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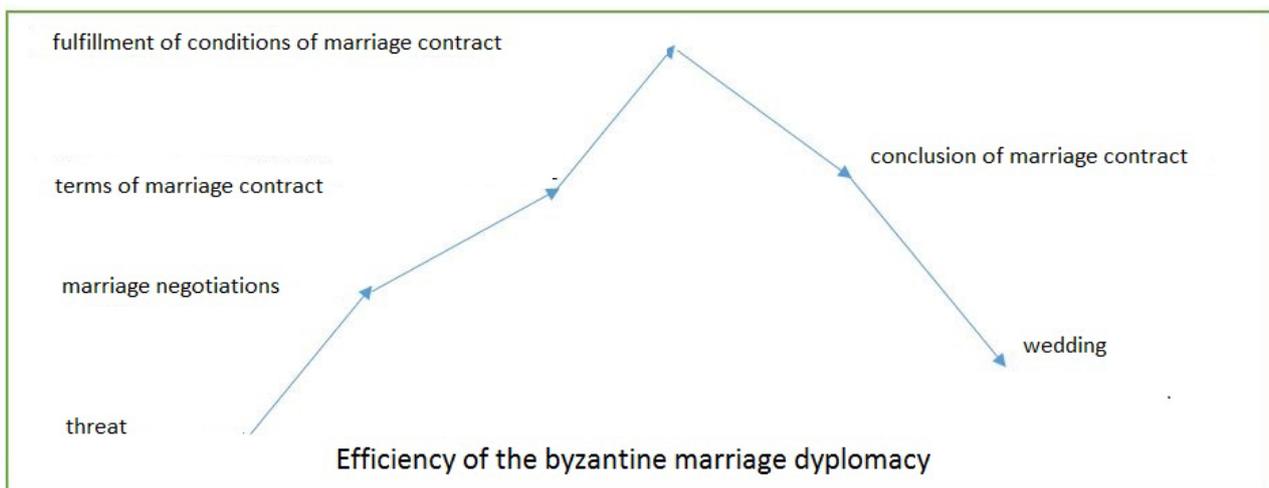


Kostiantyn Bardola

Dynastic Marriages as a Failure of the Byzantine Diplomacy

The effectiveness of diplomacy should be judged not by words but by the results, and the results are to be correlated with the objectives. The marriage diplomacy is no exception.

Dynastic marriage was an excellent tool for territorial, material and political gains, most often in that order, for a typical medieval lord. In the times of the political system of feudal vassalage, when the conditional land tenure was the basis, as well as considering the hereditary, the dynastic nature of the transfer of power, territorial acquisition, even a peaceful one, was regarded as undoubted success. It was very difficult for the Byzantine emperors to get advantage from the territorial or material acquisitions, which generally led to long dynastic ties. As for the political dividends, the marriage of the emperor or his family member carried a greater risk for the state than prospects. However, despite this, the Byzantine rulers were often negotiating about a diplomatic marriage, actively using interest of the counteragent. As a rule, these negotiations helped the Byzantine government to solve urgent problems in the suspension of foreign aggression or search for allies. Mostly, the negotiations on the conclusion of a dynastic marriage were much more effective than the marriage itself, which could also carry considerable long-term threat to the political stability of the empire. That was probably the reason for such a small number of marriages in the international arena with a rather significant number of matrimonial negotiations on the initiative of the Byzantine side. To intrigue, to set the conditions, to negotiate, to get political dividends, and in the end not to marry - that is the top of the Byzantine marriage diplomacy.



As a result, the marriage was usually held in the case of critical political leverage. There is no doubt that in order to explain this political behavior Byzantine diplomacy used the vast ideological campaign, including “the customs”, “the old laws” and “the religious rules”, which may well have been “forgotten” if necessary.

Most of the marriages of the reigning dynasties were held with the members of the political elite of Byzantine society. Thus, combining with other noble families, the emperors strengthened

their position on the throne, and guaranteed further comfortable existence to their offspring. The situation changed dramatically with Komnenos dynasty. Latin foreigners' impact to the imperial power in the XII - early XIII centuries increased dramatically, resulting in a change of Byzantine diplomacy objectives. Dynastic marriages are no longer a rarity; political alliances with foreigners become an active part of the internal struggle for the imperial throne.

Thus, up to the XII century, a dynastic marriage between the ruling family of the Byzantine and foreign rulers or their offspring can be treated as a diplomatic failure, an assignment made under political pressure. In this case, a small number of marriages, against the background of numerous diplomatic talks on the subject may indicate precisely the effectiveness and reasonableness of the Byzantine diplomatic line.