

Vedran Bileta

**ON THE FRINGES OF THE SHRINKING EMPIRE:  
THE MILITARIZATION OF ADMINISTRATION  
AND SOCIETY IN BYZANTINE HISTRIA**

MA Thesis in Medieval Studies

Central European University

Budapest

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by

Vedran Bileta

(Croatia)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,  
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the Master of Arts degree in Medieval Studies  
Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU

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Chair, Examination Committee

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Thesis Supervisor

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Examiner

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I, the undersigned, **Vedran Bileta**, candidate for the MA degree in Medieval Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, 25 May 2010

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Signature

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDI	<i>Codice Diplomatico Istriano</i> . Ed. Pietro Kandler. Trieste: Lloyd Adriatico, (reprint) 1986.
CJC	<i>Corpus Iuris Civilis</i> , II. <i>Codex Iustinianus</i> , ed. P. Krueger.
HL	Diaconus Paulus. <i>Historia Langobardorum</i> . Ed. L. Bethmann and G. Waitz, MGH, SRL, 12-187.
LP	<i>Le Liber Pontificalis</i> , texte, introduction. Ed. L. Duchesne, 3 vols. Paris 1886-1957.
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum</i> , saec. VI-IX. Hannover, 1878.
PIB	<i>Prosopografia dell'Italia bizantina</i> . Ed. S. Cosentino. Vol. 1 Bologna: Lo Scarabeo. 1996, Vol. 2 Bologna: Lo Scarabeo, 2000.
PLRE	<i>Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i> , Ed. A. H. M Jones, J. R Martindale and J. Morris, I, Cambridge, 1971. II Cambridge, 1979
PS	<i>Sanctio Pragmatica pro petitione Vigilii</i> , CJC, II, 797-802.
ZRVI	<i>Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta</i> . Beograd: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, 1951-.

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## Introduction

In the autumn of 554 the Byzantine commander Narses won an overwhelming victory over the last serious opposition to the imperial forces in Italy, thus effectively reinstating Byzantine rule over the peninsula. To a contemporary observer it seemed that Justinian's dream of a *restauratio imperii* was only a matter of time. Less than two centuries later, in 751, the Lombards occupied Ravenna, ending the exarchate. In 800, Charlemagne was crowned emperor in Rome and by this act most of Italy was forever lost to Byzantium.

The two and half centuries that passed between Narses' victory and Charlemagne's coronation are usually regarded as the darkest in the history of medieval Italy. However, this scholarly *terra incognita* was a period characterized by a dramatic transformation. In 554, the entire peninsula was still inhabited by a Late Roman society, led by powerful senatorial class, and characterized by a neat separation between military and civil powers. By 751, the senatorial class had long disappeared and been replaced by a landed military aristocracy who ruled the fragmented imperial territory, fighting not in the name of the empire, but to protect their own lands.

One of these lands was Histria, a small province situated in the northern Adriatic.<sup>1</sup> Like the rest of Byzantine Italy, Histria underwent a thorough metamorphosis that changed not only its administration and society, but also the very landscape. If a first century Roman citizen could have traveled through time to the eighth century, he would not have recognizes his surroundings. The large cities governed by the *curia* and open lowland settlements were replaced with a network of forts and fortified settlements situated on hilltops or islands, ruled

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<sup>1</sup> To avoid confusion between modern Istria, which at present denotes the Istrian peninsula, or a modern political unit, the county of Istria; I will use a historical term – Histria. Historical Histria encompassed larger territory than the present one, and during the Byzantine period is often mentioned in documents as *provincia Histria*. It is also important to note here that for the entire Roman and the early Byzantine period Histria was part of a larger administrative unit called *Venetia et Histria*. This thesis will predominantly describe events and patterns characteristic of Histria, although Venetia will also be mentioned.

by military generals, while Classical cities had retreated within their walls, with large parts falling into decay. The province that had once been a part of the imperial heartland, far from conflicts, was now a besieged fortress, the imperial periphery, which experienced constant warfare.

However, unlike rest of the exarchate, Histria remained a part of the empire even after the fall of Ravenna, in 751, up to the Frankish conquest at the end of the eighth century. On the eve of the Frankish conquest, Histrian society still possessed its particular Byzantine character and continued to maintain strong connections with Constantinople. The main aim of this thesis is to show how and how much the society of Byzantine Histria was altered by two hundred years of constant warfare and to what extent it remained “Byzantine.” To answer this I will examine two concepts that characterized the development of the society: *castrization* and *militarization*.

**Militarization** is the process by which a society organizes itself in preparation for military conflict in a situation of increased insecurity, usually on the frontier. Mobilization of human, technological, and economic resources is the active preparation for war. Due to extraordinary conditions, it involves many interrelated aspects that encompass all levels of society. In such a society, all available resources are subdued to the military needs. One almost inevitable result is the privatisation of power and authority in the hands of a military élite, followed by the creation of a privileged military political structure. The difference between military and civil official is blurred, and the head of the state is at the same time the supreme commander of the army. Although the origins of militarization in the Roman Empire can be traced to the fourth century, the militarization process in Histria started only after its reincorporation to the Justinianic Empire, with the Lombard invasion in 568.

The process of militarization was followed, or better to say accompanied, by **castrization**.<sup>2</sup> Castrization is a process often identified with *incastellamento*.<sup>3</sup> Both of these processes are characterized by the creation of forts and fortified hilltop settlements. However, there is one crucial difference. *Incastellamento* refers to a planned process started from above, beginning in the ninth century, when the feudal kingdoms of Europe became dotted with the castles and fortresses of feudal lords.<sup>4</sup> *Castrization*, however, was a process initiated from below, stretching from the sixth to the eighth century, although its origins can be noted in the late fifth century.<sup>5</sup> During times of increased insecurity people abandoned the cities and villages in the valleys and spontaneously moved to more secure hilltops, where they built fortified villages (Lat. *castra*), usually on the locations of abandoned prehistoric settlements. In the face of constant and present danger and the lack of a military presence – the troops were deployed elsewhere along the vulnerable imperial borders – the *castra* were organized into a strategically positioned network, based on the defense-in-depth.

However, it is difficult to research those developments out of context. That is the reason why the first chapter deals with the geographical and historical framework. This short survey of the geographical area of Histria was done to aid the reader in locating the places described in the thesis and also to establish settlement patterns. There is also a short overview of the administrative division of the region, with an elaboration of important problems related

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<sup>2</sup> For similar process happening in the East see: A. Dunn. "The Transition from *polis* to *kastron* in the Balkans (III-VII cc.): General and Regional Perspectives." *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 14 (1994): 60-80.

<sup>3</sup> For debate, see R. Frankovich, R. Hodges, *Villa to Village: the Transformation of the Roman countryside in Italy, c. 400-1000* (London: Duckworth, 2003), 13-26. Note that although *incastellamento* is mentioned as a historical process, no one denoted the other process (castrization). Sadly, although the book deals with Italy, Histria is not mentioned.

<sup>4</sup> For more about *incastellamento* in northern Italy, see C. Wickham, *The Mountains and the City. The Tuscan Apennines in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); for the south, see B. M. Kreutz, *Before the Normans: Southern Italy in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> B. Kuntić-Makvić, "Populacija i kontinuitet pri smjeni civilizacija. Primjeri s izmaka antike" [Population and continuity in Change of Civilisations. Examples from the End of Antiquity] *Etničnost i povijest*, ed. E. Heršak (Zagreb: Naklada Jesenski i Turk, 1999), 83; For a general overview of the castrization process in Histria, see Maurizio Levak *Kastrizacija u Istri* [The Process of Castrization in Istria], PhD dissertation, Zagreb, 2009. This work established *castrization* as a historical concept. See also M. Suić, *Antički grad na istočnoj obali Jadrana* [An antique city on the eastern Coast of the Adriatic] (Zagreb: Golden Marketing), 2003, 358.

to the field, such as the question of the territorial extension of Byzantine Histria after the Lombard invasion. In order to establish the historical framework, a number of historical sequences are presented, based mainly on military events that had great importance for the area of Byzantine Histria. Yet, one may note that these events fit into a broader picture of events happening in the entire empire. Two particular problems are emphasized, Slavic settlement in Histria and the question of the Lombard and Frankish occupation of the province.

The second chapter introduces and analyses the creation of Histria's fortified landscape, which was a consequence of the process of militarization. A short overview of the conditions from the Roman period is given in order to explain the background of the process of castrization. Rural and frontier defenses are fully considered, particularly in the context of Byzantino-Lombard conflicts and the Avaro-Slavic invasion. By studying the origin of the fortification process and the settlement patterns, I will try to determine the influence of barbarian raids on change.

The third chapter deals with the transformation of Late Roman society – predominantly urban – to an increasingly militarized society. It also addresses questions of the military organization of the province, the status that military had in provincial society, their origins and social backgrounds; it also examines the province's ties to Ravenna and the central government in Constantinople.

As far as secondary literature is concerned, for a long time the scholars have largely ignored the Byzantine element in the historical development of medieval Italy. As a result, until the 1960s, detailed studies of the social and administrative development of the Exarchate were largely the domain of Byzantine historians such as Charles Diehl or social historians as Ludo Hartmann.<sup>6</sup> Both of them concentrated on the administration and postulated a general

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Diehl, *Etudes sur l'administration byzantine dans l'exarchat de Ravenne* (Paris, 1888); Ludo Hartmann, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der byzantinischen Verwaltung in Italien* (Leipzig, 1889).

militarization associated with the creation of the exarch as the supreme commander. However, both scholars were less convincing in portraying the realities of local political and economic power which was reflected in the emergence of the local military élite. Despite these weaknesses, Diehl's and Hartmann's works created a framework for this new field of study, and they can still be used as authorities for some elements of the Exarchate of Ravenna. It is difficult to explain why there was such a gap in scholarship between the end of the nineteenth century and the second half of the twentieth. One may only assume that Italian scholars felt more at home examining Lombard areas of the peninsula and that they probably regarded the exarchate as alien, a colonial type of government. A notable exception in the neglect of Byzantine Italy has been the work of Andre Guillou, a French scholar, who published a study on regionalism and independence of the exarchate in 1969.<sup>7</sup> He argued for the uniqueness of Imperial Italy and the influence that the local élite had on its autonomy from Constantinople. His work was complemented by Thomas Brown who, in his seminal study, analyzed the social development of the exarchate's military élite, making considerable use of the interdisciplinary approach.<sup>8</sup> His work summarized all the previous studies and became the handbook for further studies about the exarchate. In the last decades, historiography has been marked by the appearance of interdisciplinary works about Byzantine Italy and about regional contributions to the social and administrative developments in the exarchate.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Andre Guillou, *Régionalisme et indépendance dans l'Empire byzantin au VIIe siècle* (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 1969).

