

# Living Outside Byzantium: Remarks on Late Medieval Displacement and Exile

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## Introduction

Generally regarded as a turbulent time marked by accelerated losses of territories, resources, and even imperial authority, the last century of Byzantine history (c. 1350 – c. 1450) offers a compelling story of catastrophic political events. During this period, Byzantium faced threats from multiple directions. The most significant event was the Ottoman conquest of European territories in the Balkans which began in the mid-fourteenth century and culminated in the Fall of Constantinople in 1453. The Ottomans rapidly expanded their territory, capturing key Byzantine cities such as Nicaea, Nicomedia and Philadelphia in Asia Minor.<sup>1</sup> The Byzantines attempted to resist the Ottoman advance through diplomacy and military action, but were ultimately unsuccessful.<sup>2</sup> Internally, the Byzantine Empire was plagued by political instability and infighting often on religious grounds over a potential union with the Catholic Church. The empire was ruled by a series of emperors who had little authority over influential aristocratic families or foreign power-brokers. This led to a number of coups and internal divisions, further weakening the empire and leaving it vulnerable to external threats.

This relentless succession of clashes between nations, polities, armies, or institutions, forced a number of notable individuals to flee to the Aegean and Mediterranean islands or to Italy and other parts of Europe.<sup>3</sup> As the Byzantines

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<sup>1</sup> Speros Vryonis, “The Decline of Byzantine Civilization in Asia Minor, Eleventh-Fifteenth Century. Remarks on the Dumbarton Oaks Symposium of 1974,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 29 (1975): 351–56.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Klaus-Peter Matschke, *Die Schlacht bei Ankara und das Schicksal von Byzanz: Studien zur spätbyzantinischen Geschichte zwischen 1402 Und 1422* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1981), 40–141.

<sup>3</sup> Most scholarship which has dealt with the transfer of Byzantine intellectuals to Italy touched upon broader issues of migration from Byzantium to Italy. See. Deno J Geanakoplos, *Greek Scholars in Venice: Studies in the Dissemination of Greek Learning from Byzantium to Western Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962); and Nigel Wilson, *From Byzantium to Italy: Greek Studies in the Italian Renaissance* (London: Duckworth, 1992).

interacted with the Italian maritime states, their lives and careers were increasingly influenced by these contacts.<sup>4</sup> A growing number of Byzantine Greek merchants and middlemen developed close ties with the two states, both in personal and official terms. The contacts between Byzantium and Italy gradually expanded in the cultural sphere. Greek speaking scholars reached Italy where they founded schools and authored popular books with a wide circulation.<sup>5</sup> Several individuals stand out. Manuel Chrysoloras (1355–1415), a diplomat and scholar, found temporary refuge in Italy in the 1390s while on a mission to gather support against the Ottomans. He remained there, teaching Greek to some of the most renowned Humanists. The Fall of Constantinople in 1453 consequently forced the philosopher and theologian, John Argyropoulos (1415–1487), to settle in Florence, where he became instrumental in imparting Greek knowledge to Western intellectuals. Cardinal Bessarion (1403–1472), a convert to Catholicism, spent a considerable portion of his life in Italy, emerging as a prominent figure of the Italian Renaissance. George of Trebizond (1395–1484), a Cretan-born philosopher and rhetorician, dedicated much of his career to teaching Greek and translating works in Italy, even engaging in a notorious literary feud with Bessarion.<sup>6</sup>

Such a displacement of people was by no means unique to the Byzantine realm. During the late Middle Ages, parts of Europe also experienced cycles of population movements, driven by factors such as political conflicts, religious upheavals, and changing economic circumstances.<sup>7</sup> The Hundred Years' War in England and France, the Hussite Wars in Bohemia, and other religious conflicts inside the Church, all contributed to widespread displacement. Economic factors such as the decline of Feudalism, the growth of trade, and the emergence of new urban centers attracted people looking for better economic opportunities in the cities. Among the groups most profoundly affected by these displacements were Jewish communities, whose lives were shaped by a distinct set of challenges and responses. As in the previous centuries, the late Medieval Jewish diaspora was characterized by a pattern of expulsions and

<sup>4</sup> See Michel Balard, "Latins in the Aegean and the Balkans (1300–1400)," in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire c. 500–1492*, ed. Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 834–51.

<sup>5</sup> See John Monfasani, *George of Trebizond: A Biography and a Study of His Rhetoric and Logic* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 3–32; and Claudine Delacroix-Besnier, "Les Grecs unionistes réfugiés en Italie et leur influence culturelle," in *Migrations et diasporas méditerranéennes (Xe–XVIe siècles)*, ed. Michel Balard and Alain Ducellier (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2017), 59–73.

<sup>6</sup> On the presence of Greek scholars in Italy, see Wilson, *From Byzantium to Italy*.

<sup>7</sup> Peter McClure, "Patterns of Migration in the Late Middle Ages: The Evidence of English Place-Name Surnames," *The Economic History Review* 32 (1979): 167–69.

forced migrations, often driven by religious persecution and economic pressures. Despite these challenges, Jewish communities played a significant role in the transmission of knowledge and trade practices between different regions.<sup>8</sup>

The situation in Byzantium presents several differences from the rest of Europe. In the Byzantine Empire, the displacement was limited to the elites and stemmed from the accelerated Ottoman conquests and the fall of Constantinople, the symbolic center of the once glorious Eastern Roman rule. While the Ottomans demonstrated tolerance towards the local population, the rapid expansion of a Muslim powerful state into previously Christian provinces caused profound anxiety among the Byzantine social upper strata.<sup>9</sup> A result of this fear was that members of the political and ecclesiastical establishment, who shared a sophisticated literary culture rooted in ancient models, described their fears and struggles in several texts.

