

BYZANTINE RULE ON THE ADRIATIC (IN DALMATIA, ISTRIA
AND ON THE WESTERN ADRIATIC): POSSIBILITIES
FOR A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The author is investigating possibilities for a comparative study of the Byzantine Rule on the Adriatic between 6th and 12th centuries. He concludes that Byzantine political presence was the most important, it was the basis of any other influence. Despite all ideological and political crises during centuries, loss of interest and reduced ability to control the Adriatic aquatory from the central parts of the Empire or from Constantinople itself, one can nevertheless continue to talk about "Byzantium on the Adriatic".

Many scholars limited their investigations only to the history of the eastern Adriatic, or only to the history of some parts of the Italian coast (Venice, Ravenna, Pentapoli, southern Italy, etc.). Each of these regions has a very specific history. One might ask, therefore, whether we attached unmerited significance to an integral approach in our wish to emphasize the importance of this paper and generally the existence of an integral Adriatic policy as part of overall Byzantine policy and civilization?

The Adriatic is an integral geographic area. It is by no chance that Nicetas Choniates, before he began describing the Byzantine-Venetian war in 1171, gave a description of the Adriatic: "there is a bay on the West by the name of Adriatic which begins from the Sea of Sicily and, as a branch of the Ionic Sea, becomes independent and in a long small backwater it wraps up towards the north" (Nicetae Choniatae, 1835, 222; Nicetae Choniatae, 1975, 171). This was not a unique case among Byzantine writers - Anna Comnena also described the Adriatic: "in the middle there is a very large sea, in width it stretches right up to the Italic coast, and lengthwise it bends and winds eastward and northward, right up to the Vetonian barbarians, who are faced by the land of the Apulians. Generally, this is how the Adriatic stretches".¹ Furthermore, the Adriatic is climatically integral, too. It has a semi-arid Mediterra-

¹ According to Leib, the Vetones were Slavic pirates from the banks of river Neretva (Anne Comnena, 1945, 83).

nean climate throughout, and olives and grapes, plants so rich in symbolical meaning grow everywhere.²

It is thus possible, indeed necessary, to view the region integrally, but this does not answer the question: can the Byzantine Adriatic be viewed as an entity? I think that an affirmative answer simply has no alternative³ Byzantine presence on the Adriatic, regardless of possible regional differences, deserves to be treated as a whole. Here this is primarily emphasized from the aspect of Byzantium as a symbol of the Roman Empire and the Roman civilization, which was in permanent opposition to the newly arrived barbarians. Therefore one should conclude that Byzantine presence on the eastern and on the western Adriatic coast between the 6th and 12th centuries resulted in many similarities in social and cultural life.

However, differences between the two coasts do exist, very important differences. The eastern Adriatic coast is almost isolated from its hinterland, it is backed by a high mountain barrier that makes close contact with the interior very difficult or even impossible. This part of the Adriatic was therefore less important for the Byzantine authorities because it could not be used to penetrate into the interior. On the other hand, the eastern Adriatic shoreline was important for sailing, and Constantine Porphyrogenitus wrote that "under the control of Dalmatia is a close-set and very numerous archipelago ... so that ships never fear to be overwhelmed in those parts" (DAI 29/285-6). The fact that Constantine thought that those islands "extend as far as Beneventum" shows that even sailors on the Italian side found them crucial for maritime traffic. In 834 "the Neretva Slavs captured Venetians who were returning from Beneventum where they had been to trade and killed almost all of them" (Diacono, 1890, 112). It was logical to sail from Beneventum to Venice along the eastern Adriatic because, in addition to favourable winds, there were also favourable sea currents to drive ships north-east when there was no wind.

One of the important reasons why social development on the eastern Adriatic coast lagged significantly behind that on the Italian coast were the east's less favourable geopolitical characteristics: on the Italian coast the process of urban separation and individualization already began at the end of the 7th and in the 8th century, first in Ravenna, and after the beginning of the 9th century Venice. This process resulted in rivalry between the cities for primacy on Byzantine-ruled territory. On the eastern Adriatic coast the first signs of this process appeared in the 10th century - that was when the Split Bishop did all he could to ensure church primacy at the Split Synods

2 A book that is quite informative from a broader perspective is Philippon, 1939.

3 This question must also be asked because Byzantologists have to date not shown a lot of interest in studying the history of the seas that belonged to the Empire - outstanding among research of this kind is certainly the book by Ahrweiler, 1966. Other texts about Byzantium and the Mediterranean are listed in Rubin, 1986. The closest to our views about how this discussion should be written is the book by Bratianu, 1969. It presents, in a synthetic manner, social and economic life, changes of power and transcontinental routes.