<sup>8</sup> Thomas S. Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers: Imperial Administration and Aristocratic Power in Byzantine Italy AD 554-800*. (Rome: British School at Rome, 1984). This study can be seen as a milestone in research on Exarchate as besides written sources, Brown used archeological research, numismatics, inscriptions, and seals.

<sup>9</sup> Enrico Zanini, *Le Italie bizantine: territorio, insediamenti ed economia nella provincia bizantina d'Italia (VI-VIII secolo)* (Bari: Edipuglia, 1998); Niel Christie, *From Constantine to Charlemagne: An Archeology of Italy, AD 300-80* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006). However there is only one general overview of Byzantine Italy, recently published, Salvatore Cosentino, *Storia dell'Italia Bizantina (VI-XI secolo)* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2009). Also it is important to mention a second volume of the History of Ravenna, *Storia di Ravenna, II, Dall'età bizantina all'età ottoniana*, ed. A.Carile (Venice: Marsilio Ed, 1991). This work contains two important articles related to the history of the Exarchate, both written by Jadran Ferluga, A general overview of the history of the Exarchate "L'esarcato," and a work on military organization "L'organizzazione militare dell'esarcato."

Although they deal with Byzantine Italy in general, all these works are quite useful for the topic of this thesis: the militarization of Byzantine Histria. One of the reasons for this is the lack of significant works written on Histria. For a number of objective and subjective reasons, the early Middle Ages are the least researched period in Istrian history. The main problem for every researcher who tries to deal with this topic is the scarcity of primary documentary sources and often quite large gaps between them. The first important work is Bernardo Benussi's monumental work about the medieval history of Istria, which includes history of Byzantine Histria – *Nel medio evo*. He was followed by a number of scholars who concentrated mainly on administrative history, like Giovanni de Vergotinni and Ramiro Udina.<sup>10</sup> Although compared to recent developments in Byzantine historiography these works have become obsolete, some of the ideas can still be used in research. During the second half of the twentieth century Ferluga and Margetić made important contributions to legal and administrative history and Branko Marušić made a breakthrough in Byzantine archeology.<sup>11</sup> However, the most recent contribution, and probably one of the most significant in the entire history of Byzantine Histria, is Maurizio Levak's "Kastrizacija u Istri" [The Process of Castrization in Istria], a still-unpublished PhD dissertation. This work alone was of great help in the writing of this thesis.

The sources here are grouped in three categories. The first is a group that contains historiographical works, chronicles, and letters. Of the historians writing in the eastern part of the empire only Procopius mentioned events in Italy in considerable detail, particularly those related to the Gothic war. In addition, I used a number of sources written in the West. *Historia Langobardorum* of Paul the Deacon includes material on the relations between the Lombards

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<sup>10</sup> Bernardo Benussi, *Nel medio evo. Pagine di storia istriana* (Trieste: Tipografia Adriatica, 2004), 3<sup>rd</sup> reprint (1897); Giovanni de Vergotinni, *Lineamenti storici della costituzione politica dell'Istria durante il Medio evo*, (Rome, 1924).

<sup>11</sup> The number of contributions by these three scholars is vast: it is thoroughly described in following chapters.



and the empire, among them a few references to Histria.<sup>12</sup> For the seventh and particularly the eighth century, the main source is the *Liber Pontificalis*, a collection of biographies of popes which includes valuable information on the period in focus here.<sup>13</sup> I also used the *Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis*, a series of biographies of the prelates of Ravenna composed by Agnellus in the 840s, which also includes a collection of earlier sources related to imperial and ecclesiastical politics, particularly pertaining to the church of Ravenna.<sup>14</sup> Letters of popes, particularly of Gregory I (590-604), include correspondence dealing with a wide range of political, economic, and ecclesiastical issues. Of particular interest are letters mentioning Avaro-Slavic attacks on the peninsula, which contain valuable information about the Byzantine army of that period.<sup>15</sup> A number of letters describe the situation in late sixth-century Histria, and contain information about the local *magistri militum*, such as Gulfaris. The *Strategikon*, a military manual written during the reign of emperor Maurice, serves as a key source for different aspects of the Byzantine provincial army.<sup>16</sup> The eleventh book is of particular importance, because it has an ethnographic focus, portraying various enemies of the Byzantine state (Franks, Lombards, Avars, Slavs).

The second group of sources is a selection of legal acts. The fifth-century *Notitia Dignitatum* is an invaluable source which details the administrative organization of the eastern and western empires, listing several thousand offices from the imperial court down to

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<sup>12</sup> Diaconus Paulus, *Historia Langobardorum*, ed. L. Bethman and G. Waitz, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum*. Saec. VI-IX (Hannoverae, 1878). Paul's work preserved a number of sources which are now lost.

<sup>13</sup> *Le Liber Pontificalis*, ed. L. Duchesne, 3 vols (Paris, 1886-1957).

<sup>14</sup> Agnellus, *Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis*, ed. ed. O. Holder-Egger. *Monumenta Germaniae historica*. Hannover, 1878.

<sup>15</sup> Gregorii Magni, *Registrum Epistolarum*, ed. P. Ewald and L. M. Hartmann, 2 vols, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, Ep. II. (Berlin, 1887-1889).

<sup>16</sup> Mauricius, *Maurice's Strategikon*, ed. G. T. Dennis (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984).

the provincial level.<sup>17</sup> The *Pragmatic Sanction* of 554 provides the sole insight into provincial administration after its incorporation into the Justinianic empire.<sup>18</sup>

As this is an interdisciplinary thesis, I also used prosopographical sources: *Prosopografia dell' Italia Bizantina* and *Prosopography of the Late Roman Empire*.<sup>19</sup> They form a third group of sources.

The reconstruction of society in Histria during Byzantine rule is a difficult task for a historian, mostly due to the scarcity of documentary sources, which contain only few references or, sometimes, only a sentence related to Byzantine Histria. However, as Histria was a part of the Exarchate of Ravenna, it is possible to fill the gaps – partially – by using data related to Byzantine Italy in general.

However, there is one document originating from Histria, without which this thesis would not be possible. It is not only important for Byzantine Histria, but also for the socio-administrative developments in the Exarchate and in the Byzantine Empire in general. This is the *Placitum Risani*, a document that describes a *placitum* (assembly) which was held close to the Rižana River (in modern Slovenia) in 804.<sup>20</sup> On this occasion imperial *missi* were sent by the imperial authority of Charlemagne and king Pippin to regulate the difficult situation in the recently conquered province of Histria, where the local élite lamented the abuses of the Frankish *dux*. The uniqueness of this document lies in the comparison between the Frankish and the traditional Romano-Byzantine system and the vast amount of information which arises from the process. They give an invaluable view of the transformation of the provincial military élite, which is the focus of this thesis.

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<sup>17</sup> *Notitia dignitatum: accedunt Notitia urbis Constantinopolitanae et Laterculi provinciarum*, ed. and tr. Otto Seeck, (Berlin, 1876).

<sup>18</sup> The text of *Pragmatica sanctio* can be found in *Corpus Iuris Civilis* II, *Codex Iustinianus*, ed. P. Krueger, 10th ed. (Berlin, 1929).

<sup>19</sup> *Prosopografia dell'Italia bizantina*, ed. Salvatore Cosentino, I (Bologna: Lo Scarabeo, 1996), II (Torino: Lo Scarabeo, 2000); *Prosopography of the Late Roman Empire*, ed. A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale and J. Morris, I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

<sup>20</sup> The original document from 804 is lost, however, the text is preserved in number of transcripts. Here I will use the edited version that can be found in Pietro Kandler, *Codice Diplomatico Istriano*, I, 54, 111-115 (Trieste Trieste, Lloyd Adriatico, 1862-1865. Reprint: Trieste: Societa di Minerva, 1986).

## I. From Byzantines to the Franks

### ***Caput Adriae* – The geographical setting of Histria**

The area of ancient Histria is today shared by three countries: Croatia, Slovenia, and Italy.

However, during the Byzantine rule it was an integral part of the empire, playing an important role in imperial politics in the Adriatic region. The Istrian Peninsula, situated on the northwest of the Adriatic Sea (Fig. 1), made up the largest part of the Byzantine province of Histria. It is the largest Adriatic peninsula. According to the geological and geomorphologic structure, the peninsula can be divided into three completely different areas.

The hilly northern and north-eastern part of the peninsula, due to its scarce vegetation and nude karst limestone surfaces is also known as White Istria. It is dominated by two mountain ranges, Učka in the northwest and Ćićarija in the north, which protects the peninsula from the mainland side. Their favourable strategic position was used by both the Roman and Byzantine administrations to create a defensive zone that barred the entrance to the invaders, reinforced by a chain of fortresses. Besides being the ideal natural defence, the region abounds in caves, which served as temporary refuges for the population in time of danger.

South-west of White Istria stretches an area that is considerably richer geomorphologically. These are the lower flisch mountainous tracts called Grey Istria; they consist of impermeable marl, clay, and sandstone, which are better substrates than limestone for arable soils. Rolling hills overlook the fields and valleys and their peaks were used from prehistoric times as ideal sites for the construction of hilltop fortresses, many of which were later reused as Byzantine *castra*.

The limestone terrace along the coastline, covered with red earth, is called Red Istria. It is a lowland area with a few low hills. This territory encompasses the most fertile lands of

the peninsula, the territory of ancient *agri* of all three Roman colonies, Pola, Parentium, and Tergeste.