If the historical context of the late Byzantine displacement of people has been the subject of thorough scholarly treatments, the question of how to explain the personal experiences of the individuals caught in these encounters rarely poses itself.<sup>10</sup> Their reflections can be found in private letters, narratives, and autobiographical texts which weave together subjective perspectives and references to events shaping the political and social history of the later Middle Ages.<sup>11</sup> Given this multitude of instances of representations of displacement, the aim of this article will be threefold: to explore the conditions in which displacement appeared; to consider the textual features and social-political implications of the most illustrative cases of late Byzantine displacement; and, finally, to provide a few tentative remarks about potential future research into the Byzantine modes of articulating displacement. For the purposes of this article, I will not only focus on textual representations of displacement as a general phenomenon, but will also specifically examine the experience of exile. This can be seen as a distinct form of displacement characterized by a forced or involuntary departure from one's homeland due to political, ideological, or religious circumstances. The Byzantine sources do not always provide clear insights, however, into the precise motivations

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<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Stow, "Jews in the Middle Ages," in *A Companion to the Medieval World*, ed. Carol Lansing and Edward English (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 293–312.

<sup>9</sup> Ihor Ševčenko, "The Decline of Byzantium Seen Through the Eyes of Its Intellectuals," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 15 (1961): 167–72.

<sup>10</sup> See for instance the chapters in Dion C. Smythe, ed., *Strangers to Themselves: The Byzantine Outsider* (London: Routledge, 2016); and Claudia Rapp, "Mobility and Migration in Byzantium: Who Gets to Tell the Story?" *Early Medieval Europe* 31 (2023): 360–79.

<sup>11</sup> Margaret Mullett, "Originality and Byzantine Letter-writing: the Case of Exile," in *Letters, Literacy and Literature in Byzantium* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 39–58.

behind an individual's relocation abroad. This lack of context makes it difficult to consistently distinguish between cases of exile and other forms of displacement. Whether driven by external pressures or personal choice, both exile and displacement involve the experience of uprootedness: leaving one's homeland and adapting to life in a new environment. Therefore, while acknowledging the potential differences between the two concepts, here I will consider them as reflections of shared experiences and challenges faced by individuals who moved abroad, regardless of the specific impetus behind their relocation.

### Shaping Late Byzantine Displacement: Politics, Ideas, Mobility

It is undoubtedly difficult to elucidate all the nuances and interpretations of displacement within the scope of this article. By briefly shifting the focus to the key trends in the research on displacement, insights can be gained into the nature of this phenomenon and can be applied to the particular case of Byzantium. Displacement has been scrutinized in several theoretical frameworks. Within the field of diaspora studies, scholars have asked questions about how individuals maintain connections to their homelands while forging new lives in host countries, thereby creating complex networks of identity and belonging.<sup>12</sup> Sociologists have explored the significance of social networks and social capital, which play a crucial role in providing support, resources, and opportunities for integration into new societies. Displacement has also been investigated in terms of its structural and institutional factors, such as political instability, armed conflicts, and economic inequalities.<sup>13</sup>

To a certain extent, the Byzantine sources illustrate these insights. By and large, in the early and middle Byzantine periods (sixth to twelfth centuries), in addition to war-related deportations, especially state structures like the imperial court or the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate can be seen as contributing to the forced mobility of several individuals.<sup>14</sup> Some of the most notorious cases were the banishment of Empress Irene (750–803) to Lesbos in 802 after being deposed in a coup and the exile of Patriarch Photios (810–893) to a monastery in 867, following a conflict with Emperor Basil I. Another prominent example

<sup>12</sup> See Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> See Anthony Richmond, "Reactive Migration: Sociological Perspectives on Refugee Movements," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 6, no. 1 (1993): 7–24.

<sup>14</sup> Yannis Stouraitis, "Migrating in the Medieval East Roman World, ca. 600–1204," in *Migration Histories of the Medieval Afroeurasian Transition Zone: Aspects of Mobility between Africa, Asia and Europe, 300–1500 C.E.*, ed. Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, Lucian Reinfandt, and Yannis Stouraitis, (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 141–65.

is the forced tonsure and exile of Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes (1030–1072) to the island of Prote in 1071 after being overthrown by Michael VII Doukas. The deposed Emperor Andronikos I Komnenos (1118–1185) was also paraded through the streets of Constantinople and exiled before his brutal execution in 1185.

In later centuries, displacement also acquired positive connotations as it facilitated cross-cultural interactions between Byzantium and the increasingly resourceful Italian cities. The experiences of these displaced Byzantines in Italy and elsewhere led to a heightened sense of their common Greco-Roman heritage and a desire to preserve and promote their cultural identity in the face of political defeats. This new identity, typical of the Byzantine diaspora in Italy, combined distinctive Hellenic and Italian features and contrasted the promotion of an exclusive Hellenic character predominant among the scholars who remained in Constantinople.<sup>15</sup>

Key to understanding these representations are several transformational events and values specific to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In this respect, one can consider three major diplomatic journeys abroad involving the Palaiologan emperors and their court: John V Palaiologos' journey to Italy in 1369–1371, the four-year-long Manuel II Palaiologos' diplomatic mission between 1399 and 1402 in western European states, and John VIII Palaiologos' presence at the Council of Ferrara-Florence in 1423 and 1439.<sup>16</sup> A rare event in the early and middle Byzantine periods, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries travels in the West became a routine activity required primarily by the need to establish military alliances and conduct negotiations with western allies. Soon, following these diplomatic delegations, Byzantine scholars were invited to remain in Italian cities such as Florence or Venice in order to teach Greek to the Humanists who wanted to read the ancient texts. The letter exchanges, reflecting the collaboration between scholars who lived in distant provinces, also had a remarkable increase in comparison with previous periods.<sup>17</sup> Moving to distant places was not always prompted, however, by positive

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<sup>15</sup> The most representative illustration of the emphasis on Hellenic identity, as opposed to a Greco-Roman identity in Italy, comes from the works of George Gemistos Plethon who thoroughly dissociated himself from any Roman element. See Han Lamers, *Greece Reinvented: Transformations of Byzantine Hellenism in Renaissance Italy*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, vol. 247 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 36–37.

<sup>16</sup> Donald Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261–1453*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 253–368. See Fotini Kondyli, ed., *Sylvester Syropoulos on Politics and Culture in the Fifteenth-Century Mediterranean* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 135–55.