in 925 and 928 (Rački, 1877, 424). However, this was only the beginning and was primarily an attempt to affirm bishops in the cities. Eastern Adriatic cities did not begin to stand apart and individualize until the 11th century, because this is when a stronger class of patricians started to develop in them. Communes in the real sense of the word did not develop on the eastern Adriatic coast until the 12th century (Steindorff, 1984) However, this process of urban singling out and individualization, both on the Italian and on the eastern coast, did not challenge supreme Byzantine rule, at least at first. The urban ruling class grew economically stronger, and the towns developed systems of self-government. It did not suit them to recognize the supremacy of the neighbouring Lombards or Franks (in the case of the Italian coast), or Croatia or Venice, which was a maritime power (in the case of the eastern coast). They found it most acceptable to continue under the supreme rule of the distant Byzantium, which was an important international factor in the 9th, and right up to the 11th century. Besides, Byzantium traditionally honoured local self-rule.

Just like in the case of the cities, the societies in the hinterland of Byzantine-ruled territory matured more quickly on the Italian side than on the eastern Adriatic side. The culture of the newly arrived Lombards grew quite close to that of the Byzantine possessions already in the 7th century, because this is when most of the Lombards left Aryanism and accepted orthodox Christianity. On the eastern Adriatic coast this rapprochement usually happened in the 9th century when most of the Croats and other Slavs were converted to Christianity. On the Italian coast barbarians from the hinterland tried to subject Byzantine Adriatic possessions sooner than on the eastern Adriatic coast.

Byzantium ruled the Adriatic, with longer or shorter interruptions, for six full centuries, from the time of Justinian in the 530s to that of Manuel Comnenus in the 1160s and 1170s. The Byzantine army conducted relatively few military campaigns on the eastern Adriatic coast. The first took place in the reign of Justinian I in the 6th century (Procopius, I, 5 sq.; Ferluga, 1978, 41 sq.; Goldstein, 1992, 17-29), the second in the reign of Nicephorus I at the beginning of the 9th century (*Annales regni Francorum*, 193-19; Ferluga, 1978, 100-102, 117; Goldstein, 1992, 1526), the third in the reign of Basil I in about 870 (DAI, 29/62-66; 29/115-215; Vita Hadriani, 268; Epistola, 521-7), and the fourth in the reign of Manuel I Comnenus in the 12th century (Cinnami, 254-260). The nature of these campaigns was completely different. The first and the fourth seem mostly to have engaged land forces, the second and the third were exclusively maritime battles (we have not included here the area of the south-Italian Adriatic coast where military operations were more frequent, but more connected with conditions on Sicily, in Calabria and Apulia).

Like any other early-medieval government in Europe, the Byzantine government could only function in accord with actual circumstances. At that time it was difficult for Byzantium to maintain direct control over the Adriatic through the army and of-

ficials, because the region was more than 1,000 km from Constantinople. Therefore, if we were to judge rigidly and without any sensibility, we might say that in that period there was no Byzantine authority on the Adriatic in today's sense of the word.

In Italy, on the western Adriatic coast, the slow disappearance of the direct influence of central Byzantine provinces can be followed in quite great detail after the end of the 6th century. This even happened during the reign of Justinian, when the church hierarchy in the north Adriatic refused to support his condemnation of the document *Tria capitula*, adopted at the Fifth Oecumenical Church Council in Constantinople, for suspicion of Nestorian tendencies. In the 7th and 8th centuries, Byzantine historians and chroniclers showed a drastic loss of interest in events in the West and on the Adriatic. Their books reflect the interests of their readers as much as their own. Scarce information is given mostly by Western chroniclers. These trends were increased by the general process of growing civilizational and other differences between East and West: monophysitic disputes in the 5th and 6th centuries, and the Graecization of the Empire in the 7th century played an important role in this. The Exarch of Ravenna, although named by the Emperor, was becoming more and more independent. However, even this was not enough for some exarchs and they rebelled: the first to rebel was Eleuterius, about twenty years later Olympius, and this second revolt ended with Olympius' death in 651. The militias of Ravenna and Pentapoli did not want to bring the Pope to the Sixth General Council in Constantinople in 680-1, but stood in his defense. Justinian II was very angry by the hostile attitude the citizens of Ravenna took against him during his first rule (685-695). Thus, when he re-assumed the throne (705-711), he sent a punitive expedition force against the city. Ravenna was sacked, the bishop's eyes were gouged out, and the most prominent citizens were brought to Constantinople in chains and executed there. These horrible acts of violence were ominous signs of the future iconoclastic dispute, the harbinger of fresh differences between East and West (Ostrogorsky, 1968; Delogu et al., 1980).