Most of the Istrian coast is on the karst (limestone). Karst landforms are created when the calcium carbonate that makes up most of the rock dissolves. The remaining sediment then sinks; isolated less soluble limestone heights remained as islands. The coast is well developed with many fairly shallow bays, small deep bays, and river mouths. Through the Roman and Byzantine period they were used as trade ports and military harbors, situated on the seaway from Constantinople to Ravenna. Unlike the eastern coast, the western coast does not abound in islands. Except for a series of small islets along the coast from Poreč to Rovinj, only the Brijuni archipelago stands to the south.

Thanks to impermeable flisch layers, Istrian peninsula has useful water resources. The most significant surface water flows in the region are the Mirna and Raša rivers. The Mirna River is the longest and the deepest river on the peninsula. It is 53 km long, it rises near Buzet (ancient Pinguentum), and it empties into the Adriatic Sea near Novigrad (Neapolis). The Raša River is 23 km long, it rises in Čepićko Polje and empties into Raša Bay. Because its strategic position, Raša was used as the eastern border of Histria until the seventh century.

Besides the peninsula, for most of the Byzantine period Histria was comprised of the lowland area that extends from Tergeste on the west and follows the Adriatic coastline to the Bay of Panzano, near Grado. From there on, Lombard territory divided Histria from the Venetian lagoon.

### **From the center to the periphery – the political and administrative border of the Roman and Byzantine Histria**

From the administrative point of view, the region of Histria was incorporated into Roman Italy under the emperor Octavian Augustus in the first century AD as the part of *Regio X*

*Venetia et Histria* (Fig. 2), which was an administrative unit without its own governmental body. With inclusion in *Regio X*, Histria became a core land of the empire. The territory of the *Regio X* extended from the Oglio River in the west to the foothills of the Alps on the north and the Raša River, which became the eastern border of Histria.

The Augustan administrative division remained unchanged until the late third century, when, as part of Diocletian's administrative reform, *Regio X* became the province *Venetia et Histria* with its center in Aquileia. The prevailing opinion is that the eastern border of the province remained at Raša until the fifth century.<sup>21</sup> The administrative unity of *Venetia et Histria* was broken for a short time during Ostrogothic rule, but the *Pragmatica Sanctio* of Justinian again reinstated the old province (Fig. 3).<sup>22</sup>

Great changes happened to the borders, and even with the term Histria, following the Lombard invasion of Italy in 568. *Provincia Venetiarum et Histriae* was broken in two; the mainland part of old *Venetia* came under Lombard rule, while coastal *Venetia* and the whole Istrian peninsula remained Byzantine (Fig. 4).<sup>23</sup> It seems that the Lombard part was called *Venetia*, with the center in Forum Iulii, while the Byzantine possessions on the coast were altogether called *Histria*, with a center in Pola. One of the pieces of evidence for such a hypothesis is a letter of pope Gregory I from 595, written to *Petro et Providentio episcopis de Histria*.<sup>24</sup> Peter was the bishop of Altinum, as can be seen from Paul Diaconus' writings.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> For more on border of Histria with province of Liburnia see J. Medini, "Provincia Liburnia," *Diadora* 9, (1980): 386-389; Margetić, "Neka pitanja u vezi s Istrom" [Some questions related to Istria] *Živa Antika* 32 (1982): 53-82; Also see M. Levak, "Kastrizacija u Istri" [The castrization process in Istria], PhD dissertation, University of Zagreb, 2009, 10-11. Some historians have argued that the border was moved further east earlier, during the second century. Benussi, *Nel medio evo. Pagine di storia istriana* (Trieste: Tipografia Adriatica, 2004), 3<sup>rd</sup> reprint., 56-63; A. Degrassi, *Il confine nord-orientale dell' Italia romana* (Bern: AG. Verlag, 1954), 101-109, 126-131, 152-155. These scholars have argued that the moving of border eastwards was a result of the establishment of the *Praetentura Italiae*. However, as Levak points out, during the Roman period the civil and military administration were separated, and the border of the military district (in this case the *Praetentura*) did not overlap with administrative ones. For more, see A. Starac, *Rimsko vladanje u Istriji i Liburniji*, [Roman government in Histria and Liburnia] Vol. 2, (Pula: Arheološki muzej Istre, 2000), 39, 67. About the *Praetentura* see Chapter Two.

<sup>22</sup> About reinstatement of the old Roman province, see in J. Ferluga, "L'Istria tra Giustiniano e Carlo Magno", *Arheološki vestnik* 43 (1992): 175-176.

<sup>23</sup> Ferluga, *L'esarcato*, 361.

<sup>24</sup> For the source see in *MGH*, Ep., V, 56.

This suggests that at the end of the sixth century, Histria's western border extended as far as Altinum. Also, in a letter to Gregory I from 591, emperor Maurice complains about the aggressive papal behavior towards *episcopi Istriensum provinciarum*. Among the bishops mentioned is the patriarch of Aquileia, Severus, who had his seat in Grado. Thus it seems that emperor Maurice used the term *Istriensum provincium* to refer to the remains of the old province of *Venetia et Histria*, which were still under Byzantine control. All of the Byzantine territory was under rule of the *magister militum Histriae*.<sup>26</sup>

The reason for the administrative unity of all of the Byzantine possessions was probably the absence of a strong center in the coastal part of Venetia, which was necessary to resist Lombard attacks effectively. Maritime communication was safe, as the Lombards did not have a navy, and made it possible to maintain the connection with Pola and other cities on the Istrian peninsula.

It is possible that the province of Venetia was restored after the establishment of Heracliana in 628.<sup>27</sup> An inscription from Torcello, dated 639, mentions the *magister militum Venetiarum*.<sup>28</sup> If not in the 630s, then certainly this division happened in 726-727, when, after the rebellion against Byzantine government, cities of the Venetian lagoon founded the duchy of Venetia, led by the *dux* of Venice, the future doge. From then on, Byzantine Histria encompassed the territory comprised mainly from territory around Grado and of the Istrian peninsula, organized as a duchy of Histria (Fig. 5).<sup>29</sup>

The eastern border of Histria also experienced significant changes during the early seventh century. Among the municipalities mentioned in the *Placitum Risani* one finds Alvona, a town situated on left bank of the Raša River. In a state of increased insecurity, and

<sup>25</sup> *HL*, III, 26.

<sup>26</sup> His position will be further elaborated in Chapter Three.

<sup>27</sup> Heracliana was established and named in honor of the victory of emperor Heraclius against the Persians. However, Brown argued that the city was founded at much later date, see in Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 149.

<sup>28</sup> More will be said about the significance of the inscription in Chapter Three.

<sup>29</sup> Ferluga, "L'organizzazione militare dell'esarcato," in *Storia di Ravenna*, II, *Dall'età bizantina all'età ottoniana*, ed. A.Carile, (Venezia: Marsilio Ed, 1991), 381.

to effectively counter the Avaro-Slavic attacks, it was logical for the defenders to position the border on easily defensible mountain range, rather than leave it on the river flowing through the valley. Thus, the Byzantines moved the border from Raša to the mountain range of Učka. However, Slav settlement during the seventh century, moved the “real” Byzantine border to the cities on the coast.

Thus, at the end of antiquity the term “provincia Histria” indicated, besides a coastal strip extending from Grado to Tergeste, the territory around the coastal cities on the Istrian peninsula. With the integration of the Slavs into Byzantine society the border was moved again, to the mountain ranges of Učka and Ćićarija, and this was the situation until Histria’s takeover by the Franks around 788.

### **On the edge of Justinian’s *Restauratio Imperii***

As said above, from the reign of Augustus, Histria was included in the imperial core lands as a part of Roman Italy. The favourable geographical position spared it the fate of rest of the Northern Italy during the troublesome period of the fifth and sixth centuries. During the brief Ostrogothic period Histria still enjoyed considerable prosperity. Even the wars of the Justinianic reconquista that ultimately ruined Italy barely touched Histria.<sup>30</sup> But it would be a mistake to say that Histria was not affected by Justinian’s war operations. Although it was not a primary theater of operations, the region played an important role in the conflict, coming under Byzantine rule in first years of the war. Here I will give a short overview of two hundred years of Byzantine rule over the province from the Justinian reconquista to its fall to the Franks.

While Belisarius landed in Sicily with a major part of the Byzantine forces, his general, Constantius, attacked the Gothic possessions in Illyricum and in 535 occupied

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<sup>30</sup> For an overview of the Gothic war in the Northern Italy, see A. Carile, “Il bellum Gothicum da Isonzo a Ravenna,” *Antichita Altoadriatiche* 13 (1978): 147-193.

Dalmatia and Liburnia, advancing towards Italy by land. In that year and for the next two years, Histria remained under Gothic rule, which is shown by the letter of *praefectus pretorium* Cassiodorus, who, in 536/37, following the fall of the grain-producing regions of Southern Italy, issued an order to the Ostrogoth subjects in Histria to supply Ravenna and contribute resources for the war effort.<sup>31</sup>

When Belisarius moved to besiege Ravenna in 539, Vitalian, the *magister militum per Illyricum*, received orders to move to Venetia with his troops, with the objective of occupying the left bank of the Po River, in this way cutting the supply line to Ravenna.<sup>32</sup> His troops were moving along the Adriatic coast, thus this must have been the time when the Byzantines conquered Histria, returning it to imperial rule.<sup>33</sup> The intact economy and infrastructure made Histria an ideal advance base for military operations in northern Italy, and the region became the assembly point for the reorganization of the troops who were preparing themselves for the next stage of the offensive.

However, following Belisarius' recall to Constantinople after the conquest of Ravenna in 540, the Ostrogoth army, reorganized under new leadership, started pushing the imperial troops out of Italy. Vitalian himself, defeated near Tarvisium (Treviso), withdrew with the majority of his troops to Dalmatia, leaving small garrisons to guard key points in Venetia and Histria.<sup>34</sup> This proved to be a clever decision, as it gave Byzantium a vital foothold which it could use in later operations.

To save the Byzantine war effort from complete collapse, Justinian once again sent Belisarius to Italy. This time, Belisarius did not disembark in Sicily, but choose Histria as his primary base of operations, closer to Ravenna than the forefront positions in Southern Italy. In 544 Belisarius landed in Pola, from where, after reorganization and re-supply, the Byzantine

<sup>31</sup> B. Benussi, *Nel medio evo*. See the source text in Cassiodorus, *Variae*, XII, 22, 24.