<sup>17</sup> Charalambos. Dendrinou, "Co-Operation and Friendship among Byzantine Scholars in the Circle of Emperor Manuel II Palaeologus (1391–1425) as Reflected in Their Autograph Man-

plans. The intensification of the internal conflicts between political factions led to an increase in cases of punishments such as exile.<sup>18</sup> Increasing numbers of members of the court also disobeyed the emperors, especially in terms of the legitimacy of their rule. In one such case, John VII succeeded in establishing his own parallel imperial court in Thessaloniki in the beginning of the fifteenth century.<sup>19</sup> Information about individuals who temporarily left their hometowns, because of their political allegiances, abounds in this period.<sup>20</sup>

This escalation of internal dissent, often culminating in punitive exiles, reflects the Palaiologan era's interplay between political dynamics and personal ambitions, imbuing the late Byzantine notion of displacement with strong political connotations. Alongside mutilation, used less frequently than before,<sup>21</sup> political exile constituted another primary tool of punishment which Byzantine rulers wielded against political enemies, particularly in the continuous dynastic battles of the last century of Byzantine history.<sup>22</sup> Most such conflicts took place during the rule of Emperor John V Palaiologos who was confronted with a series of usurpations. Due to his claims to the imperial succession, John V Palaiologos sent Matthew Kantakouzenos (1325–1383) into exile, first on the island of Tenedos (1356) and a year later on the island of Lesbos, where his ally Francesco I Gattilusio was ruling. John's son and the future Emperor, Manuel Palaiologos, had to live for several years exiled on the island of Lemnos (1387–1389) after he refused to comply with the imperial policy of appeasement towards the Ottomans and organized a rebellion in Thessaloniki. These were neither the only nor the most serious instances of attempted usurpation against John V, as his eldest son, Andronikos, managed to depose him in 1373. In all cases, however, exile constituted only a temporary solution to the problems of dynastic succession. All three, Matthew, Manuel, and Andronikos were later pardoned and continued with their political careers.<sup>23</sup>

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uscripts," 22 February 2010, <http://www.mml.cam.ac.uk/greek/grammarofmedievalgreek/unlocking/Dendrinios.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> In 1396, Patriarch Antony IV initiated a series of steps against Catholic converts and anti-Hesychasts. See Manuel Kalekas, *Correspondence de Manuel Calecas*, ed. Raymond-Joseph Loenertz (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1950), 23–24.

<sup>19</sup> Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261–1453*, 318–22.

<sup>20</sup> Siren Çelik, *Manuel II Palaiologos (1350–1425): A Byzantine Emperor in a Time of Tumult*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

<sup>21</sup> Dion C. Smythe, ed., *Strangers to Themselves: The Byzantine Outsider*, (London: Routledge, 2016), 56–57.

<sup>22</sup> Donald Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261–1453*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 149–295.

<sup>23</sup> Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium*, 281–87.

Theological controversies also caused the exile of several clerics sanctioned either by other higher ecclesiastics or by the emperors themselves. Conflicts around the orthodoxy of Hesychasm or debates over the Union with the Church of Rome caused numerous individuals to choose to move temporarily in places where ecclesiastical jurisdictions were less strict.<sup>24</sup> In theological circles, however, the idea of exile had a distinct meaning, describing the condition of being an expatriate from the divine realm. It involved a physical or mental detachment from one's familiar surroundings and passions in order to pursue a spiritual goal or a moral ideal. Significantly, in the fourteenth century, exile (ξενιτεία) often became associated with ἡσυχία (stillness), the core concept of the Hesychast monastic movement which shaped much of the political landscape of the later decades in the fourteenth-century.<sup>25</sup> Monks and theologians regarded it as a means of achieving wisdom and sometimes viewed it as a beneficial preparation for higher stages of spiritual life.<sup>26</sup>

Long-standing beliefs further shaped the representations and nuances of displacement, for which the Byzantines used two terms: ἔξοπα or ξενιτεία.<sup>27</sup> In general, the idea of Constantinople's centrality in the Byzantine mentality often made individuals represent any form of residence abroad (voluntary or not) as a form of sanction.<sup>28</sup> While Constantinopolitan exclusivism was carefully built throughout centuries, there was also an ambiguous attitude toward it, with many authors noting that the City was tainted by political corruption and instability as opposed to other provinces.<sup>29</sup> This ambiguous attitude signaled that displacement could undertake positive nuances, with several writers highlighting its benefits, or at least its potential for a new beginning. The memory of the years of imperial exile in Nicaea (1204–1261) was also still vivid in the Palaiologan period among the members of the imperial court. During those decades, in spite of the temporary loss of Constantinople

<sup>24</sup> Nigel Russell, "Prochoros Cydones and the Fourteenth-Century Understanding of Orthodoxy," in *Byzantine Orthodoxies. Papers from the 36th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Andrew Louth (Farnham: Ashgate 2006), 75–94.

<sup>25</sup> Ioannis Polemis, "The Hesychast Controversy: Events, Personalities, Texts and Trends," in *A Companion to the Intellectual Life of the Palaeologan Period*, ed. Sofia Kotzabassi (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 345–98.

<sup>26</sup> McGuckin, "Aliens and Citizens of Elsewhere," 25–28.

<sup>27</sup> John Anthony McGuckin, "Aliens and Citizens of Elsewhere," in *Strangers to Themselves*, 23–38.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Magdalino, "Constantinople and the Outside World," in *Studies on the History and Topography of Byzantine Constantinople*, 2006, 149–62.

