of Basil II, Tzimiskes's successor as emperor. In the first of his eastern campaigns, in 995, Basil crossed Anatolia in little over two weeks appearing unexpectedly in northern Syria at the start of spring, with the ambition of scaring off a Fatimid army which was threatening Antioch, while disciplining the commander at Antioch who had suffered an unexpected defeat the previous year.[28] A second imperial raid, in 999, again provoked by Fatimid attack, entailed the emperor raiding the Syrian coast as far as Tripoli and Beirut, before withdrawing for the winter to the plains of Cilicia (around Tarsos), and then unexpectedly changing direction to put in an appearance in the Armenian borderlands at Tao, where a local ruler had recently died leaving Basil as his heir. But what is striking about the events of 999–1000 is how little territory was permanently occupied, with most of Basil's energies going first into raiding, and then, into a long tour of the frontier region, when client rulers, Muslims as well as Christians, received titles and salaries.[29] Even in a longer eastern campaign of 1021–3, when one purpose was to secure the Tao legacy, many aspects of Basil's campaign resembled a raid rather than a planned territorial conquest. We are told that contemporaries were taken by surprise when Basil chose to march towards Tao rather than down into Syria. And once a handful of fortresses had been reoccupied, Basil did not tarry but instead kept marching as far east as Lake Urmia in western Iran, a campaign which was perhaps intended to rival the expeditions of the seventh-century emperor Herakleios.[30]

One could perhaps argue that Basil's raiding in the east was too infrequent to justify the term 'kinetic empire'; and one could argue that it was in fact Bulgaria which interested Basil the most, and where he worked in a more piecemeal but consistent way to advance his empire, until in 1018 the Byzantines were able to absorb the Bulgarian state; and then, over a number of decades, the indigenous Bulgarian governing system was gradually replaced with Byzantine officials and structures. In fact, the state of the evidence does not really allow us to say all that much about how warfare was conducted across Bulgaria in Basil's reign. Where such evidence does exist (in the rather muddled text of the later eleventh-century historian John Skyliztes), it appears

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[28] Yahya, 'Histoire', *PO*, 23 (1932), 442–4; Alexander D. Beihammer, 'Muslim Rulers Visiting the Imperial City: Building Alliances and Personal Networks between Constantinople and the Eastern Borderlands (Fourth/Tenth–Fifth/Eleventh Century)', *Al-Masaq*, 24 (2012), 164.

[29] Yahya, 'Histoire', *PO*, 23 (1932), 457–61; Stephen of Taron, *The Universal History*, 306–11; Aristakes of Lastivert, *Récit des malheurs de la nation arménienne*, tr. M. Canard and H. Berbérian according to the edn and tr. (Russian) by K. Yuzbashian (Brussels, 1973), 2–6; Holmes, *Basil II*, 475–81.

[30] For this campaign see Robert Thomson (tr.), *Rewriting Caucasian History: The Georgian Chronicles* (Oxford, 1996), 281–4, 374; Aristakes of Lastivert, *Récit des malheurs*, 11–21; Yahya ibn Sa'id, 'Histoire', *Patrologia Orientalis*, 47 (1997), 459–63, 467–9; Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 366–7; tr. Wortley, *John Skylitzes*, 346–7; Holmes, *Basil II*, 482. For Herakleios's campaigns in this region see James Howard-Johnston, *The Last Great War of Antiquity* (Oxford, 2021), chs. 7 and 9. Indeed it is possible that Basil's own reputation as a raider in the east may have inspired his own successors to seek to emulate him, as with Romanos III's ultimately unsuccessful campaign against Aleppo in 1030 (Yahya, 'Histoire', *PO*, 47 (1997), 493–501).

that small-scale campaigns to seize particular fortified targets may have been the bread and butter of Balkan fighting: hardly kinetic empire or even kinetic warfare.[31] Yet even here, the kinetic, in the shape of long-distance raids, does still seem to have played a role. For instance in 1002 Basil is said to have marched well beyond Byzantine-held territory, up to the middle Danube at Vidin, and then to have raided deep within the territory of his Bulgarian rival Samuel, around Skopje in Macedonia.[32] Somewhat later after the rather sudden and mysterious Bulgarian capitulation to Byzantium in 1018, the surrenders of royal princes and local commanders were taken publicly by the emperor in something like a grand tour of the Balkans. This imperial peregrination included the surrender of much gold from Samuel's stores at Ochrid, and culminated in an imperial entry back in Byzantine-governed territory in Athens.[33]