<sup>32</sup> Procopius, II, 28; Ravagnani, *I Bizantini e la guerra*, (Rome: Jouvence, 2004), 175.

<sup>33</sup> Procopius, II, 28, This was later elaborated by R. Udina, "Il Placito de Risano," *Archeografo Triestino* 45 (1932): 9; and B. Benussi, *Nel medio evo*, 3-4.

<sup>34</sup> Benussi, *Nel medio evo*, 4.



army moved towards Ravenna with a fleet.<sup>35</sup> But although an outstanding general, without adequate backing from Constantinople Belisarius could not defeat the Ostrogoths, and in 549 he was again recalled to the capital.

However, it was obvious that only total victory over the Ostrogoths would bring peace to Italy and stop the war that dragged on for more than a decade. Following Belisarius' unsuccessful expedition, the central government decided to undertake more energetic action. In the year 550 Justinian's cousin Germanus was appointed as commander-in-chief of the Italian expeditionary forces. According to Procopius, Germanus was so popular among the soldiers, that, hearing the news of his appointment, the survivors of the Italian campaign gathered in Histria, awaiting the commander's arrival.<sup>36</sup> Germanus assembled a great army, but just prior to his departure to Italy, he fell ill and died. With the death of one of his most competent commanders, Justinian gave control over Germanus' troops to the eunuch Narses, who, after assembling a large army numbering perhaps 20 000 soldiers, departed for Italy.<sup>37</sup> Since his army was the largest of the Italian campaign, the imperial fleet could not transport all these soldiers by sea, so the majority of Narses' army moved via land, first to Dalmatia and then to Histria, where, after reorganization, it moved forward to Venetia, and then to Ravenna itself. Given the full support of the court in Constantinople, Narses finally turned the tide of the Gothic war to the Byzantine side, defeating the Ostrogoth army near Busta Gallorum, and establishing imperial control over the whole of Italy.<sup>38</sup>

As a part of the Justinianic empire, Histria enjoyed its last Golden Age. The administration was reformed by the introduction of the *Pragmatica Sanctio*. Histria's cities

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<sup>35</sup> Procopius, BG, III, 10 *Da Salona solvit cum universa Classe Belisarius, et Polam applicuit; ubi aliquantum temporis posuit in componendo exercitu...Ravennam vero delatus cum universa classe*. See in Carile, *Il bellum Gothicum*, 171-172.

<sup>36</sup> Procopius, BG, III, 12.

<sup>37</sup> W. Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 61; Haldon speaks about 25 000 men, see in J. Haldon, *The Byzantine Wars*, (Charleston: History Press, 2008), 35.

<sup>38</sup> For an account about Battle of Tagina and its influences in the Byzantine Italy, see H. N. Roisl, "Totila und die Schlacht bei den Busta Gallorum, Ende Juni/Anfang Juli 552," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 30 (1981), 25-50.

were embellished by majestic imperial basilicas that could parallel those of Ravenna. More will be said about administrative and social changes of that period in the next chapter. However, soon after its reincorporation into the empire, Histria experienced the first troubles. In the year 568, a tribe of Lombards penetrated the imperial border, and broke into Northern Italy, occupying Aquileia and Forum Iulii (Cividale). For the first time since the Roman conquest of the province in 177 BC, Histria became a war zone and border outpost on the periphery of the Byzantine empire. During following decades the population of Histria experienced the horrors of war at first hand.

In 569 a detachment of the main Lombard army moved towards northern Histria, where they destroyed and sacked the city of Tergeste. However, when the Lombard army retreated, the Byzantine fleet was able to re-take the city and restore its fortifications.<sup>39</sup> In fear of further Lombard incursions, the nearby population fled to the island of Capris, where they founded a new town and named it in honor of the reigning emperor Justin II -- Justinopolis. Probably the same happened at ancient Emonia, further south, which was abandoned and replaced by Neapolis, a town that is mentioned in the Plea of Rižana as Civitas Nova.

The long siege of Pavia, which was captured in 572, and the period of anarchy that followed, briefly halted the Lombard advance and gave much needed respite to the Byzantine defenders. However, after the election of their new king, the Lombards renewed the offensive. Under leadership of Ewin, the *dux* of Trento, in the year 588 the Lombard army burst into Histria, sacking and plundering the countryside. After the forces led by the exarch of Ravenna defeated them, the Lombards withdrew, taking with them large sums of tribute.<sup>40</sup>

However, after the Lombard pressure relented, a new and more dangerous enemy appeared in Histria. Lombard descent into Italy had created a vacuum area in Pannonia, which

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<sup>39</sup> The Byzantine reoccupation can be proved by an inscription in which the Byzantine emperor Justin II is mentioned. See in Benussi, *Nel medio evo*, 10.

<sup>40</sup> Benussi, *Nel medio evo*, 14; *HL*, III, 26: *ad Histriam rex Authari exercitum misit, cui exercitui Ewin dux tridentus praeficit, qui post praedas et incendia facta pacem in annum unum, magnam pecuniam regi deluterunt.*

was exploited by Avars and Slavs, who after the conquest of Sirmium in 582, burst into the imperial territory. Although it is difficult to determine the exact date and place of the first Avaro-Slavic incursions into Histria, it seems that the invasion happened at the end of the sixth century, somewhere along the border area in the northern part of Histria. In the year 599, the joint Avaro-Slavic forces invaded Histria, as is recorded in the letters of pope Gregory I. It is possible that they endangered Histria's coastal cities, which triggered a response from Ravenna.<sup>41</sup> In a letter, pope Gregory congratulated exarch Callinicus for his victory over the Slavs, which means that the exarchate's army intervened and defeated the enemy.<sup>42</sup> The reason that the exarchate's army could act in Histria was the strengthening of Byzantine positions in the West following Maurice's victory over Persia in 590.<sup>43</sup>

However, the incursion of 599 was only a prelude to those that followed. The next year, the pope writes to bishop of Salona about Slav incursions into Italy through Histria's territory.<sup>44</sup> It can be supposed that locals, without help from Ravenna, withdrew to their *castra*, leaving the main routes undefended. Maurice's aggressive policy with the aim to restore Balkans and Italy back to the empire presented clear danger to his enemies. Thus, in year 602, the Avars and Slavs allied with the Lombards, attacked Histria. This time, Byzantine forces suffered a heavy defeat, although they eventually repelled the attack.<sup>45</sup> The death of emperor Maurice in 602, caused warming in relations between Byzantines and

<sup>41</sup> Marušić argued about the destruction of the basilica in Orsera, and the fall of Nesactium, situated close to Pola. See more in "Slavensko-avarski napadi na Istru u svjetlu arheološke građe," [Avaro-Slavic Attacks in Light of the Archeological Evidence] *Peristil* 2 (1957): 68-69. For the intervention of the exarch see Ferluga, *L'esarcato*, 360.

<sup>42</sup> *MGH*, Ep. IX, 154: *Gregorius Callinico Exarcho Italiae. Inter haec quod mihi de Sclavis victorias nuntiastis, magna me laetitia relevatum esse cognoscite, quod latores praesentium de Capritana insula unitati sanctae ecclesiae coniungi festinantes ad beatum Petrum apostolum principem ab excellentia vestra transmissi sunt.*

<sup>43</sup> *HL*, IV, 12. For Maurice's plans in the West and *divisio imperii* between his sons, see J. Moorhead, "Western Approaches (500-600)," in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire*, ed. J. Shepard (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 219-220. For renewal of the offensive in the Balkans, see M. Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 266.

<sup>44</sup> B. Marušić, *Istra u ranom srednjem vijeku* [The Early Medieval Istria] (Pula: Arheološki muzej Istre, 1960), 15; *MGH*, Ep. X, 154. Pope Gregory wrote in 600 that the Slavs *per Histriae aditum iam ad Italiam coeperunt*.

<sup>45</sup> *HL*, IV, 25, Paul Deacon wrote that *Langobardi cum Avaribus and Sclavis Histriae fines ingressi universa ignibus et rapinis vastarunt*. Although he did not mention places, by examination of the term *universa*, it can be assumed that entire peninsula was devastated. The Lombards attacked the north-western border, while Avars and Slaves attacked from the East. Thus, the Byzantine defenders were opposing not one, but two enemy armies.

barbarians. Maurice's successor Phocas (602-610) signed the truce with the Lombards in 603. The truce made possible for Phocas to transfer western troops to the endangered eastern front, which was under attack of the Persians. It seems that during his reign a large tribute guaranteed peace with the Avars and Slavs.<sup>46</sup> However, after Heraclius (610-641) became the emperor, the truce was broken and the attacks continued.

In 611, after devastating the Lombard's Friuli, Avars and Slavs attacked Histria again, inflicting perhaps the worst defeat since the beginning of the war on the defenders.<sup>47</sup> Probably this was the same year when Nesactium was destroyed.<sup>48</sup> The intensity of destruction can be explained by neglect of the defenses during Phocas' reign. The year 611 is also the last written record of a Slav attack in Histria. It can be assumed that their alliance ended after the crushing defeat of the Avaro-Slav forces in the siege of Constantinople in 612, with the Slavs leaving their Avar masters and settling in Byzantine territory.

Although it cannot be said with certainty when exactly the Slavs settled in Histria, it can be assumed that that before the Frankish conquest the Slavs became a permanent residents of the northern part of the peninsula in the area between the sources of the Rižana, Dragonja, and Mirna rivers in the environs of Pinguentum and in the zone north-east of the Raša. Relevant to this is the letter that pope John IV (640-642) sent to abbot Martin as his envoy to Histria and Dalmatia to ransom not only the prisoners who had fallen into the hands of the pagans, but also to secure the translation of relics of the saints from the troubled churches of Histria and Dalmatia to the safe haven in Rome. As Avaro-Slavic alliance had broken down almost thirty years earlier and the Lombards were Christians, these "pagans" can be identified

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<sup>46</sup> Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 43-45; also see the excellent study about relation between Phocas' Byzantium and Avars and Slavs: F. Barišić, "Car Foka i podunavski Avaro- Slaveni," [Emperor Phocas and the Danubian Avaro-Slavic Tribes] *ZRVI* 4 (1956): 73-86.

