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## **BYZANTIUM AND ITALY**

**HISTORY OF BYZANTINE DOMINATION IN  
ITALY, FROM JUSTINIAN THE GREAT TO  
CHARLEMAGNE**

**(PhD abstract)**

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**Keywords: Byzantium, reconquest, Justinian the Great, Byzantine Italy, Lombards, the papacy, Constantinople, Rome, Charlemagne, Venice, Ravenna, griko dialect.**

The Byzantium portrayed an image of the world that, after several hundred years, continues to fascinate. The Byzantine Saint, the Byzantine creed, the Byzantine art and the Byzantine fast are elements that compose the painting that the Byzantium bequeathed to the world and history, an image of symbols, simplicity and refinement, which manage to amaze the very creators.

Given the above, we believe that it is incomprehensible that the traveler on his way through the nowadays Istanbul, he wouldn't feel the thrill of a return over time, in the spiritual space that once was the glory of this city. Is it just a city? It is more than a city - a world. It was said, exaggerating of course, but not without a kernel of truth, that in the city on the Bosphorus there were two thirds of the wealth of the world, a world that had to manage with what was left from this division. And yet, even though the history recorded that fateful day of Tuesday, May 29, 1453, we can firmly say that Byzantium continues to live today by what it has bequeathed: Orthodoxy, precepts of life, architecture, painting, aspiration to beauty and much more. And perhaps that's why the history and the whole posterity blame the servants of the prophet, as they interrupted Byzantine liturgy in the world, but as any liturgy can not remain unfinished, the Byzantium continues its spiritual and civilizing mission.

The Byzantine treasures that are kept mainly in Italy, lead us to believe that Byzantium was not only what we used to call the Eastern Empire. The truth is that the Western side of Byzantium is not well-known, because we got used to strictly refer to the Eastern part when we speak about the Byzantine Empire. And it is not wrong, because the vital forces of the Empire were concentrated in the East, it is just an incomplete vision. Today, the Eastern world of Byzantium lives another form of existence. Places where once lived Byzantines, where they build their monumental works that still produce vibrations deep into our souls are now integral parts of some Ottoman states, and the pagan domination has tarnished the beauty or even destroyed the Byzantine wonders. Therefore, in order to imagine the Byzantine world or to taste a little of the charm of old Byzantium, we must consider also Italy.

The work titled: Byzantium and Italy. The history of Byzantine domination in Italy from Justinian to Charlemagne, as a doctoral thesis under the guidance of Pr. Prof. Dr. Ioan Vasile Leb aims to explore an important segment of Byzantine history, profoundly neglected in the Romanian specialist literature, a period with an outstanding role in the history and construction of Europe.

Even if the work was conceived as a unilateral one, focusing only on issues of history, this study has not neglected the theological issues in the era, and any elements of art and church architecture. In a bid to bring more details regarding this subject, were used studies from different areas such as numismatics, anthropology, literature, ethnology and linguistics. Also the geographical details were not forgotten, as indispensable to any study of history, details that were inserted in all parts of the work.

In accordance with the methodology of Byzantine history, I used Greek and Latin appointments, except for cases when there is a name in the Romanian language already naturalized.

The compositional structure of the work can distinguish four chapters, each with a stated theme, distinct, but it can be seen only in interdependence with other parts. Considering the fact that the biggest part of Emperor Justinian (527-565) life and work was marked by restoring the old Roman Empire, we considered appropriate to dedicate the first chapter exclusively to relations between Constantinople and *pars Occidentis*, in the period mentioned above. After introducing the military expeditions in Africa, Italy and Spain, it was detailed the situation in Italy during the Byzantine administration. The church matters were not neglected church, the first chapter ends by presenting a very tense episode of Rome and Constantinople: the Schism of the three chapters.

The second chapter presents the situation of Italy, under imperial domination, during the invasion of Lombards. After an introduction about the origin of Lombards and the conditions of their coming in Italy, were presented the relations between the four factors that have dominated the political, military and cultural life by the end of the sixth century Italy and early next century: Byzantine Empire, the papacy, the Lombards' kingdom and the independent and autonomous groups. Since during this we are witnessing to a growth of the papal power, starting with Pope Gregory the Great pontificate (590-604), is imperative to describe the relations between the Roman pope

and the imperial authority in Constantinople, which will exert an important influence upon Europe's life in that period.