Indeed, other aspects of Byzantium's long-term military engagement with the Balkans evoke the kinetic. It is possible that Basil II's striking of a trade deal in 992 with the still rather obscure power of Venice was partly about gaining a naval ally who might present the Bulgarian rulers with problems in the Adriatic.[34] Other neighbours with access to ship power were regarded as useful allies by the Byzantines at the same time, above all the Rus from settlements such as Kyiv on the Dnieper. Their military involvement with Byzantium is particularly well recorded for Basil II's reign, since it was a detachment of Rus troops who helped to defend the emperor against the serious rebellion led by two of his most senior generals: Bardas Phokas and Bardas Skleros. In return for these troops, the ruler of Kyiv, Volodymyr, received Basil's sister Anna as a bride, and took on Orthodox Christianity. This deal, however, was built on an evolving tradition across the tenth century by which troops from Rus campaigned with Byzantine armies, or on behalf of Byzantium, as far west as Italy, and as far east as Georgia and Syria as well as against Bulgaria.[35] Their naval expertise was integral to a very big campaign against Crete in 949, which was one example of a campaign where territorial reconquest does seem to have been expected, even if the campaign ended in failure.[36] But, Crete may be an exception which proves a rule: for there were many other engagements when Byzantine kinetic power at sea was involved where the principal objective appears to have been a display of the raw

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[31] Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier*, 59–79; *idem*, *The Legend of Basil the Bulgarslayer* (Cambridge, 2003), 1–48; Holmes, *Basil II*, 394–428.

[32] Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 346; tr. Wortley, *John Skylitzes*, 328; Holmes, *Basil II*, 414–18; Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier*, 65.

[33] Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 357–64; tr. Wortley, *John Skylitzes*, 338–44; Holmes, *Basil II*, 421, 501.

[34] A. Pertusi, 'Venezia e Bisanzio nel secolo XI', repr. in *Storia della civiltà veneziana*, ed. V. Branca (3 vols., Florence, 1979), I, 195–8; Donald Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Military Relations* (Cambridge, 1988), 39–40.

[35] Holmes, *Basil II*, 510–15; Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus, 750–1200* (New York, 1996), 160–8.

[36] Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *The Book of Ceremonies: With the Greek Edition of the Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae (Bonn, 1829)*, tr. Ann Moffatt and Maxeme Tall (Canberra, 2012), 664–7.

power and resources of the empire rather than territorial occupation. Into this bracket might fall the naval support the Byzantines provided to multi-party alliances of Mediterranean Christians which attacked Muslim enclaves on the Garigliano river near Rome in 915, and at Fraxinetum, near Marseille, in 941–2.[37] Perhaps most intriguing of all is the expedition of 935 which was sent to southern Italy to bring the rebellious Lombard princes of Benevento and Salerno to heel, in which imperial officials employed portable wealth, above all silks, to persuade local allies to fight on their behalf. This campaign force included a small detachment of elite troops from as far away as Rus and central Asia to impress locals in Italy with the Byzantines' access to specialist fighting manpower.[38]

Another aspect of Byzantine military endeavour integral to kinetic empire is revealed when the objectives, or at least the acquisitions, of many campaigns are registered: in short when we realise how important were movable goods and people to the Byzantines, as well as the places (in Pekka Hämäläinen's terms, the 'nodes') where goods and people could be exchanged. Thus, the main result of the raid against Edessa in 944 was not control of territory but instead a relic-cum-ikon (the face-of-Christ handkerchief known as the *Mandylion*).[39] This was just one of many different relics which were taken back to Constantinople during the later tenth century.[40] One purpose to this sacred capital transfer may have been to increase the spiritual arsenal which protected the emperor, palace and capital. But interestingly such sacred capital could itself play a kinetic role: we know for instance that ikons were taken into battle against both domestic and external enemies by Basil II, including on long-distance raids.[41] We also know that holy water, extracted by contact with relics in the capital, was transported from Constantinople in order to bless the troops before their campaigns.[42] Meanwhile, relics exported from Constantinople were a tried and tested means by which to attract the loyalty and service of peoples and rulers on the empire's periphery and well

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[37] Luigi Andrea Berto, *Christians and Muslims in Early Medieval Italy: Perceptions, Encounters and Clashes* (Milton, 2019), 5 (for Garigliano); Paolo Squatriti, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona* (Washington, DC, 2007), 181 (for Fraxinetum).

[38] Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *Book of Ceremonies*, 660–2.

[39] Whittow, *Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, 321; Averil Cameron, 'The History of the Image of Edessa: The Telling of a Story', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 7 (1983), 80–94; Meredith Riedel, 'Demonic Prophecy as Byzantine Imperial Propaganda: The Rhetorical Appeal of the Tenth-Century Narratio de Imagine Edessena', *Fides et Historia*, 49 (2017), 11–23.

[40] Whittow, *Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, 352.

[41] Basil II carried an ikon of the Virgin into battle against the rebel general Bardas Phokas in 989 (Michael Psellos, *Chronographie*, ed. Emile Renauld (2 vols., Paris, 1967), I, 10; E. R. A. Sewter (tr.), *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers: The Chronographia of Michael Psellus* (1953), 36); in the final campaign of his reign against the Georgians, he carried the *Mandylion* (Thomson (tr.), *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 284). Later eleventh-century emperors carried ikons of the Virgin into battle: see Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park, PA, 2006), 75–103.