<sup>47</sup> *HL*, IV, 24, *Sclavi Histriam, interfecis militibus, lacrimabiliter depredati sunt*. As Paul mentioned *militibus*, it can be assumed that invaders encountered professional army. However, the place of battle is not mentioned. It is interesting here to note a reference from Benussi. In the time when he wrote his book, the late nineteenth century, a tradition existed among the local population living in the foothills of Učka Mountain about a great battle against Slavs in the distant past. Apparently, the battle was so bloody that slopes of the mountain were covered by corpses of dead soldiers. However, it seems that at present day the tradition does not exist anymore.

<sup>48</sup> For more about destruction of Nesactium see Chapter Two.

only with the Slavs. Moreover, personal papal involvement in the ransom of captives suggests that the local Byzantine government was not able to gather enough money, so they addressed a higher power for help, in this case, the pope. One may remember that the first half of the seventh century was a difficult time for Byzantines, not only in Italy, but in the whole empire. This is the time of Persian and, later, Arab attacks in the east, and increasing Lombard pressure in Italy. Thus, it can be safely assumed that without external help, the local forces in Histria could not hold the entire region, and concentrated mainly on holding the *castra* and the coastal cities, leaving the rest to the Slavs. As the hostility in Histria ended, a number of Slavs became part of in the military organization of the region, which can be seen in archeological finds. They were probably included in the *numerus Tergestinus*, a military district created in Northern Histria, with the aim of defending the most vulnerable territory of the province, the surroundings of Tergeste and the city itself.<sup>49</sup>

Having seen the extent of Slavic influence in Histria, it is important to address the problem of the Lombard conquest. Was there a Lombard conquest of Histria or not? This is the question that many scholars have tried to clarify, but no one has given a definite answer.<sup>50</sup> According to Ferluga, the evidence that many scholars relied on for the Lombard conquest in 751, the *Chronicum Salernitanum*, is a forgery.<sup>51</sup> The other important evidence for Lombard occupation of Histria is the letter of John, archbishop of Grado, to the pope Stephen III, dated to 771/772. In it the archbishop complains to the pope about misdeeds done by Lombards to

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<sup>49</sup> For more about the *numerus Tergestinus* see chapters Two and three. For the Slavs as the element in the Byzantine army see Ferluga, *L'organizzazione*, 382.

<sup>50</sup> There are different opinions about Lombard Rule over Histria, following the fall of the exarchate in 751. Benussi argued that Histria was till 774 Lombard, then Byzantine (*Nel medio evo*, 107); L. Hartmann, *Untersuchungen*, argued that Histria was Byzantine until 787; On the other hand Vergottini, supported the idea that Histria stayed under the Byzantine rule until 787, with the brief Lombard interlude around 751 and 774 (*Lineamenti*, 37). According to Ferluga the Lombard occupation is uncertain, however, the “Byzantine” Histria had strong autonomy after 751 (Ferluga, *Istria*, 181). argued that Histria stayed under the Byzantine rule until 788 when it was conquered by Franks. Such idea is supported by Margetić (*Neka pitanja*, 10).

<sup>51</sup> Ferluga, *Istria* 181-182, His opinion is also shared by Margetić, (*Neka pitanja*, 8).

his diocese.<sup>52</sup> The pope replied that help was on the way, thinking of Charlemagne, who had started a war with Lombards.<sup>53</sup> However, from available sources it cannot be concluded if Lombards occupied all of Histria or only a part, like the territory around Grado, which was, as argued above, part of the province. Although this question will remain open, taking in account that local forces in previous decades repelled all hostile forces including the joint Avaro-Slavic-Lombard attack in 602 and the strength of the network of *castra* on the peninsula, it can be supposed that they repelled even that last one, with Lombards conquering the lands around Grado and perhaps Tergeste. This may also explain the later Byzantine reconquest of the lost territories in 774, undertaken by local forces reinforced perhaps with Venetian troops as exarchate did not exist at that time and help from the capital would have been improbable.

Further evidence for a Byzantine presence in Histria is the letter from pope Hadrian I to Charlemagne, dated 776. In it, the pope complains about the brutal treatment of his envoy, bishop Maurice, who was sent to Histria, where he was captured by the locals and blinded, a typical Byzantine punishment.<sup>54</sup> The Byzantines described in the letter were not acting on emperor's order, but on their own initiative. Probably the local élite saw the unfortunate bishop as Charlemagne's spy who wanted to prepare the territory for a Frankish arrival. The seriousness of the situation can be seen from the papal request to Charlemagne for military intervention in Histria. By this time the society of Histria was probably divided on two parties, pro-Byzantine and pro-Frankish.

As with many other events related to late antique and early medieval Histria, the exact date of the fall of the province to the Franks is not known. One can say with certainty that Histria was Frankish in 791, when Charlemagne, in a letter to his wife, mentions that the *dux*

<sup>52</sup> MGH, *Ep III*, 713, 20 *Quod gens perfida Langobardorum sanctae nostrae ecclesiae invaserunt haereditam e ipsi saevissimi Langobardi pro iussione regis sui.*

<sup>53</sup> Papal response: MGH, *Ep III*, 714, 21 *iam prope est Dominus, ut arrogantiam ferocitatem deiciat.* For through analysis, see Margetić, Neka pitanja, 8-10.

<sup>54</sup> *CDI*, I, 45, 95: *Neffandissimi Graeci, qui ibidem in praedicto territorio residebant Histriense...zelo ducti tam predicti Greci quamque de ipsis Histriensibus, eius (Mauricii episcopi) oculos eruerunt, propontes ei, ut quasi ipsum territorium Histriense vestrae sublimi excellentiae tradere debuisset.* For blinding as a Byzantine punishment see H. Krahwinkler, *Friaul im Frühmittelalter*. (Wien - Köln - Weimar, 1992)144-145.

*Histriae* distinguished himself in battle against the Avars.<sup>55</sup> The year 788-789 was a time of open hostility between the Byzantines and Franks during battle for Benevento, so it seems that the Franks, after their victory over the Byzantines in Italy, obtained Histria “on the negotiating table” rather than by military occupation. There are no sources mentioning resistance in Histria. From the example of Venice, where the Franks tried an unsuccessful anti-Byzantine coup, it can be assumed that the pro-Frankish faction won, and almost two hundred years of Byzantine rule in Histria came to an end.

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<sup>55</sup> CDI, I, 47, 101: *Ill. Dux de Histria, ut dictum est nobis, ibidem bene fecit cum suis hominibus.*

## II. The Militarized Landscape of Roman and Byzantine Histria

### The development and transformation of the landscape of Roman Histria

One of the main features of the Roman Empire was that it was an empire of cities. As Haldon argues, the city, the *civitas* or *polis*, occupied a central role in the socioeconomic structure of Mediterranean society during the Roman period, as well as in the imperial administration.<sup>56</sup> The cities acted as the interface between central and local authorities in the empire; they were power bases of the imperial taxation system, centers of political, religious, and economic life, and the urban network in each region had generally been established upon its incorporation into the empire, conducted simultaneously with the process of Romanization.<sup>57</sup>

Following the conquest of Histria in 177 BC, the Romans established three cities on the western coast of the peninsula, which had all achieved the prestigious status of a Roman *colonia* by the time of Augustus: Colonia Pietas Iulia Pola (Pula), Colonia Iulia Parentium (Poreč) and Tergeste (Trieste).<sup>58</sup> According to the traditional Roman custom, the territory surrounding the colonies was centuriated, forming their respective *agri*, leaving the interior of the peninsula still inhabited by the indigenous population.<sup>59</sup>

The arrival of the Romans meant a change in Histria's landscape. The new cities were not built on existing prehistoric sites. Instead, the hill forts destroyed in clashes with the Romans were left in ruins as an example of the futility of resistance to the military might of

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<sup>56</sup> J. Haldon, *Byzantium* (Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2005), 141.

<sup>57</sup> More on process of Romanization in general in D. J. Mattingly, "Being Roman: Expressing Identity in a provincial setting," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 17 (2004), 5-26. For Romanization in Histria see R. Matijašić, *Gospodarstvo antičke Istre* [The Economy of Roman Istria] (Pula: Zavičajna naklada "Žakan Juri", 1998), 49-50; V. Girardi-Jurkić, "Prilog za sintezu povijesti Istre u rimsko doba" [Contribution to a Synthesis of Istrian History in Roman Times], *Izdanja HAD-a* 11, No. 1 (1987): 65-80.

<sup>58</sup> R. Matijašić, "L'Istria tra l'antichità classica e la tarda antichità," *Arheološki Vestnik* 48 (1997): 203-218; V. Girardi Jurkić, "Kontinuitet utvrđivanja u Istri" [The Continuity of Defence Construction in Istria], *Histria Antiqua* 6 (2000): 12-13.

<sup>59</sup> The centurization process in Roman Histria is well explained in R. Matijašić, *Gospodarstvo Antičke Istre* 47. For more about the centurization of entire *Venetia et Histria* see L. Bosio, "La centuriazione romana della X region," *Antichità Altoadriatiche* 28 (1986): 143-156. For more about the non-Romanized population see A. Starac, "Unutrašnjost Histrije u vremenu Rimske vlasti" [The Interior of Histria at the time of Roman Government], *Histria Archeologica* 26 (1995): 58-106.



Rome. The pacification of the region made the existing fortifications obsolete, and the population moved to the valleys. Some of these places, located in favorable sites, were later reoccupied, among which the most important was Nesactium, rebuilt in the first century AD.<sup>60</sup> The new centers in Roman Histria were regular planned colonies, set on the coastline to control not only the hinterland, but also to protect a vital waterway along the eastern Adriatic coast. As the other cities of the Roman Empire, the cities of Histria were no exception in Roman urban planning. They carried a specifically aesthetic and architectural identity common to all cities in the empire, featuring a number of public monuments and amenities such as temples, aqueducts, baths, theaters, and a large forum as the center of city life. The city acted as the place of public display, sumptuous imperial processions, and religious festivals.

