



## Summary :

The Genoese, just like the merchants of Venice and Pisa, were granted the privilege of having their own quarter in Constantinople in the 12th century. At the time of the Komnenian Dynasty it was located on the southern shore of the Golden Horn. From 1267 to 1682, the Genoese colony flourished on the northern shore of the gulf – in Pera. It was the hub for trade with the Black Sea towns and cities. The fortification walls and towers and the buildings from the Middle Ages have been preserved up to the present day.

## Date

12<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> c.

## Geographical Location

Constantinople

### 1. First Genoese quarter in Constantinople

The first agreement for commercial privileges to Genoa in the Byzantine era dates to 1155. By that time in [Constantinople](#), the quarters of [Venice](#) and Pisa, whose merchants enjoyed similar privileges, had already emerged. Genoa was approached by [Manuel I Komnenos](#) (r. 1143-1180), whose activity was in agreement with his aspirations of reestablishing Byzantine rule over southern Italy. Such ambitions required allies against the German emperor Frederick I and the Normans. The Genoese were thus offered commercial privileges similar to those of the other Italian cities in Constantinople (that is, a concession for a commercial quarter and a reduction of the **kommerkion** to 4 percent), in return for an alliance and the promise that Genoese merchants in the Empire would come to its defence in case of attack.<sup>1</sup>

However, only in 1160 would the Genoese establish a quarter in Constantinople.<sup>2</sup> This first quarter was shortlived. In 1162, the Pisans attacked it and sacked it, and the Genoese merchants were expelled from the city.<sup>3</sup>

### 2. The second Genoese quarter

In 1164 Manuel I resumed negotiations with Genoa in order to reestablish the Genoese commercial quarter in Constantinople, which eventually happened in 1170. A **chrysobull** of Manuel I of the same year provides information for this new quarter. It was located next to the Pisan quarter – on the southern shore of the Golden Horn between the city gates of *Veteris Rectoris* (Sirkeci) and Eugenios, in the districts of Eugenios and the Neorion.<sup>4</sup> It included one wharf in the Golden Horn and the [palace of Botaneiates or Kalamanos](#),<sup>5</sup> which was, up to then, in Venetian possession.

The Venetians, who were affected by these concessions, reacted immediately by attacking and destroying the Genoese quarter in 1171. After that, about 10,000 Venetians were banished from the Empire, and Genoa asked for compensations from the emperor. However, such claims seem to have caused the indignation of the local merchants, who were threatened by the competition of the Italian traders.<sup>6</sup>

In the following years the Genoese of Constantinople found themselves dragged into the conflicts for power between



the members of the [Komnenian dynasty](#). After the death of Manuel I, in September 1180, his widow relied upon the pro-latin party for the protection of her underage son, Alexios II's, dynastic rights. On the contrary, [Andronikos I Komnenos](#) (r. 1183-1185) rose to the throne leaning on the anti-latin sentiments of the [populace](#) of Constantinople: in April 1182 they launched attacks and plundering against the Latins of the city, with the aid of Andronikos's soldiers. A big part of the Genoese quarter was murdered and the survivors left the city on their ships.<sup>7</sup>

The Genoese, who had suffered the greatest blow from the events of 1182, asked for compensation up to 230,000 [hyperpyra](#), which is an evidence of the considerable amount of commercial dealings. The negotiations between Genoa and the emperor lasted from 1186 until 1191; in 1192 the privileges of Genoa were finally reinstated by a chrusobul. However, the disaster of 1182 seems to have prompted, to an extent, Genoese piracy, which put a strain on the relations of the Genoese quarter with imperial administration. [Alexios III Angelos](#) (r. 1195-1203) even stripped the Genoese of their privileges and arrested many of them. However, in the competition with Venice, Genoa was the natural ally, so Alexios III soon had to lift the measures against the Genoese. In October 1201, just before the onset of the [Fourth Crusade](#), the Genoese were granted a bigger concession for their quarter and a further reduce of the *kommerkion* to 2 percent.<sup>8</sup>

### 2.1. The quarter in the years of the Latin rule

In the years of the Latin empire (1204-1261) Venice achieved an exclusive trade monopoly in the Eastern Mediterranean and the [Black Sea](#). The governor of the Venetians in [Constantinople](#), called [podestà](#), governed the conquest and exploitation of territories on the islands of the Aegean Sea, the Peloponnesian coastline and the Black Sea, as far as the distant [Tanais](#) on the estuary of the Don at the [Azov Sea](#).