<sup>29</sup> Magdalino, "Constantinople and the Outside World," 153.

as the capital, the chronicles about the imperial activities present the image of a stable empire with an administration that thrived on local resources.<sup>30</sup>

The increase, perceivable in accounts of displacement, may be misleading for the general picture of migration in Byzantium, as the sources present several important limitations. Thierry Ganchou has recently argued that the image of a massive exodus of Byzantine Christians in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries needs qualification. He noted that after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, only a group of individuals, mostly scholars and aristocrats who saw their activities or status in danger, actually left the City. Those who left did not go very far, however, but took residence on the islands close to the capital where they often returned to visit relatives or properties in Constantinople.<sup>31</sup>

This situation finds a proper illustration in the post-1453 context. Indeed, it is telling that the members of the Byzantine diaspora, who took refuge in Italy after the final Ottoman conquests of the fifteenth century, did not produce much in terms of accounts of exile. The Italian careers of renowned Greek scholars such as George of Trebizond or Cardinal Besarion show that, despite the distance from Constantinople, they not only maintained the links to Constantinople, but also sought to revive the Byzantine state in one form or another. Rather than lamenting their condition while residing in Italy, both Trebizond and Besarion nurtured plans for a new form of Byzantine statehood. The former tried to convince Sultan Mehmed II to convert to Christianity, while the latter advanced the idea of purchasing a large plot of land in Italy and founding a new city-state.<sup>32</sup> Although both attempts failed, they reflect their adaptability in exilic circumstances. Such moves in the direction of Byzantium's revival also suggest that, in the second half of the fifteenth century, Greek scholars in Italy gave up the idea of a return to their homeland as they thought their new residence to be definitive.

## Writing and Living Displacement in the Late Byzantium

How did the transformative power of the values and historical context shape the late Byzantine experience of being abroad? To answer this question, I will

<sup>30</sup> Magdalino, "Constantinople and the Outside World," 161.

<sup>31</sup> Thierry Ganchou, "Le rachat des Notaras après la chute de Constantinople ou les relations « étrangères » de l'élite byzantine au xve siècle," in *Migrations et diasporas méditerranéennes (Xe–XVIe siècles)*, ed. Michel Balard and Alain Ducellier, Byzantina Sorbonensia (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2017), 149–229.

<sup>32</sup> Ksenia Lobovikova, "George of Trebizond's Views on Islam and their Eschatological Backgrounds," *Scrinium* 6 (2010): 346–65.

look at six cases of individuals who experienced displacement about which we have written accounts: John Laskaris Kalopheros, Demetrios Kydones, Manuel Kalekas, George Sphrantzes, Joseph Bryennios, and Manuel Palaiologos. While each case holds its own unique traits, they share as triggering factors political pressures, whether internal or external, with some variations pertaining to personal strategies or struggles. These cases can be grouped into two main categories: one highlighting the adherence to a pro-Latin stance and another centered on loyalty to the Byzantine higher authority, either political or ecclesiastical. The first individual under consideration here, John Laskaris Kalopheros (1325–1392),<sup>33</sup> left us little in terms of written texts, and yet his biography was marked by frequent long-term displacements from his residence in Constantinople.<sup>34</sup> He was best known as a businessman who occasionally used his contacts with the imperial court to deal with regional political leaders, particularly the ambitious King of Cyprus, Peter I (1328–1369). Initially a favorite of Emperor John V Palaiologos, he soon received an interdiction for entering Constantinople in the year 1362 when he married the daughter of the Emperor's usurper, Matthew Kantakouzenos.<sup>35</sup> Since that time, Laskaris moved into foreign territories under Latin jurisdiction where he conducted his business and intervened in regional politics. After the death of his first wife, he married the daughter of Peter I, in a move that strengthened his political aspirations. In addition to his commercial interests, he established connections with other scholars who regarded him as one of the promoters of an alliance between Byzantium and the West. Kalopheros was especially popular among the Byzantine *literati* who traveled between Byzantium and Italy. Manuel Chrysoloras, the renowned Byzantine teacher and diplomat, served as his testamentary executor together with two other scholars, Demetrios Kydones and Demetrios Skaranos. His biography, which can be reconstructed from the substantial evidence provided by contemporary authors,<sup>36</sup> indicates that his exile was not resented as a personal calamity, but rather as an active way to develop a complex transnational social network that included regional

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<sup>33</sup> Erich Trapp, ed., *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit* (Wien: Verl. d. Österr. Akad. d. Wiss., 1976) (henceforth *PLP*), 10732.

<sup>34</sup> Ambrosius Eszer, *Das abenteuerliche Leben des Johannes Laskaris Kalopheros. Forschungen zur Geschichte der Ost-Westlichen Beziehungen im 14. Jahrhundert*, *Schriften zur Geistesgeschichte des Östlichen Europa* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1969).

<sup>35</sup> *PLP*, 10983.

<sup>36</sup> Eszer, *Das Abenteuerliche Leben des Johannes Laskaris Kalopheros*, 50–72.

potentates, scholars, and businessmen alike.<sup>37</sup> In several letters to Kalopheros, Kydones complains about his addressee's intense activity which prevented him from knowing John's whereabouts.<sup>38</sup> From other letters, one finds out that Kalopheros encountered difficulties after he was banished from Cyprus in 1369 and was looking for other travelling destinations in Italy or France where he could continue his business.<sup>39</sup> Kalopheros thus embodied the model of the Palaiologan entrepreneur, mobile, and independent from the goodwill of the Constantinopolitan court.

Another fourteenth-century scholar associated with him, Demetrios Kydones (1324–1398),<sup>40</sup> pursued a sinuous career path, adding further political and identity nuances to the late Byzantine experience of displacement.<sup>41</sup> Early in his youth, Kydones became an influential advisor to Emperor John V Palaiologos, whom he stirred towards strengthening the Byzantine connections with the Latins.<sup>42</sup> In the beginning he was persuasive but the 1370s saw the Emperor's abandonment of his policy of resistance to the Turks and a religious rapprochement with the Latins, a shift influenced by the disappointment he suffered during a long journey to the West in 1369. This led to the acceptance of tributary obligations towards the Ottomans and the fall from favor of those who had promoted the former policy, most prominently Kydones himself, who found refuge among his Latin friends, particularly the Gattilusio family on the island of Lesbos. A letter dated to 1370 implies that his contacts with the Gattilusio family ruling in Lesbos raised doubts about his commitment to the plans of Emperor John V who had, in the meantime, shifted his allegiance from the Latins to the more powerful Ottomans.<sup>43</sup> Further evidence about the clash between the Emperor and Kydones comes from a letter dated to 1373, when Demetrios noted that Emperor John V opposed his plans to visit Francesco on Lesbos. Having at first opposed the trip, the ruler later displayed disaffection after realizing that Demetrios left because of

<sup>37</sup> See Franz Tinnefeld, *Die Briefe des Demetrios Kydones: Themen und literarische Form*, Mainzer Veröffentlichungen zur Byzantinistik, Bd. 11 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 84–85.