In the eighth century the situation changed, the place of the Lombards' kingdom is being taken by a more powerful and better organized kingdom, which will give a serious blow to the Byzantine domination in Italy: Regnum Francorum. This is precisely the theme of the third chapter, this part shows us a Byzantine Empire attacked from all sides and unable to defend the great legacy of Emperor Justinian the Great. After an introduction to the era of Charlemagne, are presented the relations between the papacy and the two major political powers of the time: Byzantium, on one hand, and the Regnum Francorum on the other. Due to strained relations between Rome and Byzantium, largely generated by the problem of iconoclasm and Illyrians, the papacy and Constantinople will increase the differences and the first one will become closer to the kings of the Franks, which will bring profound changes in European life in the eighth century. After the defeat of the Lombards' kingdom in 774, the Byzantine Italy will be represented only by Calabria, Salento and Sicily.

However, the Byzantine world is still present in Italy today. Suffices to think to the San Marco church in Venice, or San Vitale in Ravenna, to show that Byzantine treasures have been preserved, better than anywhere else, in Italy. To complete the picture, the churches of San Apollinare in Classe and San Apollinare Il Nuovo in Ravenna are other real references. Then, many holy relics and many manuscripts and icons from all *pars Orientis* were taken on the West area, following the Crusades, and especially after the Ottoman conquest. This is the theme of the last chapter, which is showing that the biggest part of the Byzantine legacy was preserved in Italy. This is because the Italian area managed to best preserve the Byzantine treasure. The reason: Italy was less exposed to the pagan invasions than the Eastern area. Noteworthy the griko dialect, which is a special presence in the landscape of Italian dialect, idiom that resembles strikingly well with neo-Greek language, spoken today by about 54,000 Italians in Salento and Calabria, an important proof of the Byzantine survival in this part of the world.

So, who wants to know how it was the Byzantine world, must necessarily take into consideration Italy. The Byzantine treasures in Italy, whether we refer to the

architecture, or the language, are constant proof that this kingdom lasted more than a thousand years, and the Byzantism is not an archives' discipline, but a living organism.

With regard to the drafting of the paper, I considered that a careful examination of existing sources is highly necessary, without this analysis would be impossible to have a correct and complete vision about the subject.

As for the written sources, I primarily used the historical writings, the annals, and the chronicles published in *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* and *Annali d'Italia*, the last one written by Ludovico Antonio Muratori.

I also used the works of hagiography, without which, the Middle Ages, whether in the East or West of Europe, can not be conceived.

Legal sources composed of laws and diplomas, together with correspondence of emperors, popes and kings in the VI-IX centuries, published in collections *Patrologia Graeca* and *Patrologia Latina*, represent other written sources that give us valuable and precise information as regarding history of mentalities.

Of course, other mandatory references are the theological sources, whether we refer to the Treaties of Christian doctrine, whether we talk about the liturgical writings. This category also includes acts of the ecumenical councils and the local ones, recorded in the collection *Sacrorum Conciliorum* thanks Joannes Dominicus Mansi's work, and in *Histoire des Conciles* by Hefele and Leclercq scholarly endeavor.

One of the main sources used was the History of the wars, written by the Syrian Procopius of Caesarea, eyewitness of the fights of the Byzantines in Italy in the mid-sixth century. For this reason, the information recorded by Procopius in his historical work has an outstanding value. However, Procopius was careful to gather between the covers of Secret History, all the gossips from Constantinople, what severely denigrate the most important people of the Byzantine Empire in the first half of the sixth century, especially the imperial couple Justinian and Theodora. This study will use the information of the secret history, but only judged after the other writings of Procopius and other Byzantine writers.

For military details of this period, the *Strategikon* of the Emperor Mauritius and *Epitoma rei militaris* of Flavius Vegetius Renatus, proved to be indispensable. Another valuable document of the period of Justinian, used in this study is the imperial edict *Pragmatica sanctio* or *De Metaxa*, promulgated by the Emperor of Constantinople on 13 August 554, which established the legal Byzantine domination in Italy. Although often challenged, the Chronograph by Theophanous, Byzantine chronicler born in Constantinople, it is the main source for the Byzantium world during the VII and VIII centuries. The diaries of Marcellinus Comes are very important for the first half of the sixth century; the Illyrian was the Chancellor of Justinian and leaved behind a single work: Chronicon. The writer Victor Tununensis brings valuable information about the dispute sparked around the Three Chapters, thanks to his work *The chronograph*, a work which detailed presents the state of African theology in the mid-sixth century. *Liber Pontificalis* brings light in the life and work of the popes, giving us valuable information about the theological disputes of the Emperor Justinian the Great and the Roman Pontiffs. The references coming from *Historiae de vitis pontificum Romanorum* written by Anastasius Bibliothecarius are particularly valuable in this chapter. The theological writings or letters of Facundus bishop of Hermiana are also important, in addition to the information recorded by the North African chronicler Victor Tununensis, works that bring greater understanding regarding the African Church reaction to the religious policy of the emperor in Constantinople. *The History* of Agatias Scholasticus has proven to be particularly valuable, an Oriental from Asia Minor, a province that gave to the Byzantine civilization many doctors, architects and historians, and increased the well-being and prestige of the kingdom.