[42] Eric McGeer, 'Two Military Orations of Constantine VII', in *Byzantine Authors: Literary Activities and Preoccupations: Text and Translations Dedicated to the Memory of Nicolas Oikonomides*, ed. John W. Nesbitt (Leiden, 2003), 132–3; for Greek text see R. Vari, 'Zum historischen Exzerptenwerke des Konstantinos Porphyrogennetos', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 17 (1908), 78–84.

beyond. And, of course, it was not necessarily just the sacred goods themselves which could move, but also the people able to create and interpret the sacred: thus, the tenth and eleventh centuries were striking for the circulation of Byzantine craftsmen, especially mosaicists to decorate new churches in locations such as Venice and Kyiv, as well as mosques in the case of the Umayyads of al Andalus.[43]

While the mobilisation and transfer of the sacred was integral to the conduct of military campaigns and the sealing of political alliances, more mundane circulation was also integral to Byzantium's kinetic empire. Narratives of the Byzantines' eastern campaigns stress with great frequency the imperial armies' acquisitions of booty, prisoners of war and slaves. When the mid-tenth-century emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus was exhorting his troops, for instance, he invoked the example of a provincial naval commander who raided deep within the frontier emirate of Tarsos (in modern southern Turkey). The emperor reminded his audience not of territory gained but of the 'huge number of Tarsiots taken prisoner'.[44] By the reign of John Tzimiskes (969–76) so many prisoners were being taken in raids that legislation was introduced to regulate their sale and the taxes owed to the state by the purchasers of the enslaved.[45] And half a century later, during Basil II's last great eastern campaign, the imperial armies wintered at Trebizond on the Black Sea, a noted entrepôt, where many prisoners of war were sold as slaves; these prisoners were almost certainly Georgians, fellow Christians.[46]

The capture, sale and ransoming of captives, many of whom must have been women, is evidence for the very tangible impact that kinetic empire could have on contemporaries who suddenly found themselves in the path of the highly mobile Byzantine forces, whether large field armies or small raiding parties. But integral to kinetic empire in the Byzantine case was also an element of the intangible, an elusive quality which was nonetheless rooted in real-world events and must have had very real-world consequences. What I have in mind here is the degree to which Byzantium's practice of kinetic empire relied on the creation and transmission of stories about the empire and its powers. When historians focus on Byzantium as a place of stories for wider consumption, it is generally on tales generated about the luxuries and improbabilities of the imperial court in Constantinople; or about the sacred complexes of the imperial city, above all the church of Hagia Sophia, which famously left Rus

[43] Helen C. Evans and William D. Wixom (eds.), *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843–1261* (New York, 1997), 282–3, 408, 434, 438.

[44] The naval commander in question was Basil Hexamilites (McGeer, 'Two Orations', 130–1).

[45] Eric McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century* (Washington, DC, 1995), 365–8.

[46] Aristakes of Lastivert, *Récit*, 16; one of the main objectives of embassies moving between Byzantium and the Islamic world, including between Byzantium and the Fatimids, was the redeeming of prisoners, some of whom remained in captivity for many years: Hugh Kennedy, 'Byzantine–Arab Diplomacy in the Near East from the Islamic Conquests to the Mid-Eleventh Century', in *Byzantine Diplomacy*, ed. Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge, 1992), 137–9; Yvonne Friedman, *Encounter between Enemies: Captivity and Ransom in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Leiden, 2002), 33–47.

visitors unsure of whether they were in heaven or on earth.[47] In short, about the stories of a sacred and stable centre which the Byzantines wished the outside world to see as a conduit between the mundane and the supernatural. These stories about a stable centre were of course themselves kinetic as their appearance in texts as diverse as the embassy reports of the Italian envoy Liudprand of Cremona, the prisoner narrative of Harun ibn Yahya and a variety of entries in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* indicates.[48] But these were not the only stories which circulated. Just as relevant in the period of imperial expansion were stories of military action and brutality. Thus, in some eleventh-century Byzantine histories there are traces of frontier epics, which pick up on the training for a raiding style of cavalry warfare.[49] In the early twelfth century some of this epic material was written up more fully in the shape of the narrative of Digenes Akrites, a tale famous for its evocation of a world of Christian–Muslim conflict and coexistence, hypermasculinity and predatory bride-snatching.[50]

It has sometimes been suggested that the world reflected in Diogenes was far from that of the imperial court in Constantinople, and as much as anything represented a rejection of imperial values by those who lived in the rough and rugged world of the eastern frontier.[51] But even if that is the case, then we should not overlook the way in which imperial forces could create their own very powerful stories when campaigning on the frontiers or well beyond them. These were stories which were borne by the mutilated bodies of the conquered, including, in the reign of Basil, not just blinded Bulgarians (the incident for which as 'Bulgarslayer' Basil became infamous) but Christian Georgians and Arab Bedouin, who may have been Christians as well as those who were Muslims. This evidence is complex because just as the Byzantines were capable of extreme physical violence, they also sought quite actively to encourage conquered populations into arrangements in which local agents could be very closely involved in imperial administration. These were nuanced arrangements in which some did not run from imperial power but sought actively to engage with it.[52]

Nonetheless, while there was undoubted reciprocity about governance in areas where the Byzantines claimed imperial control, the role that violence,

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[47] Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor (tr.), *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text* (Cambridge, MA, 1953), 110–11.