Being included in imperial core lands brought significant benefits to Histria's inhabitants. Secure in the heart of the empire, during the first and second century Histria prospered, experiencing its Golden Age.<sup>61</sup> Its wealth, immortalized by Roman poets, derived mainly from olive oil production.<sup>62</sup> The prosperity of its inhabitants is best visible in the monumental architecture of the *colonies*, particularly in Pola, the center of Roman Histria.<sup>63</sup> The most prominent are a luxuriously decorated triumphal arch, erected by the wealthy decurional family of Sergii, an amphitheatre seating 20,000, the final phase of which was

<sup>60</sup> M. M. Roberti, "Urbanistica romana di Trieste e dell'Istria," *Antichità Altoadriatiche* 28 (1986): 190. Although it did not have the status of *colonia*, Nesactium had all the amenities typical of a Roman city, of which the most important were a large forum, two *thermae*, and a large necropolis. In the sixth century two basilicas were built. For more about Nesactium see V. Girardi Jurkić, "History of the research on Nesactium and its archaeological and historical significance," *Histria Antiqua* 2 (1996): 15-24; K. Mihovilić, R. Matijašić, *Nesactium - Kulturno-povijesni spomenici Istre* 7 (Pula: Arheološki Muzej Istre, 1998).

<sup>61</sup> A vast number of amphorae found in shipwrecks along the Istrian coast attest the significance of Histria for the empire. For more about the ports and maritime connections of Histria see Ida, Koncani Uhač, *Poluotok uronjen u more, podmorska arheologija južne Istre u antici* [A peninsula immersed in sea, the underwater archeology of southern Istria in Antiquity], (Pula: Arheološki muzej Istre, 2008).

<sup>62</sup> Marcus Valerius Martialis, native of Cordoba who lived in the 1st century AD, celebrated Istrian olive oil with the following verses: "*Uncto Corduba laetior Venafro Histra nec minus absolute testa.*" The translation would be: "Cordoba, you being more fertile than the olive oil region of Venafro and as perfect as the oil (amphora) from Histria." In Martial, *Epigrams*, book XII.

<sup>63</sup> During the Roman Empire Pola was home to many important Roman families like the: Sergi, Crassi, Flavi, Costantini. Cenide, the Emperor Vespasianus' mistress, was also from Pola.

completed during the rule of the Flavian emperors, Vespasian and Titus, and two large theaters.

The other two cities, Parentium and Tergeste also flourished, acting as important ports on the trade route from Africa and the eastern provinces to Aquilea and Ravenna, the two largest cities on Adriatic coast of the Apennine peninsula.<sup>64</sup> During the first and second century, a considerable number of luxury *villae rusticae* were built along the western coast of the Istrian peninsula, some of them being the property of the imperial family itself.<sup>65</sup>

The turbulent late antique period was reflected in Histria's inhabitants and their ways of life. The cities of Histria were not affected by the deteriorating situation of the late third and fourth century which caused fortification of other cities of Northern Italy, such as Milan, Verona, and Aquileia. Being situated on the sea, the region preserved good connections with other Mediterranean provinces; however, during the third century the continental trade with Noricum and Pannonia decreased.<sup>66</sup> Increased insecurity on the imperial border, however, probably influenced a positive demographic image of the region, since many refugees arrived from the endangered northern provinces trying to find a safe haven in Histria. The arrival of refugees caused a renewal of the economy, although more on the local level.

<sup>64</sup> For more about the urban structure of both cities see M. M. Roberti, *Urbanistica romana di Trieste e dell'Istria*, 185-200.

<sup>65</sup> The western coast of Histria became particularly attractive for Roman senators after its incorporation into Italian administrative territory. At the beginning of the *principate* the imperial patrimony consisted mainly of lands in *ager Polensis* and the Brijuni islands. By the period of the *dominate*, imperial lands spread all the way to Humagum. See more in A. Starac, "Carski posjedi u Istriji" [Imperial lands in Histria], *Opuscula Archaeologica* 18, No. 1 (1994): 1-14. For a general overview of Roman villas in Histria see V. Girardi Jurčić. "Građevinski kontinuitet rimskih gospodarskih vila u zapadnoj Istri od antike do bizantskog doba" [The Building Continuity of Roman Rustic Villas in Western Istria from Antiquity to Byzantine Period] *Histria Historica* 4 (1983): 77-106, and Š. Mlakar, "Arhitektonsko-kompozicijske značajke rimskih vila rustika i ljetnikovaca Istre" [Architectural and Compositional Features of Roman Rustic Villas and Leisure Mansions in Istria], *Jadranski zbornik* 15-16 (2002): 13-43. The most splendid of those facilities were imperial villas on the Brijuni islands, particularly the Roman villa on Verige bay built by the wealthy Laecani family, who were closely tied to the Julian-Claudian dynasty. See more in V. Begović and I. Schrank, "Villae rusticae na Brijunskom otočju" [Villae Rusticae on the Brijuni Islands], *Opuscula Archeologica*, 23-24, No. 1 (2000): 425-439.

<sup>66</sup> For more on trade between Histria and the imperial hinterland see Matijašić, *L'Istria tra l'antichità classica e la tarda antichità*, 209-210. For relations between Histria and Aquilea see S. Panciera, "Porti e commerci nell'alto Adriatico," *Antichità altoadriatiche* 2 (1972): 103; A. Biscardi, "Il porto di Aquileia e i noli marittimi nel calmiere diocleziano," *Antichità Altoadriatiche* 29, No. 1 (1987): 169-181.

From the late fourth century the situation changed. There is evidence that the population moved to caves in case of danger, but only for a short time.<sup>67</sup> Because the situation on the border stiffened, residential places in the countryside, like rustic villas, started to be fortified. High perimeter walls were built around the complexes, in some places additionally strengthened by towers.<sup>68</sup> The transformation of country villas to fortified settlements can be seen as a beginning of the process of the militarization of the landscape.<sup>69</sup>

The events of the late fifth century also had a considerable impact on the development of the coastal cities. It seems that Attila's invasion of Italy and destruction of Aquileia in 452 posed a potential threat not only to settlements of northern Histria, but to Pola itself. The fear of a possible new incursion and plundering by barbarian tribes is reflected in the extension, reinforcement, and completion of the Pula town walls.<sup>70</sup> The significant use of *spolia* in their construction demonstrates that the walls were built in a relatively short period of time, probably motivated by potential danger. The citizens of Pola probably did not consider the existing Augustean walls as reliable protection, so they strengthened them in width, adding an extra layer on the outer side. Also, the security of the city was amplified by reducing the number of gates, walling up or narrowing existing ones. It is possible that this is the time

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<sup>67</sup> A number of third- to fifth-century artifacts, including coin hoards, have been found in the caves in the Učka and Čičarija mountains and Trieste Kras. See more in Levak, *Kastrizacija*, 54-57 and D. Komšo, "Pećine Istre-mjesta življenja od prapovijesti do srednjeg vijeka" [The caves of Istria--Living Places from Prehistory to the Middle Ages], *Histria antiqua* 11 (2003): 41-54. Particularly interesting is a relatively large cave complex discovered on the eastern side of Učka, near Lovran. Among the interesting finds is a large water cistern, which implies that the complex was permanently inhabited, probably during the fifth and sixth centuries. Remains of a late antique fort were found in the vicinity of the cave entrance. The most recent research about the cave complex is D. Komšo and M. Blečić, "The Secret Cave Hidden in the Cliffs," *On Shelter's Ledge: Histories, Theories and Methods of Rockshelter Research*, ed. M. Kornfeld, S. Vasilev, and L. Miotti (Oxford: British Archeological Reports, 2007), 119-123.

<sup>68</sup> For more about the fortification of Classical cities in Histria, see M. Suić, *Antički grad na istočnoj obali Jadrana*, 356-362.

<sup>69</sup> It is possible that these developments were influenced more by internal conflicts than a direct barbarian threat. This can be seen in coin hoards dated to the period of the civil war between Constantine and Maxentius. See Levak, *Kastrizacija*, 51-55.

<sup>70</sup> Š. Mlakar, *Antička Pula* [Antique Pula] (Pula: Arheološki muzej Istre, 1978), 12.

when Pola built its second line of defense, by fortifying the hilltop inside the city.<sup>71</sup> Following the example of Pola, the walls were reinforced in other cities of Histria.

In such circumstances the townscape also changed. During the fourth and fifth centuries, the urban areas had shrunk and secular monumental buildings had fallen out of use.<sup>72</sup> Too expensive to be maintained, the open public spaces like the *forum* and the amphitheater lost their purposes and were replaced by churches as new foci of urban life.<sup>73</sup> Christianity promoted new ideals and new social and moral values, all of which were opposed to traditional antique culture. Like other cities of the late empire, the cities of Histria showed signs of the process of ruralization. In times of danger, production plants moved inside the city walls. Also, the decrease of exports to other parts of the empire caused a reduction of production capacity. This is particularly visible in the remains of late antique oil and wine presses which have been found within the city walls of Pola and Parentium.<sup>74</sup> Remains of the oil or wine production plants are also found within the Nesactium walls, dated to the early fifth century.<sup>75</sup> The moving of production within city walls may also be explained by a change in Roman mentality caused by Christianity. The ancient Roman laws expressly

<sup>71</sup> The urgency in construction can be demonstrated by some of the *spolia*, which included remains of gravestones taken from the necropolis situated outside the walls. More in B. Marušić, *Kasnoantička i bizantska Pula* [Late Antique and Byzantine Pula] (Pula: Arheološki muzej Istre, 1967), 5; Suić, *Antički grad*, 354; Levak, *Kastrizacija*; 72-73.

<sup>72</sup> For more about the transformation of late antique city see D. Nicholas, *The Growth of the Medieval City* (London: Longman, 1997), 17-18; W. Liebeschuetz, "The End of the Ancient City," In *The City in the Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Rich (London: Routledge, 1992), 4-6.; S. T. Loseby, "Mediterranean Cities," In *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. P. Rousseau (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 139-156. Also see the seminal work on the late antique city, J.H.W.G Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall of the Roman City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 369-400.

<sup>73</sup> N. Christie, *From Constantine to Charlemagne: An Archeology of Italy, AD 300-800* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 94-98, 107-11, 214-217.