With a number of agreements and peace treaties (1218, 1228, 1232, 1238, 1251) with the Venetian [podestà](#) in Constantinople, Genoa tried to retain its position as a trade power in the region of the [Black Sea](#), as well as the autonomy of its quarter in Constantinople. But eventhough they were not subjected to any further fighting, the competition with the dominant power Venice severely restricted their economic activity, to a point that Genoese newcomers were not keen to settle in the quarter.<sup>9</sup> In any case, in the treaty documents some dignitaries are mentioned, who governed the colony in Constantinople – consuls, counts and magistrates (*consules et vicecomites atque rectores*) –, which shows a more advanced stage of administration organisation compared to the Venetians.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Genoese settlement in Galata-Pera

Genoa took advantage of the Byzantine hostility against Venice after the [fall of Constantinople in 1204](#), and they managed to establish close relations with the [Empire of Nicaea](#). So, after the [recapture of Constantinople](#) and came with the reinstatement of the Empire in 1261, Genoa had the upper hand. Just before the collapse of the Latin empire, Genoa managed to conclude the [treaty of Nymphaion](#) with [Michael VIII Palaiologos](#) (r. 1259-1282). Its clauses provided for exclusive trade privileges for the Genoese within the boundaries of soon-to-be restored Byzantium (at the expense of the Venetians), as well as for their commercial quarter in [Constantinople](#), which would include the church of Santa Maria de Embulo, until then in Venetian possession.<sup>11</sup> Also devolved to the Genoese the palace of Botaneiates, which had been used as the palazzo of the Venetian [podestà](#). After the success of their venture the Genoese not only destroyed the old Venetian quarter, but also transferred in Genoa material from the palace of the Venetian [podestà](#) and



used it to erect the building of the **Banco di San Giorgio** (the Bank of St. George).

After 1264, Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos allotted to the Genoese a new quarter on the northern shore of the Golden Horn, in Galata. Galata is actually the name of the hill, and the foot of the hill is known by the name Pera, (mean. "on the other side" in Greek). Initially the Genoese did not have the right to fortify their district by means of walls, but only with a moat. Galata became the trade centre, and the privileges granted to it attracted a lot of Venetians who went to install themselves there. Many churches of [Catholic orders](#) such as the Franciscans and the Dominicans, which at the time of the Latin empire were under the jurisdiction of the Venetian patriarch in Constantinople passed under Genoese guardianship and under the authority of the archbishop of Genoa (this remained unchanged in the next centuries during the time of the Ottoman empire). With the chrysobull of 1302 the Genoese in Pera were allowed to erect fortress walls. Later on the [round tower](#) was built (1348), as well as the palace of the Genoese podestà (a title adopted by influence from the Venetians). By the time of the capture of the Byzantine capital by sultan [Mehmed II](#) in [1453](#), the Genoese colony in Pera was booming.

#### 4. Organization of Genoese colony in Pera

It was headed by a podestà (from 1275), elected by the metropolis and accredited to the palace of the Byzantine emperor as an ambassador. He governed the trade affairs of the colony and was assisted by a 24 member council, administrative office and notary publics. The functions of the Genoese podesta included also the exercise of control on the activity of the consuls who resided locally – Varna, Chilia, Lycostomo, Moncastro (Maurocastrum), [Caffa](#), etc. In Pera the treaties with the rulers of the coastal states on the Black Sea were signed – such is the example with the treaty signed between Genoa and despot Ivanko Terter son of Dobrotitsa in 1387.<sup>12</sup> Numerous notary public offices, banks, warehouses and trading agents were located in Pera.

Big entrepreneurial families from Genoa settled in Pera and opened their banks, trade and notary public offices with their numerous agents and intermediaries who worked with the colonies in the region of the Black Sea. Documents of notary publics have been preserved which show the extremely large turnover amounting to 200 000 **ducats** per year. Examples of such documents are the notary deeds of big merchants and the accounting books of Genoese galleys.<sup>13</sup> Ships from various Genoese colonies on the Northern Black Sea coast and from the estuary of the Danube but mostly from [Trebizond](#) arrived at the port of Pera. From Pera to Genoa goods arriving from the Black Sea region were re-exported: wheat, tallow, wax, raw and processed silk, fine textiles and luxury goods from the East, alum for dyeing textiles; fur, salt and slaves from Tatar lands.

The attempts of the Byzantine emperors to restrict the transformation of the Genoese quarter into an independent and self-governing entity were unsuccessful. There were constant rivalry wars for dominance over the Black Sea during the XIV and XV century.

#### 5. Genoese-Ottoman relations

As early as 1352, long before the capture of Constantinople, dated the first agreement between the Genoese and the Ottomans under which the Genoese were granted the monopolistic right to trade in alum from Manisa. In response to that in 1421 and 1444 Genoese ships transported Ottoman military forces to fight against Christians. The sultans started numerous wars with Venice 1463-79, 1499-1502, 1537-1540 etc., trying to counterbalance its strong influence



by giving privileges to Florence, Dubrovnik and other commercial cities. The new masters of the Bosphorus imposed a restrictive regime on the ships which depended on the willingness of the high officials in the Ottoman Empire. In the middle of the XVI c. the Black Sea was no longer accessible for trading for Western merchants.<sup>14</sup>

After the final victory over Constantinople in 1453 the Ottoman Turks lead by Mehmed II the Conqueror beheaded the Venetian bailo and punished severely the Genoese merchants from Pera. Soon after however, the activity of the Genoese colony was renewed albeit under less favourable conditions.

During the rule of the Turkish sultans the Genoese from [Pera](#) retained their trading rights to some extent. But the colonies were no longer governed by a podestà. After 1453 [Magnifica Comunità di Pera](#) was created – the only example of self-governing minority in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>15</sup> It expanded, attracting a lot of merchants from other cities. After the capture of Caffa in 1475, one part of its residents also settled in [Pera](#). It existed until 1682. The remnants of the Genoese buildings, streets and fortress walls could be seen nowadays in the neighbourhood of Beyoglu in Istanbul.