[48] Nadia Maria el Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 142–62, for Harun ibn Yahya's observations of Constantinople as transmitted by the early tenth-century geographer Ibn Rusteh.

[49] Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 291–4; tr. Wortley, *John Skylitzes*, 278–81.

[50] Elizabeth Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis: The Grottaferrata and Escorial Versions* (Cambridge, 1998); Roderick Beaton, David Ricks and Peter Mackridge (eds.), *Digenes Akrites: New Approaches to Byzantine Heroic Poetry* (Aldershot, 1993).

[51] I. Sevcenko, 'Byzantium Viewed from the Eastern Provinces in the Middle Byzantine Period', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 3–4 (1979–80), 732–5.

[52] Catherine Holmes, 'Basil II the Bulgar-Slayer and the Blinding of 15,000 Bulgarians in 1014: Mutilation and Prisoners-of-War in the Middle Ages', in *How Fighting Ends: A History of Surrender*, ed. Holger Afflerbach and Hew Strachan (Oxford, 2012), 86–93; for the evolution of Basil's reputation as 'Bulgarslayer' see Stephenson, *Bulgarslayer, passim*.

or at least the threat of violence, played should not be overlooked. That the Byzantines were fully aware of the power of stories about the impact of their armies is revealed by the letters of the emperor Constantine VII who exhorted his armies to military action, precisely so that those outside the empire would hear stories of the army's achievement: 'Let your heroic deeds be spoken of in foreign lands, let the foreign contingents accompanying you be amazed at your discipline, let them be messengers to their compatriots of your triumphs and symbols which bring victory, so that they may see the deeds you have performed.'[53] One example of the conveying of such information by external witnesses may come at the moment when Liudprand of Cremona, the Italian bishop and envoy of the German emperor Otto I, passed on the story that the new emperor Nikephoros Phokas was celebrated in Constantinopolitan ceremonial as the 'pallid death of the Saracens'.[54] One imagines that news about this sobriquet lent additional frisson to the message that Nikephoros wanted Liudprand to convey to Otto I: that if the German emperor continued to annoy the Byzantines in southern Italy, then he would be smashed like an earthenware pot.[55] Of course there is always the question of what was style and what was substance. A letter from John Tzimiskes to the Armenian princes datable to *c.* 975, claiming that he had raided not just as far as Damascus but all the way to Jerusalem, was clearly far-fetched.[56] But that the kinesis of Byzantine imperial forces was not all just empty imperial rhetoric is made clear by the fact that stories about the brutality of Byzantine raiding armies of the tenth century continued to circulate in the east when the crusaders arrived in the same region nearly a century later. The explicit imperial memorialisation of stories of brutality, or at least of the physicality of victory, was clearly actively cultivated by the Byzantines themselves. In his Balkan grand tour of 1018, Basil I stopped off to see the heap of bones near Thermopylae where a Byzantine army had won a huge and slightly unexpected victory against the Bulgarians more than twenty years earlier.[57] In this sense the Byzantines' military activity, both in practice and memorialisation, seems to constitute the 'dark matter' of kinetic empire (a term I take from Hämäläinen): that is, a sense of empire which was simultaneously intangible and yet residually powerful, and in the Byzantine case, a sense of empire strikingly far away from what we customarily regard as its epicentre in the imperial palace and the city of Constantinople.

If there is anything in the evidence for a strong kinetic dimension to the tenth- and eleventh-century Byzantine Empire, how far do we want to take this idea? Of course there are several possible answers, but I will focus on two. Both are connected to issues of control.

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[53] McGeer, 'Two Orations', 131–2.

[54] Squatriti, *Liudprand of Cremona*, 244.

[55] *Ibid.*, 271.

[56] Paul E. Walker, 'The "Crusade" of John Tzmisces in the Light of New Arabic Evidence', *Byzantion*, 47 (1977), 301–27.

[57] Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 364; tr. Wortley, *John Skylitzes*, 344.