<sup>38</sup> Kydones, *Letter* 246.

<sup>39</sup> Kydones, *Letter* 86.

<sup>40</sup> *PLP*, 13876.

<sup>41</sup> See Judith R Ryder, *The Career and Writings of Demetrius Kydones: A Study of Fourteenth-Century Byzantine Politics, Religion and Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 89–110.

<sup>42</sup> Oskar Halecki, *Un Empereur De Byzance À Rome* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1972), 89–110.

<sup>43</sup> Kydones, *Letter* 82.

the differences of perspective over foreign relations with the Latins and the Ottomans.<sup>44</sup>

Kydones' sojourn in Lesbos with Gattilusioi coincided with his attempt to break with his political career, as he became disappointed by the failure to garner the Latins' support. He also remained dedicated to nurturing closer ties with Italy as a long-term project.<sup>45</sup> Around this time, he devoted himself to studying and translating from Latin into Greek. He deepened his interest into Italy and cultivated his connections there with high-profile humanist scholars such as Coluccio Salutati. His residence in Serenissima eventually earned him an honorary certificate of citizenship.<sup>46</sup> Despite the recognition of his merits in the promotion of humanist studies in Italy, he confessed his dissatisfaction with leaving Byzantium. In a letter, he complained about the lack of intellectual challenges in Venice: "I did not have anything to do while staying there. From ancient days, as you know, the city is the fatherland only for merchants, for it is really looked down upon for a person to reside there not to be engaged in trade or not to be sent to wander around everywhere on business. I was annoyed by the inaction and the memory of home and friends would not let me sleep. I boarded a ship and, enjoying the good will of the Saviour, quickly sailed into the harbor in my native land."<sup>47</sup>

Although Kydones later changed his opinion about the scholarly life in Venice,<sup>48</sup> he did not spend many years in Italy but, eventually, returned to Byzantium, where he died in 1398. He documented these journeys and provided details of his activities abroad in an extensive epistolary collection comprising no less than 450 letters. Even with the negative consequences, Kydones' voluntary displacement from Constantinople became a key element in his continuous self-fashioning as a scholar drawn towards both the civic values and the Humanism of Italian cities.

A towering figure of the fourteenth-century Byzantine intellectual landscape, Kydones had numerous disciples who followed in his footsteps by adopting pro-Latin views and spending time abroad. Among them, Manuel Kalekas (d. 1410) illustrates displacement as a phenomenon, shaped by the

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<sup>44</sup> Kydones, *Letter 105*.

<sup>45</sup> Frances Kianka, "Demetrios Kydones and Italy," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 49 (1995): 99.

<sup>46</sup> Raymond-Joseph Loenertz, "Demetrius Cydones, Citoyen de Venise," *Echos d'Orient* 37 (1938): 125–26.

<sup>47</sup> Kydones, *Letter 443*; tr. George Dennis, in George Dennis, "Demetrios Kydones and Venice," in *Bisanzio, Venezia e il mondo franco-greco (XIII–XV secolo)*, ed. Chryssa Maltezou (Venice: Istituto Ellenico, 2002), 500.

<sup>48</sup> Dennis, "Demetrios Kydones and Venice," 501.

interplay of religious convictions, political pressures, and personal aspirations that characterized the lives of late Byzantine intellectuals.<sup>49</sup> His conversion to Catholicism and opposition to the Constantinopolitan ecclesiastical establishment drove him into a theological dispute with the Emperor Manuel II, who attacked Kalekas in a long essay where the latter was accused of rejecting Orthodoxy.<sup>50</sup> Following the pressures of the anti-Catholic party, he fled Constantinople in the last decade of the fourteenth century and took refuge in a Dominican convent on the island of Lesbos, the same place where his mentor, Demetrios Kydones, had stayed several decades earlier.<sup>51</sup> He moved to northern Italy from there where he visited cities such as Milan which, by that time, promoted Greek studies and looked to hire teachers. To a certain extent, his experience was similar to his mentor's who also spent time in Italy promoting Greek studies. Like him, he also instrumentalized the period of exile to signal his traits as a pro-Latin theologian and scholar. And like Kydones, he often expressed a desire to return to his motherland. In several of his letters, Kalekas complained about the difficulties of adapting to the lifestyle in Italian cities and about feeling estranged among the fellow Latin Dominicans. In 1403, Kalekas returned to Constantinople where he engaged in further debates over the Church Union. Soon after, however, the hostility to other Byzantine *literati*, drove him to move back to the much friendlier island of Lesbos.<sup>52</sup>

Although in his letters Kalekas expressed bitterness about leaving Constantinople, he maintained connections with Byzantine émigrés such as Manuel Chrysoloras and Italian scholars like Jacopo d'Angelo, who later translated Greek texts into Latin. In Italian humanistic circles, he came to be known as an excellent professor of Greek.<sup>53</sup> Together with other Byzantine and Italian scholars, Kalekas participated in scholarly projects centered on the transmission of Hellenic knowledge and the translation of Latin texts into Greek. This effort indicates that, even if short and perceived as painful, he ultimately used the experience of displacement to shape the image of a promoter of Hellenic identity in the Italian context.

Exile and displacement from Constantinople affected not only the Byzantine supporters of Latin culture and faith, but also Byzantine officials. George

<sup>49</sup> *PLP*, 10289 and *Correspondence de Manuel Calecas*, 23–24.

<sup>50</sup> Çelik, *Manuel II Palaiologos*, 70–71.