At the end of the 9th and the beginning of the 10th century a *strategus* was sent to Dalmatia from Constantinople (Ferluga, 1978, 162 sq.), which is confirmed by some evidence, including seals.⁴ The *hypatos* (consul) for Istria was confirmed in Constantinople.⁵

Military campaigns undertaken by the Byzantines at the beginning of the 9th century were just the first step in this complex operation. With the Aachen Peace Treaty of 812 Byzantium came out of the Byzantine-Frankish war as the winner, without having to wage a real prolonged war (as medieval wars usually were, as was the Byzantine experience with the Persians, the Arabs and finally the Seljuks and the Ottomans).

4 Nesbitt, Oikonomides, 1991, 47. Evidence is also found in some documents, such as *Taktikon Benešević* or *Taktikon Uspenski* - see, Ferluga, 1978.

5 This fact is from the *Placit of Rižana*, a document that was written in 804 just after the Franks had taken over rule in the formerly Byzantine Istria (Petranović - Margetić, 1983-4, 55-75).

Other things took place in addition to military campaigns: at the beginning of the 9th century the relics of St. Anastasia were translated from Constantinople to Zadar,⁶ and the relics of St. Triphon from Constantinople to Kotor. In 828 the relics of St. Mark came to Venice from Alexandria, and although this event was not directly linked with the Byzantine Empire, it shows the close cultural and church connections between the Byzantine Adriatic and the East.

In the next few decades the peace treaty was followed by Byzantium's important role in the conversion to Christianity of the peoples on the eastern Adriatic, its engagement in commerce and culture, and the foundation of Byzantine administrative units (themes). These actions helped melt the differences between the Byzantine coastal domain and the eastern Adriatic hinterland. In the 9th century Byzantine Adriatic domains began to reflect the new Empire which sailed into a very active medieval period after the inertia of late Antiquity. In fact, on the Adriatic the true Middle Ages started in the 9th century. At that time independent states began to be founded under the aegis of the Empire's supreme power, such as Venice. The development of Venice was made possible by Byzantine supremacy and by the fact that Venice remained in close contact with the Byzantine world.⁷ The region of Venice and Istria was one province under the administration of the Exarch of Ravenna. In 639 the centre of Byzantine administration was in Cittanova-Heracliana. After a period of successful centralist rule from Ravenna, in the 740s, towards the end of the exarchate, the Venetians could no longer expect effective aid from Ravenna. Thus they elected their own imperial administrator - a "dux" (Ortalli, 1995, 769; Ortalli 1988, 4-5; Ravegnani, 1992, 19-29). This was the beginning of aspirations for autonomy, which was still far from aspirations for full independence. In addition to its political importance, Venice's economic importance also grew with the disappearance of the exarchate and the partial renewal of East-West links at the end of the 8th century. Local loyalties fueled the fires of conflict among Venetians. Some were for and some were against maintaining their link with the Byzantine Empire, but the conflict among them was as much a matter of rivalry between families and between island communities. From the 6th century the religious and ecclesiastical center was located in Grado, on the very eastern edge of the area. In 775-776 the Bishopric of Olivolo was created to underline the importance of the nearby political centre in the Venetian lagoon.⁸ Nevertheless, in the second half of 8th century the Franks recognized Byzantine sovereignty in that area.⁹ In those times the Venetians retained a powerful sense of loyalty to Byzantium (Nicol, 1995, 11-12). The position of Venice

6 *Historia translationis s. Anastasiae*, in: *Rački*, 1877, 306-310.

7 On Venice, Lane, 1973, 4-6; Cessi, 1957; Carile - Fedalto, 1983; Carile, 1987, 5-37; Nicol, 1995.

8 Niero, 1987, 101-121. Niero, 1987 = A. Niero, *La sistemazione ecclesiastica del ducato di Venezia*, in: *Le origini della Chiesa di Venezia*, a cura di F. Tonon, Venezia 1987.

9 On Byzantine - Frankish relations Dölger, 1953, 282-369; Ohnsorge, 1958; Ohnsorge, 1947; Jenkins, 1966; Ostrogorsky, 1968, 182-6; Nicol, 1995, 14-15.

was threatened by the new Frankish Empire, and Venetian-Byzantine relations were closely connected with those of two Empires.