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  2. According to M. Balard, « Une marché à prendre: l'invasion occidentale», in Ducellier, A. - Balard, M. (ed.), *Constantinople 1054-1261. Tête de la chretienité, proie des Latins, capitale grecque* (Collection Mémoires 40, Paris 1996), p. 189, this first quarter was on the north shore of the Golden Horn, thus putting the Genoese at disadvantage against their rival italian commercial quarters.
  3. *Annali genovesi di Caffaro e de' suoi continuatori dal 1099 al 1293*, 1, 67. Day, G.W., «Manuel II and the Genoese: A reappraisal of Byzantine commercial policy in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century», *Journal of Economic History* 37.2 (Jun. 1977), pp. 292-3.
  4. Janin, R., *Constantinople byzantine. Développement urbain et répertoire topographique* (Paris 1964), pp. 250-251.
  5. See the map of Constantinople in Magdalino, P. "Medieval Constantinople: Built environment and Urban development" in Laiou, A. (ed.), *The Economic history of Byzantium : from the seventh through the fifteenth century*, 2 (Dumbarton Oaks Studies 39 - Washington D.C. 2002), p. 535.
  6. Balard, M., « Une marché à prendre: l'invasion occidentale», in Ducellier, A. - Balard, M. (ed.), *Constantinople 1054-1261. Tête de la chretienité, proie des Latins, capitale grecque* (Collection Mémoires 40, Paris 1996), p. 190.
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  9. Jacoby, D., «The urban evolution of Latin Constantinople (1204-1261)», in Necipoğlu, N. (ed.), *Byzantine Constantinople: Monuments, topography and everyday life* (Leiden-Boston-Köln 2001), p. 283.
  10. On the text of the treaty of 1251 see *Liber iurium reipublicae Genuensis*, M. Ercole Ricotti (ed.), vol. 1, col. 1093.



11. It seems however that the clause regarding this particular church was never put actually into practice, and the church probably remained to the Venetians, see Janin, R., *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantin I: Le siège de Constantinople et le Patriarcat Oecumenique, iii: Les Églises et les monastères* (Paris 2<sup>1969</sup>), p. 571.
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	Medieval Constantinople: Built Environment and Urban Development <a href="http://www.doaks.org/publications/doaks_online_publications/EconHist/EHB20.pdf">http://www.doaks.org/publications/doaks_online_publications/EconHist/EHB20.pdf</a>

### Glossary :

	<b>Banco di San Giorgio</b> The most important financial institution of the Republic of Genoa, founded in 1407 through the consolidation of Genoa's public debt. The administration of the bank constituted the wealthiest men of the state who had the right to collect a series of taxes. In the 15th century the territorial possessions of Genoa were placed under the bank's administration as guarantees for future loans. The Palazzo San Giorgio built in 1260 was the seat of the bank.
	<b>chrysobull</b> (gold seal) Imperial document of the Byzantine state which was so named because it bore the gold seal of the emperor.
	<b>hyperpyron</b> The Byzantine gold coin, 4.3 gr. and 20 ½ carats, introduced by Alexios I Komnenos in 1092. It was preserved until the end of the Byzantine Empire with big changes in his cold content.
	<b>kommerkion</b> This name had two meanings in Byzantium 1. <i>Commercium</i> (lat.), which in late Roman times designated the frontier cities where exchanges with foreign merchants were authorised. 2. <i>Kommerkion</i> , which was a circulation and sales tax, paid at the customs, and collected on merchandise imported into the empire and on merchandise reaching Constantinople by the sea. It appears in the sources c. 800 and was also called <i>dekate</i> , its rate being 10 percent of the merchandise value.
	<b>Magnifica Communità di Pera</b> the name of the self-governing institution of Genoese merchants in Pera.
	<b>podesta or potesta</b> (lat. Potestas – power): name given to certain high officials in many Italian cities. The podesta was also: a) governor of the Venetian sector of the Latin Empire of Constantinople. b) head of the Genoese City Hall (14th-15th centuries) , governor in the Genoese acquisitions of Romania (Galata and Chios). c) Lombard magistrate in Euboea.
	<b>venetian ducat</b> golden coin (also zechin) from 1284 until the Early Modern times and even before World War I, used as a trade currency throughout Europe. Its weight is 3.4909 gr. of 986 pure gold.

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## Chronological Table

1155: first trade privileges to Genoa in Byzantium

1204, 12 april: capture of Constantinople by the knights of the IV<sup>th</sup> Crusade

1204-1261: Latin Empire of Constantinople

1261: treaty of Nymphaion between Byzantium and Genoa

1268: construction of Genoese quarter in Pera

1303: the bull of Andronicus II Palaiologus for Genoese quarter

1348: construction of the tower in Galata

1453: the fall of Constantinople

1454: capitulation of Mehmed II in favour of Genoese merchants

XVII<sup>th</sup> c.: and of Genoese activity in Constantinople and Pera