<sup>74</sup> For oil press findings see R. Matijašić *Gospodarstvo antičke Istre*, 212-213; Matijašić, "O nalazu kasnoantičkih tijesaka u Poreču 1997. godine" [On the discovery of late antique presses in Poreč in 1997], *Opvscvla Archeologica* 31 (2007): 265-281. For wine presses, see Levak, *Kastrizacija*, 74.

<sup>75</sup> R. Matijašić, *L' Istria tra l'antichità classica e la tarda antichità*, 203-218, and *Gospodarstvo antičke Istre*, 97, 214-215.

forbade building production plants on the territory within the *pomerium* (the sacred line of the city wall).<sup>76</sup>

It must be stated that the abandonment or changing uses of buildings may not reflect de-urbanization, but merely a transformation of the character of urban life. Even in a shrunken condition the cities of Histria continued to fill a large number of functions which can be only classified as “urban”. Their role as political and commercial centers of the region enabled them to maintain this superiority for centuries after other towns appeared on their *agri* as a result of the castrization process.

### **Protecting the heart of the empire -- *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum***

Before moving on to the problem of *castrization*, it is important to give a short excursus on the late Roman defensive system of Italy, which, among other things, guaranteed the safety of the cities of Histria, ensuring them the level of prosperity described above. The defensive system also influenced the development of the defensive system of Histria during Byzantine rule.

The foundation of the system can be traced to the late second century, the time of the Romano-Parthian conflict, when emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180) moved troops from the Rhone and Danube eastwards in order to pursue his war against the Parthians. He did not take many men, probably only three legions, and those from widely separated regions, but it was enough.<sup>77</sup> Various Germanic tribes, notably the Marcomanni, exploited the absence of the legions and crossed the Danube in 166, devastating the rich agricultural lands beyond it. In 170 the Marcomanni were repelled back to their territory, but not before they had devastated

<sup>76</sup> Levak, *Kastrizacija*, 76. The author also argues that a change of mentality caused the construction of the fifth-century basilica of Parentium on a northern part of the decumanus, transforming it into two blind streets.

<sup>77</sup> A. R. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius: A Biography* (New York: Routledge, 1987), 123.

northern Italy, destroying Opiterguim (Oderzo) and plundering the countryside around Aquileia, one of the largest Italian cities.<sup>78</sup>

The Marcomanni raid indicated the necessity of strengthening Italy's defenses. The solution was the *Praetentura Italiae et Alpium*, a military district created with the task of protecting important routes leading through the eastern Alps. Using the benefits of the hilly and mountainous area, the Roman administration constructed a number of large and small forts, towers, and lookouts by which it could monitor and, if necessary, close the natural passes leading to the Po Valley and on to central Italy. Among them the most important was the one which connected Pannonia with Aquileia, presumably the center of the defense system.

Although the *Praetentura Italiae et Alpium* was only an ad hoc solution to the problem, after its disbandment in 175, the Roman administration continued to maintain the existing fortifications. The events of the 170s made it clear to the Romans that in the future the enemy had to be stopped before they reached the gates of Italy.<sup>79</sup> Thus, the new defense system included not only the territory of the old *Praetentura*, but was extended to a much wider area, basically including all the provinces surrounding Italy to the north and east.

The deterioration of the situation on the imperial borders during the fourth century, especially the second half, made it necessary to reorganize a defense system for the protection of Italy as a permanent solution. To facilitate its supervision, the capital was moved from Rome to newly refortified Milano, situated closer to the Alps, and thus closer to the frontier.<sup>80</sup> However, to further bolster imperial defences and to protect the vulnerable cities in Northern

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<sup>78</sup> Levak, *Kastrizacija*, 28.

<sup>79</sup> The Marcomanii raid of the 170s which devastated Northern Italy also affected Histria. The remains of many rustic villas show a degree of stagnation in production and the habitation of the buildings during the second half of the second century. But after the establishment of *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*, the stagnation was quickly followed by a period of recovery.

<sup>80</sup> The extension of the defences to the cities reflects the state's own admission of the *limes* fragility, particularly one along the middle Danube. N. Christie, "From the Danube to the Po: the Defence of Pannonia and Italy in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries AD," in *The Transition to Late Antiquity*, ed. A. Poulter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 564-565.

Italy, a military defensive cordon was built, not based on a line defense, but on in-depth defense. This was the Alpine or Julian Alpine defensive chain (*Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*),<sup>81</sup> spanning from Tarsatica (Rijeka), Emona (Ljubljana), Ad Pirum (Hrušica)<sup>82</sup> to Tergeste (Trieste) and Forum Iulii (Cividale del Friuli), guarding the mountain passes into northeastern Italy. It appears that Histria, or at least the northern part, were included in the Julian Alpine defensive chain. The center of the Histria's section of *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum* was Tergeste, situated on the strategic road which connected imperial centers in Pannonia with Italy. Tergeste, situated on the coast, may have been the organizational centre of the entire system, directly under a commander in Aquileia.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, Tergeste was an important city on the Via Flavia, which connected Pola in the south with Tergeste in the north.

It is important to note that the *Claustra* was not created by imperial directive or command, but it evolved gradually, in a territory endangered by potential threat. The system comprised barrier walls, fortified towns, forts, military camps, and towers. The multiple barrier walls prevented the enemy's fast advance, giving defenders the time necessary to reorganize and regroup. After regrouping, the defenders could close the pass, cutting the invaders supply line, which made encirclement and elimination of trapped enemy forces possible.<sup>84</sup>

The *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum* itself was part of a larger defensive system called the *Tractus Italiae circa Alpes*, a wider defensive screen that reached from the Liguria to the

<sup>81</sup> J. Šašel, "K zgodovini Julijsko-alpskega obrambnega področja" [On the History of the Julian-Alpine Defense Area], *Situla* 14/15 (1974): 256-257.

<sup>82</sup> The Roman name Ad Pirum probably originates from the Greek word for fire, which indicates that a signaling station may have been situated on the site. Reconnaissance and the early warning system played significant parts in this strategy. It is estimated that only two hours were needed for the transfer of smoke (day) and fire (night) signals from Poetovio (Ptuj), a city on the Pannonian border, to Aquileia. For more about strategies of defense on the Julian Alpine "*limes*" see P. Petru, "Novejše arheološke raziskave *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum* in kasnoantičnih utrd v Sloveniji" [Recent Archeological Research of *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum* and Late Antique Forts in Slovenia], *Arheološki vestnik* 23 (1972): 357.

<sup>83</sup> *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*, I, Fontes, ed. J. Šašel (Ljubljana: Narodni muzej v Ljubljani, 1971), 100. For the most recent interpretation see Levak, *Kastrizacija*, 46.

<sup>84</sup> Ironically, these fortifications mostly demonstrated their usefulness during civil struggles rather than invasions. The most important event recorded was the battle of Cold River (*Fluvius Frigidus*) between Castra and Ad Pirum in 394. The emperor of the eastern part of the empire, Theodosius I, defeated the western pretender Eugenius, thus becoming a sole emperor.

Adriatic Sea, protecting northern Italy from mainland attack. The entire system was under the command of the *comes Italiae*, who, according to some estimates, had around 20,000 armed men under his command.<sup>85</sup>

However, neither the *Tractus Italiae circa Alpes*, nor its eastern branch, the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*, could prevent the increasing number of barbarian raids into Italy. The fall of the Danubian *limes* in 380 and the subsequent collapse of the northern border caused an increased pressure on the Italian defensive chain. Although it stopped smaller barbarian raids, it could not prevent the migration of large groups of barbarians like a Hun incursion in 452, partly because of the weakening of the Western Empire's military capabilities. Its disbanding came just prior to the Visigothic invasion, which implies that Alaric's forces were not checked in this corridor.<sup>86</sup> It is possible that military units withdrew to the large fortified towns within Venetia or along the coast of Histria, providing no obstacle to the intruders.<sup>87</sup> However, it seems that the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum* was renewed during the Ostrogothic reign, and continued to present a formidable barrier to invading forces. The last information about still-functioning fragments of the system comes from Procopius, who mentions its role in preventing Narses' advance to Italy by land.<sup>88</sup>

### ***Histria* as border zone – the castrization of the province**

As stated in the Chapter Two, the land mass known as the Istrian peninsula formed the largest part of the Roman, and later Byzantine, province of Histria, well protected from the

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<sup>85</sup> E. Possenti, "I siti fortificati dell'Italia alpina nord-orientale (Trentino Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli Venezia Giulia): elementi comuni e peculiarità regionali in un'epoca di transizione (IV-VIII secolo)," *Antichità Altoadriatiche* 56 (2004): 126. N. Christie, 566, *Notitia Dignitatum* XXXIV.

<sup>86</sup> Tractus is mentioned only in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, meaning that it broke down just prior to the Visigothic invasion. Also, the excavations at Ad Pirum show the presence of a military garrison during the fourth century, but with no indication that it continued into the fifth. For more see N. Christie, *From the Danube to the Po*, 566.

<sup>87</sup> The reason for their withdrawal can be explained by inadequate supply. Small, static units could block a mobile invasion force, but not for a long time without mobile rearward support. Christie, *From Constantine to Charlemagne*, 325-326.

<sup>88</sup> For a detailed description see Procopius, *History of the Wars* (Gothic War IV), book VIII, ed. H. B. Dewing (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1928), 333-336.



mainland side by the mountain ranges of Ćićarija and Učka. Such natural protection and inclusion in the Julian Alpine defensive system spared the region from the fate of the rest of Northern Italy.

The fall of the Western Roman Empire and the subsequent Ostrogothic administration had no considerable impact on the development of Histria. At the time of Cassiodorus, the region, now included in the Ostrogoth Kingdom of Italy, was known as Campania of Ravenna, being praised for its fine oil and wine.<sup>89</sup> Even the destructive Gothic war that ruined Italy bypassed Histria, which, during Justinian's reign, experienced its last Indian summer. This can be seen from the considerable number of large and small churches built in the coastal cities and their countryside, the most prominent of them the huge imperial basilicas of Pola and Parentium.<sup>90</sup>

The beginning of long-term insecurity for Histria started after Justinian's death, with an almost unchecked Lombard incursion into the territory of Italy in the late sixth century, which broke the unity of the ancient Roman province, *Venetia et Histria* in 569. At the same time, the Byzantine Balkan hinterland was ravaged by Avar and Slav attacks, while in the East, imperial field armies had great difficulties in containing a Persian onslaught. With resources stretched thin, the central government of the post-Justinianic Empire was unable to assure the safety of its western possessions that were left on their own.