At the beginning of the 9th century a pro-Frankish party took power in Venice, led by *Doge* Obelerio and his brother Beat. Nevertheless, when the Byzantine fleet came to the lagoon, sympathies for Byzantium suddenly reappeared: the Byzantine commander Nicetas was confirmed in office as Doge and honoured with the Byzantine title of *spatharios*. So things settled down. It is, therefore, not surprising that 150 years later Constantine Porphyrogenitus wrote, in the manner of self-praise, that the Venetians refused to subdue to the Franks saying "we want to be servants of the Emperor of the Romans, and not of you" (DAI 28/36-37). Writing around 1000, the Venetian chronicler John Deacon described these events as if it was normal for the Byzantine navy to regain control over the area (Diacono, 103-104). It seems that in those times Byzantine sovereignty was a perfect "umbrella" for the creation of the "Rialto, which would be more Venetia than any other Venetia". That is how contemporaries understood events around the year 800, that is how later historians described those events.¹⁰

However, it is usually very difficult to view real life on the eastern Adriatic exclusively in the category things that actually took place. This means that one should also consider ideological and psychological categories.

The ancient Greeks, and after them the Byzantines, used the concept of *politeia* to denote various different features of life in their state. It had several meanings: civil law, state administration, state system, government, state regulation, state constitution, and the ordered life of the state, the opposite of the last was war, *polemos*. If, therefore, we understand Byzantine rule as *politeia* then it certainly had to take into account the different way of life among the neighbouring Slavs, Croats and Serbs, and can thus be considered as an integral system of social relations and way of life. The starting point for differentiation was the different supreme political authority; the coast was under "imperial authority", the hinterland was the area of Lombard rule or barbarian "Sclavinia". The special features of Byzantine rule on the Adriatic, not quite usual for the Byzantine Empire, or for the Adriatic region, was the most important characteristic of Byzantine presence on the Adriatic in the first period, which lasted until 800 for the Italian Adriatic coast, and more or less until the end of the 9th century for the eastern coast. Other differences arose from this contrast between the Byzantine coast and the Lombard and Slav interior, which was unusually important in the early Middle Ages.

Because it is so difficult to categorize Byzantine rule, and because it is in some regions even difficult to speak about rule in the usual sense of the word, I prefer to speak about Byzantine "presence" (*prisutnost* or *nazočnost* in Croatian, *presence* in English, *presenza* in Italian). This concept is much broader than mere Byzantine po-

¹⁰ About the "determination of the town of Venice", Ortalli, 1995, 778-780; Gaspari, 1992, 3-18.

litical authority and in fact refers to the overall influence of the Byzantine civilization in the Adriatic region.

A. Guillou established that a feeling of loyalty existed in Byzantine Italy among most of the imperial subjects, *douleia*, a feeling of subjection to the Emperor; and also *oikeiosis*, a feeling of togetherness among all the inhabitants under the supreme rule of the Byzantine emperor. These feelings also existed on the eastern Adriatic coast: in the *Placit of Rižana* people who had formerly been Byzantine subjects but were at that time Frankish subjects confirmed that they had "since days of old been under the rule of the Greek Empire" (Petranović, Margetić, 1983-4, 65). The Benedictine monk Gottschalk, who found refuge in Croatia from the persecution of the church hierarchy in the mid-9th century (CMH, 529-533), said that the Croatian army fought against the "people of the Greeks" ("*contra gentes Graecorum*"), obviously referring to one of the towns or areas of Byzantine Dalmatia (probably Split, Trogir or Zadar) (Katić, 1932, 8).

The epithet "Byzantine" should obviously not be given only to what came from Constantinople or the central parts of the Empire, because whatever was created and happened on Byzantine territories was also "Byzantine", for example in Italy (for the earlier period in Ravenna and Rome), and in Byzantine Dalmatia and Istria. Viewed strictly from the historical and legal aspect it could not have been otherwise because the ruling ideology of the Byzantine Empire considered all Christian lands their own, and all Christians who lived in them the Emperor's subjects, regardless of the vernacular language. Specifically, this is what Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus said in his description of conditions on the eastern Adriatic coast.¹¹

Viewed from the perspective of society as a whole, political presence was the most important and was the basis for any other influence. Byzantine presence was thus most clearly reflected in the fact that everyone knew and everyone unquestioningly accepted that coastal Dalmatia was a land under the supreme rule of the Byzantine Emperor. This was the most lasting feeling, it was sustained from the end of the 6th even into the 11th century. However, at that time Byzantine presence on the Adriatic was also upheld to a great degree because the population on the eastern Adriatic coast felt threatened by the aggressive Slavs, and on the Italian coast by the Lombards (Delogu et al., 1980).

