CHAPTER FOUR

THE LORDSHIPS AS A NETWORK: FAMILY AND ENTERPRISE

While the Gattilusio lordships formed a zone of intersection for a varied range of larger networks, they also constituted a small network in their own right. Just as such small domains were attracted into the orbit of larger groups and powers, so they themselves were governed through shifting patterns of devolution, subordination and association, their political configuration changing as territories were acquired and lost and as the dynastic circumstances of the ruling family changed. They were also linked to one another and to a range of other territories and communities by economic activities which radiated from them, shaping the movement of commodities through peaceful exchange and forcible seizure. The movements and enterprises of traders and marauders form a web of interactions spreading outwards from the lordships themselves. The pattern of these activities was both influenced by and an influence upon the relations between the lordships and other groups in the Aegean and the wider Mediterranean. It illuminates both commonalities and differences between the different components of the Gattilusio network. The Gattilusio lordships were both fragmented and integrated by geography. Like the wider maritime empires of Genoa and Venice, the residual holdings of Byzantium, the possessions of the Order of St. John or the Duchy of the Archipelago, the Gattilusio domains formed a cluster of islands and enclaves. They were divided into small coherent segments by the sea, but the ready accessibility of the sea also provided easy communication between and within these units. In this regard they exemplified the combination of fragmentation and connectivity which typified the Mediterranean in general and the Aegean world of this period in particular.¹ This natural discontinuity encouraged the emergence of divergences within a single network, with methods of government and patterns of external connection varying between different territories, according to the particular conditions of each territorial unit. At the same time, the ease of communication provided by the sea,

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In common with normal Genoese practice, and increasingly that of Byzantium also, the political structure of theGattilusio lordships was essentially an associative one. It was managed through cooperation between the leading members of a family rather than forming an organisational structure based on formal hierarchical institutions. The Gattilusio did not govern their domains as a single polity with Mytilene as its capital and a clear hierarchy of subordination embracing their other possessions, but neither did they establish permanent and officially distinct family inheritances in different territories. Gattilusio rulers in territories beyond Lesbos were not, or not always, mere representatives of the head of the family, but neither were they the masters of new discrete patrimonies of their own. These lordships were a family concern in which multiple members of the clan held an interest and enjoyed power in their own right but which was to be kept together and not allowed to fragment in the hands of separate lineages. In this it bore a considerable resemblance to the arrangements which emerged in Palaiologan Byzantium, where individual relatives of the emperor were entitled to expect great autonomous authority over portions of the empire but permanent dispersal of those possessions was avoided. It lacked, however, the enduring monarchical ethos which counterposed this emerging model of shared power and which remained supreme and undiminished in the theory, if not the practice, of Byzantine government. The lord of Mytilene held a position of preeminence within the family and was the habitual point of contact with outside authorities, but he seems not to have been seen as an overlord enjoying formal supremacy over all the territories of his family and interposing between them and their imperial sovereign.

In the event Ainos, and only Ainos, came to enjoy durably a status comparable to that of Mytilene, having its own Gattilusio lord through most of its history under the family’s control, being treated by other powers as a distinct entity for diplomatic and military purposes, and acquiring

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2 See above, pp. 82–3.