First: could those who claimed imperial hegemony really control the kinetic elements which helped to create their power? Here, I would suggest that while the kinetic could be a potent force for extending the reputational reach of Byzantium, it was also something that was not always easy to control at the level of domestic politics. This is most visible when we think about the increasing frequency with which the Byzantine armed forces, those engaged in kinetic activity, became integral to politics in the imperial city of Constantinople and to authorising who it was that held imperial power. In other words, an increasing danger to the Byzantine body politic of the tenth and eleventh centuries was the powerful general who would turn a mobile field army to march on Constantinople.[58] Constantine VII, a mid-tenth-century armchair emperor who was brought to the throne with the support of those with military command, betrays a great deal of anxiety in the harangues that he sends to his troops about his own capacity to control their activities. His solution was to suggest that at some point he intended to join the army; in the meantime he intended to send dignitaries who would write down the deeds of those who deserved reward.[59] But one wonders whether a predominantly sedentary empire solution to a kinetic empire problem was ever likely to work. Thus, despite a great deal of legislation connected to the financing and organisation of the Byzantine army in the tenth century, it is clear from legal rulings concerned with the difficulties of retaining Armenian forces that it was actually quite difficult to control troops by bureaucratic means from the Constantinopolitan centre.[60] If command from the imperial centre did not always have much purchase on real-world conditions, an alternative option was for those running the empire to become more peripatetic themselves, the solution adopted by the emperor Basil II, who led his armies personally, as on occasion did Alexios Komnenos, famous as the emperor at the time of the first crusade. Of course, personal leadership of the kinetic was not the solution adopted by all emperors in the eleventh century, and we need to be wary of overstating this phenomenon. Kekaumenos, an astute later eleventh-century provincial observer of politics, noted that the emperor who holds power in Constantinople always wins, a maxim which has been regarded as foundational to the operation of political culture in Byzantium.[61] And, of course, it is striking that most coups were focused on seizing the administrative and ceremonial resources of the palace and the city. But even when focusing on the capital, it is possible that we need to think more about the kinetic. One of the most striking developments of the tenth century was the revival of the imperial triumph

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[58] Holmes, *Basil II*, 461–8.

[59] McGeer, 'Two Orations', 119–20.

[60] E. McGeer, 'The Legal Decree of Nikephoros Phokas Concerning Armenian Stratiotai', in *Peace and War in Byzantium: Essays in Honor of George T. Dennis*, ed. Timothy S. Miller and John W. Nesbitt (Washington, DC, 1995), 123–37.

[61] Kekaumenos: G. Litavrin, ed. and Russian tr., *Cecaumeni Consilia et Narrationes* (Moscow, 1972), 268; English translation by Charlotte Roueché available online: https://ancientwisdoms.ac.uk/library/kekaumenos-consilia-et-narrationes. It is worth noting, however, that in the same work Kekaumenos also advises emperors on the wisdom of a mobile form of governance; leaving Constantinople was wise, so that the emperor had good knowledge of the state of the provinces.

through the streets of Constantinople.[62] Such occasions can perhaps be interpreted as the means by which imperial authorities sought to celebrate and yet also to control the kinetic genie that inspired the expansion of the empire.

A second, and perhaps more significant, aspect of control of the kinetic, or indeed lack of control, was the fact that for much of the period I have been speaking about, Byzantium was just one of many political entities underwritten by highly mobile power. Indeed one of the most striking aspects of Byzantine history in this period is just how similar many aspects of its military campaigns were to those of its neighbours; and just how many neighbours also engaged in raiding. Indeed, one could argue that this kinetic commonality between Byzantium and its neighbours is just as striking an aspect of Byzantine warfare in the tenth and eleventh centuries as are other dimensions of the empire's military culture which have traditionally been more central to scholarly enquiry.[63]

The most obvious point of kinetic comparison for this paper are the Fatimids, who differed from the Byzantines in that it took some time before they were able to find a stable political centre, with Cairo only coming to be such after other sites in North Africa had been tried and abandoned, including al-Mahdiya and al-Mansuria in modern-day Tunisia. But in other respects many of the Fatimids' politico-military practices seem rather similar to those of the Byzantines, namely the cultivation of an elaborate ceremonial culture in a fixed urban centre, coupled with a projection of power from that centre which involved long-distance raiding. Such Fatimid raids came as early as 935 for instance against the city of Genoa and the coast of southern France.[64] Also similar to the Byzantines' modus operandi was the Fatimids' threat of lending mobile military support, particularly maritime support, to their enemies' enemies. Thus in the early tenth century the Byzantines were terrified by the prospect of their principal Bulgarian rival being able to enlist Fatimid naval support.[65] The Fatimids' combination of elaborate ceremonial power and long-distance raiding activity undoubtedly had parallels elsewhere in the contemporary Islamic world, most obviously in the Umayyad caliphate of Cordoba in Spain, which engaged in very widely reported raids on sites in Christian Iberia, including at the shrine of Santiago de Compostella, as well

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[62] Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge, 1986), 159–230; Stephenson, *Bulgarslayer*, 49–65; Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 31–5; see also McGeer, 'Two Orations', 128–9.