<sup>51</sup> Kalekas, *Correspondence de Manuel Calecas*, 25.

<sup>52</sup> Kalekas, *Letters* 83–89.

<sup>53</sup> See especially letters addressed to the Florentine Humanist, Jacopo Angeli da Scarperia; Kalekas, *Letters* 18, 22, 33, 64, 81.

Sphrantzes (1401–1478),<sup>54</sup> *megas logothetes* in Constantinople right before the fall of the city, illustrates an instance of forced displacement. As a high-ranking courtier, he had close ties with all of the last three Palaiologan emperors: Manuel II (r. 1391–1425), John VIII (r. 1425–1448) and Constantine XI (r. 1448–1453). The direct access to the political decisions of the fifteenth century provided Sphrantzes with sufficient material to compose a book of memoirs, known as *Chronicon Minus*.<sup>55</sup> Scholars have long recognized the historical and autobiographical quality of his account since he was an eyewitness to the events leading up to the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Sphrantzes' report documented life in Byzantium after the Ottoman conquest of the city, the liberation from Ottoman captivity, the loss of his wife and children, the move to Morea, and his travels to Italy.<sup>56</sup> His account is filled with laments as he represented the life outside Byzantium as a painful experience beset by poverty and diseases: "On October the same year I suffered an attack of rheumatism in my head and knees with the result that so much discharge came from mouth, nose and ears that I lost all hope [...] Even though I escaped death, I remained deaf for a long time. I could not even hear bells tolling next to me. As my feet were in pain, I was confined to bed. It rested with Divine Providence whether I would recover from my misfortunes or if in a few days of death would come."<sup>57</sup>

The chronicle suggests that Sphrantzes still entertained hopes for the recovery of the city which emerge in correlation with his outright admiration for the Italian cities he visited during his exile from Constantinople: "Once I had toured all the sights of this great, famous, and ancient city, I departed on July 16 and I came to Ancona, where I remained for a few days. I went by sea to Venice on the twenty-eighth of the same month where I lodged at the Monastery of the Cross for twenty-six days."<sup>58</sup>

Sphrantzes details the experience he lived during the long years of displacement. His relentless search for a yearly remuneration, based on the decades-long service he provided at the Byzantine court, brought him into contact with other exiled members of the Palaiologos and the Kantakouzenos former ruling families.<sup>59</sup> In Italy, he also established close ties with Cardinal Besarion, who

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<sup>54</sup> PLP, 27278.

<sup>55</sup> George Sphrantzes, *Chronicon Minus*, ed. Riccardo Maisano (Rome: Accademia dei Lincei, 1990), 1–22.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> George Sphrantzes, *Chronicon Minus. XLVIII*, ed. Riccardo Maisano, tr. M. Philippides.

<sup>58</sup> George Sphrantzes, *Chronicon Minus. XLIII*, ed. Riccardo Maisano, tr. M. Philippides.

<sup>59</sup> E. g. George Sphrantzes, *Chronicon Minus. XLVI*, ed. Riccardo Maisano.

was, at that time, engaged in collecting Greek manuscripts.<sup>60</sup> These encounters suggest that, during the exile, he took a step forward compared to the previous pro-Latin Byzantine scholars who toured Italy and sought to promote the idea of Byzantium's revival with the support of other former acquaintances.<sup>61</sup> Embedding references to a potential crusade for the liberation of Constantinople that would proceed from Central Europe, his narrative of displacement indicates that he pictured the personal misfortune as part of a broader political context dominated by the Ottomans, but where hopes could still be pinned on Western intervention and support.<sup>62</sup> Altogether, the representation of his time outside Constantinople integrated his personal struggles into general plans to recover Byzantium's political system.

The last two cases presented here demonstrate that displacement did not only punctuate attempts at Byzantine revival or personal identity but also signaled loyalty to an institutional structure of authority, be it ecclesiastical or imperial. One of the most prolific authors of this period, Joseph Bryennios (1350–1438),<sup>63</sup> also experienced long periods of residence outside his hometown, Constantinople. Known as a court-preacher with an intransigent theological position in the debate over Church Union, Bryennios lived for twenty years in Crete before he returned to the capital city.<sup>64</sup> He recorded his personal observations about these periods in several letters included in his epistolary collection.<sup>65</sup> In the letters sent from Crete to Constantinople, despite his decades-long absence from the city, Bryennios fashioned himself as a long-standing member of the Constantinopolitan circles and a defender of his addressees' position in the conflicts of the day, particularly those involving the union with Rome. In this respect, Bryennios used a particular style to approach the addressees (high-ranking ecclesiastics like bishops and patriarchs), revealing a mode that conveyed both his loyalty to the Constantinopolitan circles and the fervent defense of the positions held by his addressees.<sup>66</sup> For instance, in the letters he sent from Crete to Antony, Metropolitan of Herak-

<sup>60</sup> Wilson, *From Byzantium to Italy*, 57–67.

<sup>61</sup> George Sphrantzes, *Chronicon Minus*. XXXIX, ed. Riccardo Maisano.

<sup>62</sup> George Sphrantzes, *Chronicon Minus*. XXXVII, ed. Riccardo Maisano, provides details about John of Capistrano's plans for a crusade.

<sup>63</sup> *PLP*, 3257.

<sup>64</sup> Hélène Bazini, "Une première édition des œuvres de Joseph Bryennios: les Traités adressés aux Crétois," *Revue des études byzantines* 62, (2004): 83–85.

<sup>65</sup> Joseph Bryennios, *Letters 17–19*, ed. Nikalaos Tomadakes.