In the same text Constantine Porphyrogenitus wrote about events on the Adriatic coasts. He wrote that Heraclius, his distant predecessor on the Byzantine throne, "allowed" the Croats to settle in Pannonia and Dalmatia. It is impossible to establish whether this is true. He may have written it only for reasons of ideology and propaganda: the Byzantine Emperor was the supreme ruler of all Christendom, so when the Croats entered that world they could only do so by "order" of the Emperor (Goldstein, 1992, 129 sq.). It is possible that he used the name of Heraclius only to

¹¹ This was shown very convincingly by Đurić, 1986.

personify the role played by Byzantine government representatives in towns on the eastern Adriatic coast in creating long-term relations with the Slav or Croat immigrants. The relatively unchanged borders between the Croats and the coastal Byzantine towns confirm that some agreements existed. In the early Middle Ages Dalmatian towns did not lose even the smallest part of the late-Antique ager (Suić, 1956; Suić, 1976) nor, on the other hand, were the strong centres of the Croatian state that developed in their direct hinterland (e.g. Klis, Nin) after the 9th century ever in danger of being subjected by Byzantium.

The Byzantine church also weakened on the Adriatic coasts: the first disputes already took place in the 6th century when the Istrian bishops sided with the teaching of the *Tria capitula* (also called the Istrian schism). However, there were some attempts to play an active role: in 732 Emperor Leo III took jurisdiction over some lands, including "Illyricum and Dalmatia" away from the Pope. This gave Byzantium a crucial impact on religious life because after 732 the Byzantine Church resumed control over Illyricum, Dalmatia and some western areas of the Empire (CMH, IV/1, 71-2; Šišić, 1925, 289-90). This is why Dalmatian bishops participated at the Sixth Oecumenical Council in 754 although they could certainly not condone its rigid iconoclastic stands.¹² They also took part in the Seventh Oecumenical Council in 787 in Nicaea. Bishop John of Solin, Bishop Urso of Rab, Bishop Laurentius of Osor, and Bishop John of Kotor attended,¹³ which was an essential prerequisite for the Byzantine Church to participate, in various ways and on several occasions, in the conversion to Christianity of "Sclavinia" in the hinterland of the eastern Adriatic coast (DAI, 31/31-35). Byzantium can be directly or at least indirectly credited with the coming of the pupils of Constantine and Methodius, who brought the vernacular language in liturgy and Slav script (Goldstein, 1995, 258-9; 279-80).

Although the Byzantine Empire did not have direct control over events in its Adriatic possessions in the 7th and the 8th centuries, they organized themselves to survive. The seal of Paulus, Exarch of Ravenna (723-6), which was found in Solin but was subsequently lost (Nikolajević-Stojković, 1961, 61-66), could also have attested direct Byzantine influence on events in the Dalmatian-Croatian region in the 7th and 8th centuries, for which there are almost no sources. It is not known whether Dalmatia depended on the Exarch of Ravenna and that exarchate, or was completely independent (Šišić, 1925, 183, 290; Ferluga, 1978, 117 sq.; Goldstein, 1992, 136 sq.). That some links between Dalmatia and Ravenna existed is shown by the case of Archbishop Damianus of Ravenna (692-708), who was Dalmatian by birth (Šišić, 1925, 284).

12 Michael the Syrian wrote about "Dalmatian bishops" but did not record the towns they came from - see, Chabot, 1901, 520.

13 Mansi, 1759-83, 139-42, 366-8, 373, 387-8, 723-4, 732; the data were analyzed by Darrouzès, 1975; the analysis of R. Katičić cannot be passed over for the eastern Adriatic coast (Katičić, 1993, 25-35); Goubert, 1965, wrote the most extensively on relations between Byzantium and the West.

Byzantium influenced life in Croatia in various ways, which are often hard to differentiate from the late-Roman heritage in Croatian lands. For example, Byzantine influence on the development of Croatian law is obvious.¹⁴ In the material culture the best examples of this influence are probably the finds of so-called "Early-Croatian" earrings, jewelry fashioned equally under the influence of the Antique heritage, the existence of Byzantine coastal towns, and Byzantine trade with the Adriatic hinterland (Maksimović, 1961, 85-96; Belošević, 1983-4, 41-52). There are many examples of Byzantine influence in art, and especially in architecture (Abramić, 1955, 5-8; Marasović, 1961, 65; Rapanić, 1983, 831-869; Rapanić, 1987; Jurković, 1987, 107-113). Finds of coins seem to be the best evidence of how strong Byzantine influence was; most of the gold coins found were minted in the reign of Constantine V (741-775), and were discovered in five graves in Biskupija near Knin (Mirnik, 1993, 208-215). There were also finds of gold coins from the reign of other emperors, but many fewer Frankish coins (Jurić, 1993, 115-130; Miletić, 1980, 287-306). The fact that Byzantine usage dominated meant that Byzantine economic influence was also strong. Finally, we must say that Byzantine influence in art continued in the eastern Adriatic even after Byzantine power disappeared from the region: for example, in the 9th and 10th centuries strong links continued between the Bishopric of Pula in Istria and some churches on its territory, and Ravenna, the centre of Byzantine art in the Adriatic (Vicelja, 1991, 23-27).