[63] Discussions of Byzantine military culture have focused very extensively on the significance of the revival of the late Roman military handbook tradition, especially in the tenth century. For a recent contribution to this literature see Georgios Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals as Literary Works and Practical Handbooks: The Case of the Tenth-Century Sylloge Tacticorum* (Abingdon, 2019). Examination of clear similarities in tactics and fighting personnel between Byzantium and its neighbours is less frequent, although this topic is touched upon in a thought-provoking discussion of Byzantine warfare with the Hamdanids, an aggressive mid-tenth-century emirate based in Aleppo and Mosul (McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, 228–48).

[64] Yaacov Lev, 'A Mediterranean Encounter: The Fatimids and Europe, Tenth to Twelfth Centuries', in *Shipping, Trade and Crusade in the Medieval Mediterranean: Studies in Honour of John Pryor*, ed. Ruth Gertwagen and Elizabeth Jeffreys (2016).

[65] Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 264–5; tr. Wortley, *John Skylitzes*, 253–4.

as in naval raids against Fatimid North Africa.[66] In many ways raiding had been typical of the operation of the ninth- and tenth-century Abbasid caliphate centred in Baghdad before its decline from the 920s onwards.[67] And further north the Byzantines were also accustomed to encountering those whose power was predicated on long-distance kinetic activity, whether in the shape of the nomad Magyars whose raids across central Europe and into Italy were a striking feature of the later ninth and tenth centuries, or even the revived western empire under the Ottonians of Saxony, whose power in Italy from the 950s onwards often took the form of dramatic and unexpected appearances in the peninsula, with Otto II's raid into southern Italy in 987 being one instance that was particularly resonant for Byzantine interests.[68] But of course these are just some of the most well-known examples of kinetic imperialists. There were others whose exploitation of mobility was also integral to their power: most obviously from a Byzantine perspective, steppe nomads such as the Pechenegs who operated north of the Black Sea and about whom the Byzantine client manual the *De Administrando Imperio* has much to say, and the Rus who by the tenth century were settling on the Dnieper river.[69] There are also those who are often dismissed merely as pirates or brigands, or controllers of 'enclaves', but who in this period are probably best regarded as incipient kinetic states, such as the Muslim-ruled enclaves at Fraxinetum, on the river Garigliano and on the island of Crete; the latter before its conquest by the Byzantines in 961 indeed struck its own coinage in an interesting example of the interplay between the kinetic, communication and power.[70]

One could go on cataloguing examples, but the more important question is what to make of the widespread incidence of the kinetic in this period, especially the importance of raiding to the operation and projection of power. I would suggest that the first implication is that any power such as Byzantium which tried to impress and express its might through kinetic means always had rivals who were doing the same thing, and who could prove to be more successful in enlisting the resources, including human capital, necessary for such activity. Thus in writing to his armies Constantine

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[66] Hugh Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal: A Political History of Al-Andalus* (1996), 119–20; Brett, *Rise of the Fatimids*, 230–5.

[67] John Haldon and Hugh Kennedy, 'The Arab–Byzantine Frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Military Organisation and Society in the Borderlands', *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta*, 19 (1980), 79–116; Michael Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War: Studies in the Jihad and the Arab–Byzantine Frontier* (New Haven, 1996).

[68] Nora Berend, Jozsef Laszlovszky and Bela Zsolt Szakacs, 'The Kingdom of Hungary', in *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900–1200*, ed. Nora Berend (Cambridge, 2007), 322–4; Liudprand of Cremona makes several references to tenth-century Magyar raids in the Balkans, Moravia, Germany and Italy (Squatriti, *Liudprand of Cremona*, 75–96, 111–14, 194, 266); G. A. Loud, 'Southern Italy and the Eastern and Western Empires, c. 900–1050', *Journal of Medieval History*, 38 (2012), 1–19, especially at 12.

[69] *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. G. Moravcsik and tr. R. J. H. Jenkins (Washington. DC, 1967), 56–63.

[70] Vassilios Christides, *The Conquest of Crete by the Arabs (ca.824): A Turning Point in the Struggle between Byzantium and Islam* (Athens, 1984); *idem*, 'The Raids of the Moslems of Crete in the Aegean Sea: Piracy and Conquest', *Byzantion*, 51 (1981), 76–111.