<sup>66</sup> Florin Leonte, "Addressing Power in Joseph Bryennios' Epistolography: Metaphors and Figurative Discourse," *Études byzantines et post-byzantines* 12 (2023): 233–56.

leia or to Theodore Meliteneiotes, *megas sakellarios* of the Great Church, his communication concentrates on the idea of canceling the distance between the correspondents through expressions of deep affection.<sup>67</sup>

This intimate tone and affectionate content deployed in the letters to ecclesiastics changed significantly in the letters addressed to his friends who remained in Crete. Bryennios offered a rare glimpse into the perceived difficulties of exile. Like Kydones decades before in Venice, he complained about the harshness of his Cretan life with few possibilities to develop connections with like-minded local theologians or scholars.<sup>68</sup> Corroborated with other texts of his, however, Bryennios' instrumentalization of exile representations reveals several surprising nuances. Despite the complaints, Bryennios maintained a close relationship with his Cretan community as is revealed in several compositions he authored as a farewell such as the *Consolation to the Cretans* or the *Letter to the Cretan Monks*.<sup>69</sup> His situation emphasizes an intention to publicly highlight the negative traits of his displacement in Crete and integrate it into his projected identity as a loyal member of the anti-Latin and anti-Church Union group in Constantinople.

Instances of forced displacement also served as a way of rearticulating loyalty to the Byzantine imperial authority. A fitting illustration in this respect is the career of Manuel Palaiologos, Byzantine Emperor between 1391 and 1425.<sup>70</sup> Although he functioned as ruler for several decades, his authority was seriously diminished in the political context of the Ottoman expansion. A writer himself, he was also an active member of the Byzantine scholarly circles, a situation which rendered the terms he used for the representation of displacement similar to those of other displaced peers. In his early political career Manuel lived through a difficult period and experienced political exile on the island of Lemnos (1387–1389).<sup>71</sup> As in the previous case of Kydones' displacement, the punishment was caused by his foreign policy views, which diverged significantly from his father's, John V Palaiologos. If the latter favored a rapprochement with the Ottomans, Manuel considered that the local military resistance would eventually lead to Byzantium's recovery.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Joseph Bryennios, *Letters 5 and 15*, ed. Nikalaos Tomadakes.

<sup>68</sup> Joseph Bryennios, *Letters 17 and 24*, ed. Nikalaos Tomadakes.

<sup>69</sup> Bazini, "Une première édition," 97–102.

<sup>70</sup> *PLP*, 21513.

<sup>71</sup> Ever since his early youth, Manuel had experienced exile and long distance journeys such as when he was held captive in Buda as a political hostage.

<sup>72</sup> Basil Laourdas, "Ο συμβουλευτικός πρὸς τοὺς Θεσσαλονικεῖς τοῦ Μανουὴλ Παλαιολόγου," [The Hortatory Oration to the Thessalonians by Manuel Palaiologos], *Μακεδονικά* 3 (1955): 290–307.

His vision was quickly thwarted. In 1387, after a failed attempt to resist the Ottoman blockade of Thessaloniki, where he had ruled shortly, Manuel surrendered and left the city. He headed to the Ottoman-occupied city of Bursa where he manifested obeisance to the Sultan, but upon his return to Byzantium, his father, John V, ordered him to stay away from Constantinople and remain in Lemnos until further notice.<sup>73</sup> Information about his confinement in Lemnos comes from the letters of his mentor, the above-mentioned Demetrios Kydones.<sup>74</sup> Although these letters avoid political references and tend to discuss scholarly preoccupations, they provide indirect information about what the exile meant for a prince. One learns, for example, that in Lemnos, Manuel spent much time with Chrysoberges, a learned Byzantine Dominican friar. In light of his later religious policy of reconciliation with the pro-Latin Byzantines,<sup>75</sup> it is plausible that the sojourn in Lemnos constituted the moment when the future Emperor began to prepare his comeback to Constantinople by insuring the support of the Catholic Byzantine party. Indeed, a few years later, in 1391, Manuel returned to the capital city and, at least in the first decade of his rule, sought to obtain Western support, via his connections with the Byzantine converts to Catholicism.<sup>76</sup>

In a similar vein, the letters that reflected his exile suggest a shift in Manuel's attitude towards authority, from rebellion to acceptance of the difficult circumstances. There is no doubt that Manuel answered Kydones' many letters, and although he did not include any of them in his official epistolary collection, one can sense from his mentor's writing that he understood his father's policy.<sup>77</sup> Interestingly, Kydones discusses both the benefits and the drawbacks involved in the experience of political exile. The exile saved Manuel's life and reputation since he managed to escape the Sultan's fury and his father's revenge. Conversely, Kydones admitted, he could not fight against the intrigues taking place at the court.<sup>78</sup> The letters reveal the old teacher providing the basics of an imperial education to the young prince: he calls upon Manuel to

<sup>73</sup> This island was usually preferred for political exiles and served later as a temporary exile for John VII before he was offered the city of Thessaloniki to rule.

<sup>74</sup> Raymond-Joseph Loenertz, "L'exil de Manuel II Paléologue à Lemnos. 1387–1389," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 38 (1972): 116–40.

<sup>75</sup> His journey to Italy, France and England (1399–1402), where he conversed on theological issues with the local theologians as well as the scholarly exchanges with Italian or Byzantine humanists, point to the idea of his moderation in the problem of the union of the Churches.

<sup>76</sup> Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261–1453*, 296–98.

<sup>77</sup> Loenertz, "L'exil de Manuel II Paléologue à Lemnos. 1387–1389." As Loenertz argues, the letters include numerous indications that they were part of a long epistolary conversation.

<sup>78</sup> Letter 374 discussed in Loenertz, "L'exil de Manuel II," 125–26.

accept displacement as a temporary pause in his political career, show patience by recognizing the Ottoman higher ground, and cultivate intellectual preoccupations. Although Kydones might have exaggerated his addressee's activities in exile during his stay in Lemnos, Manuel certainly spent a great deal of time studying as he was surrounded by scholars and friends. These studies eventually left many traces on his later style of government, centered on intellectual pursuits in rhetoric and theology which he used to insure political consensus.<sup>79</sup>

Despite Loenertz's evaluation of this letter exchange as irrelevant for late Byzantine political history, it is arguable that it actually reflected Manuel's early efforts to project an image of a peaceful ruler involved in intellectual projects and uninterested in political conflicts. The letters, which became public,<sup>80</sup> portray the exile as a moment that redefined the prince's intellectual identity and provided evidence in favor of Manuel's repentance for the rebellion against his father. In other words, the letters, even if lacking much concrete information, the letters suggest that Manuel conducted intense backstage political negotiations in which the idea of fulfilling exile played a key role in his plans to return to the political stage. They echo Manuel's personal and political anxiety in a critical period where he had to face a choice between a peace treaty with the Ottomans or a war against them with Latin help.

