

Pietro Orseolo, was policing the Adriatic, and Venice was lending a helping hand to the Comnene Emperors of the East in their effort to prevent the Normans from reaching Constantinople; for it was an essential part of Venetian policy to oppose every attempt to close the mouth of the Adriatic, and the Normans were masters in Apulia and had already gained a footing at Durazzo on the eastern shores of that sea. The juridical position of Ragusa at that period was undoubtedly that of dependence on the Eastern Empire; Venice had no rights over the city, save such as might be implied by her alliance with the Emperor, for whom the Republic was acting. But after the Fourth Crusade the situation changed. Venice became the dominant maritime power, both in the Adriatic and in the Levant, and we find a Venetian "Count", established in Ragusa and administering the city, but with that large liberty and regard for local customs and sentiment so characteristic of Venetian suzerainty. The first Ragusan "Statuto", or Constitution, appeared in 1272, the year in which Ragusa became master of the island of Lågosta. Venetian interests were chiefly concerned with the sea and freedom of traffic for its own shipping, and as long as no danger threatened