It would be impossible to conceive the Lombards' world without the witness of Paul Diaconu, a Lombard noble which stayed a long time at Charlemagne's court, after Italy was conquered by the Franks kingdom in 774. This work presents the Lombards' odyssey, which came, after several pilgrimages through Europe, in Italy, where they founded a powerful kingdom. In addition to the particularly important information about the Lombards, recorded in *Historia Langobardorum*, Paul Diaconu's work gives us valuable references about the Byzantine Empire, of Franks, but also about the papacy.

The pontificate of Gregory the Great is a special chapter in the history and construction of Europe, and his theological works, but also his letters, sent to the most



important spiritual leaders and politicians of the old continent, have been frequently cited in this study. To obtain better understanding of how Charlemagne's era, the main sources of this period are the works of Eginhardus, and to complete the picture chronicles aevi Carolini are also other required references.

To get a more accurate picture as regarding this subject, I used also unwritten sources of medieval history, such as numismatics, toponymy, epigraphic or archaeological. The importance of studying and using these sources is outstanding when we discussed the European Middle Ages.

In the Chapter works consulted I included several studies and articles, written in Italian, English, Greek, French, Spanish, but also Romanian studies that come to give more details on the issue addressed. For this category, I paid attention to Italian literature, literature often neglected by the Romanian historiography. Thus, in this category were included works that bear the signature of Italian Byzantine historians and scholars of the past such as Cesare Balbo, Giuseppe Cappelletti, Francesco di Manzano, Jean Charles Sismondi, and the latest times as Alessandro Barbero, Giulio D 'Onofrio, R. Cess, Claudio Rendina, Luigi Salvatorelli, Indro Montanelli, Roberto Gervaso, Ravegnani Giorgio, Nicola Bergamo and many, many others. To complete the picture I used historical articles of British, American, French and Greeks from magazines such as The English Historical Review, Speculum, Cambridge Medieval History, Dumbarton Oaks Papers, Dumbarton Oaks Research, Journal of the American Oriental Society, Historical Essays, The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians. Among the writers are worth mentioning: John Meyendorff, M. V. Anastos, Robert P. Bergman, Norman H. Baynes, Francois Dvornik and Dimitri Oblensky. Of course, the list could be much longer.

It would have been impossible to not be investigated also the works of the great Romanian historian, even if they do not closely approach the subject, have valuable information recorded. I would like to especially remember Nicolae Iorga, Gheorghe I. Brăteanu, Nicolae Bănescu, Stelian Brezeanu or Emanoil Băbuş.

As was natural, the latest research on Byzantine Italy belong to the Italian historiography, both in appearances and in volume but also in articles published in professional journals such as Πορφύρα, Τάγματα, Basileia and Ravennantica.

I would say that one of the reasons I chose this topic is a passion for Byzantine history and spirituality and love for Italian culture and civilization. The second reason behind the preparation of this work is to make a small contribution, as far as possible, in the Byzantism field, addressing a new topic. I chose this topic in an effort to make known the Western world of the Byzantine Empire, an empire that survived for eleven centuries between East and West, resisting the blows and it met mission both to history and civilization.

Due to cultural openness we enjoy in the last decades, we have learned not to see the Byzantium as Dark Ages, who lived a *storia dei secoli bui*. The Byzantium from the latter discovers, although bright and luxurious, does not look like a kingdom of high social statutes, but rather as a depth and structure of the foundations, without which Europe can not be conceived in the third millennium.

However, for centuries, to the Christian kingdom have been applied, with malice and injustice, all kinds of labels, with pejorative inscriptions, forgetting that Byzantine people always known how to read and write, to promulgate laws, to build churches to create unique and timeless works. Works created by the Byzantine writers are always beautiful and exciting, able to produce profound echoes in the hearts of people today.

Given the above, this study aims to explore an important segment of the history and construction of Europe, showing a less known side of the Roman Empire, namely the West. Even if it didn't have the strength of the Eastern Byzantine Empire, the Western world has managed to remain in history especially with longevity, as in the parts of the Levant, the kingdom has long been banished by the pagans.

Studying these aspects of Byzantine history, it is absolutely necessary today, when East and West Europe are closer and closer, due to the EU context, the Orthodox peoples on the old continent have been acknowledged and their European vocation accepted. A better understanding of the idea of European history, history of mentalities and behaviors, would show in a different way the relations between the Europeans.

I consider this work a starting point as regarding the need to study these aspects of Byzantine history, but without claiming that we have exhausted all aspects of this subject, this can be structured in the future as theme that can and should be detailed treated.

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