## Displacement as Textual Mode

These six instances of experiencing displacement in late Byzantium were certainly not the only ones,<sup>81</sup> but given the high profile of the individuals presented here, they are representative for how living abroad was perceived and reflected in Byzantine texts. The cases suggest that beyond the challenges of living abroad, the perception of exile relied on specific modes of textual expression. Two such modes can be identified: one centered on memory and idealization of the life before relocation and another focused on immediate agency and the constitution of a new reality in exile. One can see, for example, memory playing a central role primarily in Kalekas' exilic letters, where anxiety linked to the distance from Byzantium is ubiquitous. Memory played

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<sup>79</sup> Florin Leonte, *Imperial Visions of Late Byzantium: Manuel II Palaiologos and Rhetoric in Purple*, Edinburgh Byzantine Studies (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 264–69.

<sup>80</sup> Raymond Loenertz, *Les recueils de lettres de Démétrius Cydonès* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1947).

<sup>81</sup> See the case of John Eugenikos. A. Pizzone, "Feeling the Rhythm of the Waves: 'Castaway Rhetoric' in John Eugenikos' Logos Eucharisterios," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 37, no. 2 (2013): 190–207.

a central role primarily in Kalekas' exilic letters, where anxiety linked to the distance from Byzantium is ubiquitous. In many letters, Kalekas laments his separation from his homeland or expresses his fear of being forgotten by his friends and family.<sup>82</sup> In Kydones' letters, memory features as well, for the image of Constantinople and its vibrant scholarly life remains attractive, despite his many connections and long sojourns in Italy. The idea of memory with its associated nostalgia is completely absent, in contrast, from Kalopheros' adventurous biography or Manuel II's exile in Lemnos, which are both centered on action and the planning of future career steps.

A second mode of textual expression pertains to the configuration of a kind of parallel society in exile. This mode involves a narrative constructed on the coordinates of present and future times, and within it lies an impulse towards the restoration of Byzantium. In the case of Manuel Palaiologos, this impulse surfaces in the suggestion of his future plans after his rehabilitation. As concerns Joseph Bryennios and George Sphrantzes, one can detect an attempt to rediscover and enact values that governed the original order from which they had been expelled. Their experiences and plans involved the idea of an eventual reintegration of old and new social structures. From this viewpoint, with their social networks that extended abroad, these late Byzantine exiles stand firmly as precursors of more celebrated fifteenth-century Greek émigrés such as George of Trebizond or Cardinal Bessarion, who became influential in the humanist circles of Italian cities.

## Conclusion

The late Byzantine literature of displacement reflects not only the political, religious, and cultural tensions common to other periods of Byzantine history, but also the personal effects of marginalization. Due to the popularity of ego-documents such as letters and memoirs in late Byzantium and the visibility that it provided, displacement spurred writers to renegotiate their selves by using adversity as marker of a distinct persona and as a way to seek alternative political actions.

These personal narratives of displacement, while shedding light on individual experiences, must be understood within the broader historical context of late Byzantium, a period shaped by both internal political struggles and external threats from the expanding Ottoman Empire. Chronologically, one has to keep in mind that, despite the wave of migrants after the Fall of

<sup>82</sup> Kalekas, *Letters* 53, 54, 68, 69, 70, 71.

Constantinople in 1453, accounts of exile were already frequent in the second half of the fourteenth century. From a political perspective, the cases presented here demonstrate that forced displacement in the form of exile represented a rather mild punishment that was eventually overcome by the individuals involved. Political exile was rather rare and limited. Its causes were linked to both the mechanisms of the internal institutional structures of Byzantium and to the Ottoman conquests. Displacement served small but highly visible groups such as that of Byzantine pro-Latin scholars to affirm their belief in the need for more connections with the Italian cities where Humanism was thriving.

The analysis of the realities of displacement, through the lens of several illustrative accounts, invites us to look at the textual level. As indicated, the texts emerging from exile literature in the late Byzantine period exhibit distinctive modes of textual representation centered on memory and the reconstruction of a parallel world imitating the past one. Configured in the disruptions of exile, both modes appear to challenge the dominant discourses of the homeland (πατρίς) which dominated the official Byzantine rhetoric of this period. The rich encomiastic literature of this time underwent no fundamental change in comparison with the previous centuries and continued to present imperial cities and lands as the main elements of Byzantine identity.<sup>83</sup> The expressions of displacement discussed in this paper nevertheless invite us to rethink the nature of the late Byzantine entanglements of the political and scholarly worlds.

## Abstract

The last century of Byzantine history, from the 1350s to the 1450s, was marked by political turmoil and the loss of territories and imperial authority. While much has been written about the broader political and religious aspects of this period, the personal experiences of those individuals caught in these events have received little focus. This article aims to explore the representations of exile and displacement during late Byzantine history by examining the accounts of individuals who left or were forced to leave their homeland. These experiences not only shaped their identities, but also influenced their perception of wider European political issues. The article analyzes the factors that contributed to the representations of exile, such as diplomatic journeys, internal conflicts, and beliefs about Constantinople's centrality. It also highlights

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<sup>83</sup> On the role of various encomiastic themes, such as the homeland in court rhetoric, see George T. Dennis, "Imperial Panegyric: Rhetoric and Reality," in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library, 1997), 131–40.

the increased contacts between the Byzantium and the Italian maritime states, Venice and Genoa, which played a significant role in shaping the experiences of displacement. The study acknowledges the limitations of available sources, analyzes the modes of representing displacement, and suggests that only a specific group of individuals, mainly scholars and aristocrats, left the Byzantine Empire after its fall in 1453.

**Keywords:** Exile; Displacement; Byzantium; Late Medieval; Mobility

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