Byzantine engagement on Croatian territory peaked in the 9th century with the foundation of the theme of Dalmatia in the 870s. A theme was an organizational form suitable for areas threatened from the outside. At that time Dalmatia was directly threatened by the Arabs from the sea, and the Sclavinias (of which Croatia was the strongest) were a permanent danger from the interior. Establishing a theme created a long-term foundation for maintaining Byzantine power, and the inhabitants of Byzantine Dalmatia upheld the idea of the Empire because this made it impossible to impose any other policy and rule on them. Byzantium traditionally honoured local urban self-government, and it was in the interest of the prosperous patricians in Dalmatian cities in the 9th century to guard Byzantine rule as protection from being completely subjected to the neighbouring Croatia, which had grown strong, or to Venice, a maritime power.

On the western Adriatic coast the engagement of the central government peaked during the formation of the Exarchate of Ravenna in the 580s. Although inspired and organized from Constantinople, its goal was to make those distant western regions as independent as possible from the central government. Local peasants were made responsible for defending their own land instead of mercenaries from central parts of the Empire (Diehl, 1888, 6-23; Hartmann, 1889, 9-10; Ostrogorsky, 1960, 99-103).

14 Margetić, 1984. See also other papers by Margetić on a similar subject, mentioned in Goldstein, 1995, and Margetić's bibliographies in *Historijski zbornik* 43, Zagreb 1990, 455-463.

The difference between Italy and central parts of the Empire was that in Italy landowners were becoming soldiers, while in the East soldiers were becoming landowners. Sources are not explicit about how engaged the central authorities were in founding the exarchate. The idea obviously originated from Constantinople, and Constantinople also partly participated in its practical implementation. However, it seems that two processes coincided: since the Empire could no longer send as many soldiers to Italy as it had during the Ostrogoth war, it encouraged the remaining territories to defend themselves, and this resulted in the establishment of specific relations in the field. Unfortunately, sources are very sparse about these events and do not allow detailed analysis in the general direction of our research. Thus this kind of thinking remains a hypothesis, all the more so as historians have not directly researched the problem from this aspect.¹⁵ We can thus say that the foundation of the exarchate was the last major activity of the Empire in this region for a long time. It seems that the Byzantine possessions along the Adriatic coast were left to fend for themselves from that moment on, and that this was actually what the central authorities in Constantinople wanted. It is a fact that after the 6th century Byzantine interest in the distant western regions weakened because of the difficult economic and military crisis, and because the Empire increasingly turned to the Greek language and culture, so that it did not pay much attention to its Adriatic lands right until the 9th century. However, this does not mean that Byzantium let direct rule over Dalmatia slip from its fingers.

In 800 the Frankish Empire challenged Byzantium's previously unquestioned supremacy on the Adriatic coasts, but not for long. The Franks never became a maritime power, and since their Empire disintegrated and finally disappeared before the end of the 9th century, it was a challenge that did not last long. In the 10th century Byzantine representatives tried to answer in the same way, and in 968 Emperor Nicephorus Phocas roughly let Liutprando, Bishop of Cremona and ambassador of Emperor Otto I, know that he and his compatriots were not Romans (i.e. Romanics) but Lombards: "Vos non romani, sed langobardi estis" (Le Goff, 1974, 1939; Lamma, 1959).

The best example of how former Byzantine possessions achieved independence is the case of Venice. Venice managed to become independent in the first place because of its economic and traffic importance, from which its maritime might later emerged. But even when it grew into an economic and seafaring power, Venice retained Byzantium's ideological "umbrella" when necessary. In this way Byzantium and Venice were associates during the centuries, but also rivals and adversaries, and their influences entwined and clashed. The specific way in which this happened dated from about 1000 when the Empire could not play an active role on the Adriatic, so it

15 Ostrogorsky, 1968; Delogu et al., 1980, 235-6, returns to Diehl's original opinion (Diehl, 1888, 13-15) that the exarchate was founded under Justin II.

let Venice maintain order in the region. However, a decade or two later Dobronja, *archont* and *toparch* of Zadar and Split, visited Constantinople twice and very clearly showed where supreme power lay in his opinion (Ferluga, 1978; Vizantijski izvori, 1966, 204-5; Cecaumeni, 1896, 77).