VII expresses some clear paranoia about the ways in which a new raiding emir-ate in the east, the Hamdanids of Mosul and Aleppo, was utilising the tricks of the kinetic trade in regional warfare, above all the spreading of rumours about the mass movement of resources, men as well as money.[71] The legislation of Emperor Nikephoros Phokas, the letter of John Tzimiskes to the Armenians and the dispatch of relics to potential allies demonstrate that Byzantine emperors, even in the military heyday of empire in the later tenth century, still needed to attract troops. Those who themselves had kinetic fighting skills would not necessarily come to serve Byzantium without inducements; those that did could easily be attracted away by others with more to offer.[72] Or, as the Byzantines discovered to their cost when they employed the Rus of Kyiv to invade and destabilise Bulgaria in 968, hired kinetic forces could become too successful: having destroyed Bulgaria, the Rus ruler Svyatoslav elected not to go back safely up the Dnieper but instead to establish a new position on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast at Pereiaslavets, a very perilous development for the Byzantines given the proximity of this site to Constantinople.[73] In a similar way, just as the Byzantines had rivals in the practice of building power through kinetic warfare, so too could they be victims of that kind of martial culture, especially in the sense of being taken prisoner of war and in some cases enslaved: a long narrative by John Kaminiates describing the sack of the Byzantine city of Thessaloniki in 904 by Leo of Tripoli was written so that its author could be ransomed.[74] Indeed Leo's own route to power as a naval commander operating loosely under the auspices of caliphal power started as a Byzantine taken captive in a raid who subsequently converted to Islam.[75]

This point about the multiplicity of those making power through kinetic means in the tenth- and eleventh-century Mediterranean also has potential implications for wider issues of periodisation. As I indicated at the beginning of this paper, if we think about power in the eastern Mediterranean in the tenth and eleventh centuries largely in terms of sedentary empires adminis-tered from fixed-point centres with civil and military infrastructures paid for from the taxes collected from an agrarian peasantry, then we can suggest that the final decades of the eleventh century represented a period of seismic

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[71] McGeer, 'Two Orations', 130–1.

[72] For example, once in Egypt, the Fatimids also looked to employ Armenian troops. On the car-eer of the Armenian commander Badr al Jamali in the later eleventh century, see Brett, *Fatimid Empire*, 199ff.; on the wider point of Armenians in the armies of Islamic powers, including the Fatimids, see John France, *Victory in the East: A Military History of the First Crusade* (Cambridge, 1994), 205–6. On mercenaries serving in Hamdanid armies, and the eagerness of the Hamdanid emirs to employ such forces for the purposes of raiding, see McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, 232–42.

[73] Franklin and Shepard, *Emergence of Rus*, 139–51.

[74] John Kameniates, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, ed., tr. and commentary D. Frendo and A. Fotiou (Perth, 2000); see Shaun Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI (886–912): Politics and People* (Leiden, 1997), 181–9, for the campaign of 904, and for an interpretation of eastern Mediterranean Arab naval activity in the early tenth century as devastating raids rather than attempts to occupy territory.

[75] Tougher, *Leo VI*, 184–5.

change, as this region came under pressure from new and aggressive kinetic powers. These new powers included the Seljuk Turks, steppe nomads from the east who moved into Fatimid-controlled regions in Syria, as well as large swathes of Byzantine Anatolia, at the same time as the Byzantines faced other aggressive steppe nomad peoples beyond the Danube (Pechenegs and Cumans) and as a new type of itinerant fighter in search of liquid assets arrived in Italy: the Normans, some of whom later contributed to crusading forces. But if we think that there was a strongly kinetic dimension to the exercise of regional power *before* the arrival of these more obviously kinetic groups, what then?

One option is to argue for an incremental case, that the large-scale regional powers of Byzantium and Fatimid Egypt were at heart sedentary empires, but ones which for a while were able to absorb, channel, harness and even exploit the kinetic, as when in the 1040s some groups of Pecheneg steppe nomads were co-opted by the Byzantines to raid against their fellow Pechenegs.[76] In this sense we might also consider the Varangians from Rus and Scandinavia who were employed as mercenaries in the imperial guard, or even the crusaders who were funnelled across the Bosphorus to help Byzantium regain territory lost to the Turks in Anatolia. This modest and incremental account of the integration of the kinetic might fit well with a relatively conservative approach to the Byzantine military state taken recently by Anthony Kaldellis. He argues that while Byzantine emperors undoubtedly employed a modest number of extra-Byzantine troops, such forces were always in the minority, even during periods when the Byzantine army and the state apparatus which supported it saw substantial growth; it was only in the 1070s that mercenary troops from outside Byzantium became the martial majority.[77] If we adopt this stance, then what happened across the tenth and much of the eleventh century could be interpreted in terms of a gradualist shift in the balance of power, as what were initially controllable kinetic incomers gradually began to eat away at the fabric of the state which sustained them. These are processes in Byzantium which can appear to have striking parallels in polities elsewhere: thus, we could think of the gradual takeover of the Lombard principalities in Italy by the Normans, or the reorientation of the Fatimid polity in the 1070s by incomers such as the Armenian commander Badr al Jamali.[78]

However, there is a third possibility which is that the kinetic in the terms that I have described was an ever-present across the tenth- and eleventh-century eastern Mediterranean, a set of mobile practices which characterised the political–military culture of all polities, not just the big imperial complexes or those we have traditionally regarded as newcomers in the eleventh century; but instead a variety of indigenous polities of all sizes which were used to exercising and projecting power through raiding, with the purpose of those raids being about accessing and controlling (or defending and preserving) key routes

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[76] Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier*, 89–91.