Since Byzantine power *de facto* disappeared on the eastern Adriatic coast in the second half of the 11th century, the feeling that the region *de iure* belonged to the Empire also decreased in time. It seems that this feeling had disappeared by the 12th century, to be more precise by 1165 when the Byzantine army under John Ducas conquered parts of Dalmatia (Ferluga, 1978, 217-250; Goldstein, 1998), and it certainly did not exist a century later, when Split chronicler Tomas Archdeacon wrote in a very positive light about current Byzantine rule and Emperor Manuel I Comnenus: "all Dalmatia and nearly all Croatia were subjected to Manuel, the Emperor of Glorious Memory. He was very benign ... he did not enforce taxes, but was a most gracious distributor of his own wealth. All who approached him were respected and the state treasury paid their expenses. When he received the list of the inhabitants of Split, he sent them salaries, and he ordered a gold coin to be given to children in their cradles..." (Rački, 1896, 73). Thomas was obviously biased and subjective, and his information was certainly a kind of panegyric. His motivation for writing as he did was to discredit the Croats before the citizens of his town, and it seems he thought that the best way to do this was to compare them with the well organized Byzantine system (Rački, 1896). A similar attitude to Byzantium developed in some Italian towns, for example Genoa and Pisa, which signed treaties with Byzantium exclusively motivated by interest. They wanted to avoid the supremacy of German Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, because he imposed high taxes.

One should take into account that it would not be a precedent for Manuel to give money away to his subjects, although they were of the Catholic faith. He had already donated money to the monastery of St. Michael in Siena in 1177 (Hiestand, 1986, 30-31), promised to double the income of any Lombard city that went over to his side (in sharp contrast to the fiscal oppression of Frederick Barbarossa in Lombardy) (Magdalino, 1993, 90), and it is well known that great amounts of money went to Crusader states during the 1160s, for example, to Bethlehem and Jerusalem in 1169 (Chalandon, 1912, 449; Lilie, 1980, 200; Lilie, 1993, 209). Even Nicetas Choniates did not make any attempt to justify Manuel's financial policy, which was characterized as both rapacious and wasteful (Magdalino, 1993, 9).

An example of Byzantine presence on the Adriatic, which has to date been mentioned relatively little, is the coastal line or the maritime limes (*limes maritimus*). This was undoubtedly the most complex feat of construction and as a whole the most immense and expensive part of "Byzantium on the Adriatic". It was a series of about a hundred fortifications, maybe more. The system, probably started in the 4th and 5th centuries and completed in the reign of Justinian I, successfully secured the

Byzantine thalassokratia for many centuries.¹⁶ In the northern Adriatic coast the thalassokratia was secured by a specific way of traveling through the lagoons, because only very skillful sailors were able to negotiate these areas successfully. According Procopius, "in that place (in the region of Ravenna and mouth of the river Po) a very wonderful thing takes place every day. For early in the morning the sea forms a kind of river and comes up over the land for the distance of a day's journey for an unencumbered traveler and becomes navigable in the midst of the mainland, and then in the late afternoon it turns back again, causing the inlet to disappear, and gathers the stream to itself. All those, therefore, who have to convey provisions into the city or carry them out from there for trade or for any other reason, place their cargoes in boats, and drawing them down to the place where the inlet is regularly formed, they await the inflow of the water. And when this comes, the boats are lifted little by little from the ground and float, and the sailors on them set to work and from that time on are seafaring men. And this is not the only place where this happens, but it is the regular occurrence along the whole coast in this region as far as the city of Aquileia..." (Procopius, I, 1, 19-23). Barbarian newcomers were obviously unable to take advantage of these opportunities so Byzantine territories in this area were quite secure from attack, despite the fact that their enemies lived quite close to them. This was not only characteristic at the time of Lombard invasion, but also during the invasions of Huns, Visigoths and some other Germanic peoples in the 5th century. Cassiodorus described the life of refugees in the lagoon area almost idyllically (Cassiodorus, 1894).

It seems that this Byzantine thalassokratia did not disappear, at least in some parts of the eastern Adriatic, until the 10th century. Constantine Porphyrogenitus wrote that some islands in Dalmatia were uninhabited and had upon them deserted cities (i. e. earlier fortresses of the *limes maritimus*); he mentioned nine of them, "and very many others of which the names are not intelligible".¹⁷

It is obvious that the system of fortifications was well planned. It was the best representative of Byzantium on the Adriatic, regardless of the degree to which the central imperial provinces participated in its construction. It provided security for the Adriatic population. It was so ideally laid out that it might arouse other associations, as if it had been planned by God.¹⁸ We saw that sailing conditions were very different on the eastern and on the western coast. The belt of lagoons on one, and the numerous and closely distributed islands on the other coast, determined the manner of sailing. Geological circumstances also differed. It was impossible to build fortifications on raised ground in the low-lying lagoon belt, as could be done in places on

16 Goldstein, 1992, 34-58; Goldstein, 1996, 257-264; Gunjača, 1980, 133; Domjan, 1983, 136; Tomičić, 1993, 91-96; Tomičić, 1989, 29-53; Badurina 1982, 173; Dorigo, 1984, Tavola 2; Schmiedt, 1974; Schmiedt, 1978, 129-255.