[77] Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood*, 11–12, 275–6.

[78] Graham A. Loud, *The Age of Robert Guiscard: Southern Italy and the Norman Conquest* (Harlow, 2000); Brett, *Fatimid Empire*, 191ff.

of communication and entrepôts rather than extending control of territory and acquiring new tax revenues based on exploitation of an agrarian peasantry. If there is anything in this idea, then rather than seeing the eastern Mediterranean in terms of frontiers akin to lines on maps, or even in terms of deep borderland zones, we could instead think about a very jagged geography of interpenetration both on land and at sea, in which different polities' raiders were frequently criss-crossing one another over considerable distances. Such a geopolitical environment could help to make sense of some rather bewildering and contradictory chronologies of the eleventh century, especially in Byzantium, where at points in time when the empire was supposed to be very secure and had achieved substantial victories (for instance, the latter part of the reign of Basil II and the reigns of his immediate successors), Rus and Arab (perhaps Fatimid?) raiding vessels could still suddenly appear in the seas very close to Constantinople;[79] in contrast, in the middle of the eleventh century when the Seljuk Turks were raiding deep into central Asia Minor, and one might assume the Byzantines were very weak, we discover that they were still able to acquire new positions in eastern Armenia, far to the east of the Turks' raids in the central plateau regions.[80] Indeed the notion of a long-established complex weave of raiding activity from multiple players may help to explain why it is so difficult to track the arrival of genuine newcomers in the historical record – the first appearance of the Turks in the eastern reaches of Byzantium is famously difficult to date.[81] And if we did not have a wealth of Western sources plus the very *sui generis* Anna Comnena to tell us otherwise, then we might be tempted to view the arrival of the crusaders in northern Syria in the 1090s as simply the return of a new Byzantine field army. Certainly the rather delayed and initially relatively small-scale response from neighbouring Islamic powers may suggest that contemporaries also saw the crusaders in that traditional light.[82]

Interpreting the eastern Mediterranean world in the tenth and eleventh centuries in terms of a long-standing tradition of raiding polities may help to explain why the Normans, Turks and crusaders were able to make such rapid progress when they did arrive in bigger numbers. And what that may mean in terms of wider periodisation is that we should think less about distinct, chronologically circumscribed, phases in the history of political change in the eastern Mediterranean and more about very *longue durée* regional continuities, especially in the vast majority of land- and seascapes of this region, beyond the imperial capitals and their immediate hinterlands. And in these senses of raiding as a shared political and military culture across many polities,

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[79] Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 367–8, 373; tr. Wortley, *John Skylitzes*, 347, 352; for a raid on the island of Gymnopelagisia by Muslim Arabs in Basil II's reign, see also George Ostrogorsky, 'Une Ambassade serbe auprès de l'empereur Basile II', *Byzantion*, 19 (1949), 187–94; Holmes, *Basil II*, 406.

[80] For example, the principality of Kars was annexed as late as 1065, only six years before the Battle of Manzikert.

[81] Alexander Beihammer, *Byzantium and the Emergence of Muslim-Turkish Anatolia, ca. 1040–1130* (2017).

[82] There are hints of this argument in France, *Victory in the East*, 203.

I would suggest that the kinetic empire model proposed by Hämäläinen has considerable potential for forcing historians of the eastern Mediterranean to loosen their traditional capital-centric gaze and expand, as well as potentially contract, what they mean by empire in this period and in this region of the medieval world.

There is, however, of course a gigantic elephant in the room, in that while most of the polities that I have discussed in this paper may have been kinetic, their rulers were not nomads; and most of those they claimed to govern were not mobile pastoralists. Do those omissions mean that this approach of applying kinetic to other kinds of peoples, polities and hegemonies risks falling into a classic global history trap: of taking a concept and applying it so generally that it flattens and homogenises that which it is trying to explain; or perhaps worse, deflects attention back onto the usual imperial suspects while condemning to the sidelines precisely the kinds of hitherto 'marginal' groups which an approach like kinetic empire was supposed to 'centre'?

In concluding, I would accept the challenge but argue against the charge. In the eastern Mediterranean world of the period I have described in this paper, thinking about the kinetic dimensions to empire actually allows us to see just how fluid and contingent were *all* the polities of the tenth and eleventh centuries, despite intermittent attempts by those in long-standing centres of imperial power, such as Byzantium, to rebrand and reorder that fluidity in traditional administrative terms. The degree to which that reordering from imperial capitals was only ever a very partial feature of a much wider and more fluid landscape of power is, paradoxically, revealed by the ubiquity of the kinetic in the ways in which those empires projected and communicated their own claims to power and authority.