17 DAI, 29/289-291. More details on limes, Goldstein, 1996, 262-4.

18 The words of Procopius, a contemporary, Buildings II, 3, 3.

the eastern coast and in the south of the Italian coast (for example, in the case of Ancona). The fortifications had to satisfy the following conditions: they had to control a broader area, which meant that they had to be built every 6 to 7 km in the lagoon belt, and about every 10-15 km in regions where they stood on raised ground. It was of the utmost importance to have a view of the next fortification in line. All the fortifications had to have a good harbour and if possible an alternative one as well, one protected from the south, the other from the north wind. They had to have a source of drinking water inside the walls,¹⁹ and as a rule there was a fertile valley to supply the garrison with the most essential foodstuffs relatively near (several kilometres distant).

The Byzantine Adriatic was an ethnically heterogeneous marginal area with a specific economy and cultural variety. Nevertheless, certain aspects of political, social and cultural life were unique for the whole area and differentiated it from the hinterland. Looked at from the perspective of society as a whole, political presence was the most important, it was the basis of any other influence. Despite all ideological and political crises during centuries, loss of interest and reduced ability to control the Adriatic aquatory from the central parts of the Empire or from Constantinople itself, we can nevertheless continue to talk about "Byzantium on the Adriatic".

BIZANTINSKA OBLAST NA JADRANU (DALMACIJA, ISTRA IN ZAHODNI JADRAN): PREDPOSTAVKE ZA PRIMERJALNE RAZISKAVE

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POVZETEK

Mnogi raziskovalci so proučevali samo zgodovino vzhodnega Jadrana, drugi spet samo zgodovino nekaterih delov italijanske obale (Benetk, Ravenne, Pentapolisa, južne Italije itd.). Vsaka od teh dežel ima zelo specifično zgodovino, za vse pa je značilna nadoblast bizantinskega cesarstva. Zato je seveda na mestu vprašanje ali obstaja posebna bizantinska politika za celotno jadransko območje in ali jo je kot tako sploh mogoče obravnavati.

¹⁹ These are instructions for construction from a concurrent military treatise - see, Three Byzantine Military Treatises, 1985.

Jadran je posebna geografska celota; celo več, Jadran je tudi klimatsko nekaj posebnega: celotno območje je pod vplivom polsuhega sredozemskega podnebja, povsod uspevajo oljke in vinska trta, rastlini z izjemno bogato simboliko.

Zato je celosten pogled, ki ga skuša podati ta študija, možen in celo potreben. Seveda to ni odgovor na vprašanje, ali je mogoče bizantinski Jadran obravnavati kot celoto. Pritrdilni odgovor na to vprašanje je namreč po mojem edino možen. Ne glede na morebitne regionalne posebnosti si namreč bizantinski vpliv na Jadranu zasluži celovito obravnavo. Ta se v tem primeru kaže predvsem kot simbol rimskega cesarstva in rimske civilizacije, te večne ovire za prihajajoči barbarski element. Zato je tudi za bizantinsko prisotnost na vzhodnem in zahodnem Jadranu med 6. in 12. stoletjem značilno veliko podobnosti na številnih področjih družbenega in kulturnega življenja.

Kljub temu seveda razlike obstajajo in to bistvene. Vzhodnojadranska obala je namreč ločena od zaledja; visoke planine v marsičem otežkočajo ali celo preprečujejo tesne stike z zaledjem in zato je bil ta del Jadrana za bizantinsko oblast manj pomemben. Nasprotno pa je bila vzhodnojadranska obala zanjo pomembna za plovbo.

Zaradi neugodnih geopolitičnih značilnosti je tudi družbeni razvoj na vzhodnojadranski obali bistveno zaostajal za razvojem na italijanski strani. Že konec 7. in v 8. stoletju se je na italijanski obali začel proces ločevanja in individualizacije mest, najprej z Ravenno, v 9. stoletju pa z Benetkami. Neposredna posledica tega procesa pa je bilo medsebojno tekmovanje urbanih enot za prevlado na bizantinskih posestih. Na vzhodnojadranski obali je mogoče prve znake podobnega procesa zaznati šele v 10. stoletju.

Najpomembnejša pa je bila politična prisotnost Bizanca kot predpogoj in temelj za vsako drugo prisotnost. Kljub vsem ideološkim, verskim in političnim krizam, kljub izgubi interesa in vse manjši verjetnosti, da bi lahko iz osrednjih delov cesarstva in iz samega Carigrada nadzorovali dogajanje na Jadranu, lahko še naprej govorimo o "Bizancu na Jadranu".

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