No longer in possession of the Alpine frontier, the new defensive line in Italy was drawn along *via Annia* and northern Adriatic coast, with Histria becoming the very border of the Byzantine empire.<sup>91</sup> To assure at least some protection, the Exarchate of Africa and Exarchate of Italy were founded during late sixth century, later including Histria. A key factor

<sup>89</sup> Variae, XII, 22, Matijašić, *L'Istria tra l'antichità classica e la tarda antichità*, 216-217.

<sup>90</sup> Both basilicas were commissioned by the archbishop of Ravenna Maximianus, a native from Histria. For basilica in Parentium see A. Terry, H. Maguire, *Dynamic Splendor: The Wall Mosaics in the Cathedral of Eufrasius at Poreč* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). For basilica in Pola, see "Ravenna e Pola Paleocristiana," in *Felix Ravenna-la croce, la spade, la vella*, ed. A. Augenti (Milano: Skira, 2007), 81-85. Regarding the Byzantine building in Histria see B. Marušić, *Kasnoantička i bizantska Pula*; M. Vicelja Matijašić, *Istra i Bizant [Istria and Byzantium]*, Matica Hrvatska – ogranak u Rijeci: Rijeka, 2007).

<sup>91</sup> N. Christie, *From Constantine to Charlemagne*, 41.

in the later sixth century Byzantine strategy was the necessity of drawing up new frontiers to counter Lombard advances and to provide a secure supply line for the defenders. After a makeshift *limes* created along Po River collapsed in the 590s, this gave way to the strategy of regional and sub--regional defence based around more restricted territorial units linked by fortified roads or naval forces. The exarchate, embroiled in constant fighting with the Lombards, could not allocate soldiers to defend Histria, leaving its defense in the hands of the local population.

Thus, by the end of the sixth century the defense system gradually extended from the north through the whole of the Istrian peninsula, with a network of fortresses and fortified places covering the entire territory, which could resist enemy attack and serve as refuge centers for the local population.

Such a system of organization, in which everyday life was imbued with military elements, was perhaps unavoidable, but it removed any possibility of feeling safe within the territory of Histria, resulting in the militarization of all the elements of society, from agents of government to the general populace.<sup>92</sup> Life in this permanent war zone created a new society, which will be further elaborated in Chapter Three. It also caused widespread fortification, resulting in a radical transformation of the landscape of Histria.

The permanent Lombard threat and inability of adequate imperial retaliation meant that a growing sense of insecurity permeated the local population. While Byzantine centers of the sixth century were favoured with state and military supplies, their failure to stimulate the economy might reflect inherent poverty, inadequate levels of supply, and a reduced population (and thus reduced demand). Without an adequate economic base after the initial surge under Justinian, the number of urban inhabitants decreased due to the economic and military collapse caused by the Lombards and frequent epidemics, so the cities became “too

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<sup>92</sup> E. Zanini, *Le Italie Bizantine: Territorio, insediamenti ed economia nella provincia bizantina d'Italia* (Bari: Edipuglia, 1998), 117.

big” for their reduced population to defend. The depopulation of the countryside caused a reduction of coastal cities’ *agri* and overall insecurity of land communications forced cities to rely only on sea routes. In other words, the decrease of the land area belonging to the town, the collapse of lowland settlements, and a state of permanent insecurity resulted in the flight of the population to upland refuges that were created in the defunct *agri*, thus beginning the process of *castrization*.

Once the pierced frontiers continued to leak, the process of refuge fortification intensified and by the end of the sixth century fortifications laid everywhere and society found itself entrenched within walls. The Roman settlements in the valleys were permanently abandoned and replaced by fortified towns or fortresses (Lat. *castra*) built on the more secure hilltops, promontories or islands, usually constructed on the sites of prehistoric hill-fort ruins.<sup>93</sup>

*Castrization* can be seen in other regions of Byzantine Italy such as Venetia, the Exarchate (here meaning only a territory around Ravenna), and Pentapolis. However, some features are distinctive to Byzantine Histria. First, although a number of new *castra* appeared on hilltops or promontories, the Roman network of cities remained largely intact through this period, with a few exceptions such as Nesactium, which was abandoned during Slav attacks. The reason lies in their continued importance as administrative and ecclesiastical centres of the surrounding territory and their role as the residences of the local military élite. The province was aided on two main fronts, first by the presence of the mountain ranges of Učka and Čičarija on the north, and second by the coast itself, where fortified towns and ports enabled regular supplies of goods, and maintained contacts with Ravenna and Constantinople.

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<sup>93</sup> For more about model of *castrum* for a fortified settlement in Byzantine Italy see Zanini, *Le Italie bizantine*, 117-118.

A similar situation could be found perhaps only in Byzantine Liguria, which was as Histria also isolated and forced to use maritime communication with Rome.<sup>94</sup>

In general, the *castra* founded during Byzantine rule were situated in the hinterland. Their characters were diverse. Some were merely small garrison posts while others developed into minor towns. The late-sixth-century landscape of Histria bore strong whiff of insecurity and change.

This can be seen from the increased fortification of the province, and the three types of Byzantine urbanism, which arose as result of castrization:

- **shrunk urban centres with continuity from a Classical foundation** and relatively well preserved monumental structures from the sixth and seventh century (Pola [Pula], Parentium and Tergeste)
- **dislocated and deserted Classical towns** that died out completely during the late sixth or early seventh century for various reasons (Nesactium, Cissa?);
- **new Byzantine towns and settlements** which developed in the sixth and seventh centuries (Duo Castra [Dvigrad], Castrum Vallis [Bale], Montona [Motovun], Bagnolium [Boljun], or a number of Justinian's fortifications that dotted the peaks of the Adriatic islands along the sailing route from Constantinople to Ravenna (Castrum).

The situation deteriorated further in the seventh century. Besides the Lombards on the northern border, Avars and Slavs appeared on the eastern border of Histria. The routes across Učka and Ćićarija, which in peaceful times were important for trade, now became potential routes for enemy invasion. With the Slavs penetrating deep into the interior of the peninsula and with no help from Constantinople and Ravenna, the natural situation of the *castra* was fully exploited and the advantages they offered were incorporated into the defensive system.

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<sup>94</sup> For more on Byzantine Liguria see Christie, *From Constantine to Charlemagne*, 372-379.

The *castra* were used for various purposes, military control, for storing agricultural products, as accommodation for the local commander, and as a place of refuge for the population of the area. They controlled sites of strategic importance, passes, and road junctions.

Like the then-defunct *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*, this was not a system based on a line defense, but on defense-in-depth.<sup>95</sup> The barbarians could penetrate the peninsula only by attacking from the mainland, so a chain of forts, towers, and fortified places was established at strategic points which had the task of hindering and preventing the entry of the enemy. Most sites occupied high hills and thus overlooked or dominated routes, but did not physically bar these to an invader. This is the case for a site such as Montona, which, although occupying an almost impregnable hill, lies on the right bank of the Mirna and thus fails to block the road physically. Nonetheless, to omit capture of such a site would have been a grave error in an invader's plans, for its continued resistance would be a major thorn in the side, particularly as regards the disrupting of communications, and the hindering of easy withdrawal. It is clear that once the enemy penetrated in force within the *castra* network, their tactical functionality would have risked being seriously compromised and their mutual relations or links cut away or at least much exposed.<sup>96</sup>

If the primary defense line were breached, the enemy could not achieve momentum and progress undisturbed towards the core of the region, in this case the major cities on the western coast of the peninsula, the principal ports on the waterway of great importance for the empire. The maritime bases supplied not only regular provisions and materials but also mobile units in times of threat, aiding the inland positions if the available forces of the main *castra* were insufficient. If these cities had been conquered maritime communication between Constantinople and Ravenna would have been cut. This made the survival of these cities a matter of importance for the whole state.

<sup>95</sup> Marušić, *Kasnoantička i bizantska Pula*, 10; Also see L. Mićlaus, "I borghi d'altura Istriani. Dinamiche insiedative tra Tardoantico e Medioevo," *Antichità Altoadriatiche* 56 (2004): 226-227

<sup>96</sup> G. Schmiedt, "Le fortificazioni altomedievali in Italia viste dall'aereo," *Settimane di Studio* 15 (1968): 929-60.

From the case of Liguria it seems likely that Byzantine Histria was divided into smaller military districts, based either on a city such as Tergeste (*numerus Tergestinus*) or on major castra.<sup>97</sup> These enabled rapid deployment of troops when danger threatened, without waiting for the detachments from more distant bases. Without doubt the number of local *militia* available within each district was sufficient for small-scale disturbances, but as the size of the threat grew, so would the requirement for manpower from neighbouring districts have increased.

If a *tribunus* was unable to deal effectively with the problem, the provincial commander, the *magister militum*, would gather the armed forces of neighboring *castra* or of the whole Histria. Only if the situation got out of control would local forces retreat behind their fortifications until the main body of army could arrive, led by the exarch himself, and then drive out the invaders with their help. It seems that this happened in 599, when exarch Callinicus personally intervened and defeated Slav invaders during an incursion into Histria.<sup>98</sup> As will be seen in the Chapter Four, the local militia was not a makeshift irregular force, but a professional army that preserved traditional Roman discipline. It was this strong professional force which contributed troops in 668 to counter the rebellion provoked by the murder of Constans II in southern Italy.

### **The Geographical Topography of *Castrization***

It must be noted that by the seventh century the Byzantine Histria bordered not only on Lombards, but with Slavs and Avars, too, after 590. This put Histria in a unique situation because, unlike rest of the exarchate, the Byzantine forces in Histria opposed not one but two strong enemies. Exactly when Histria's "*limes*" arose is unknown, but it cannot have existed before the sixth century. Probably a border was drawn up to denote imperial lands after the

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<sup>97</sup> Christie, *From Constantine to Charlemagne*, 372.

<sup>98</sup> *MGH*, Ep. IX, 154.

Lombard occupation of Friuli and most of Venetia in 568-569. As mentioned, the defence-in-depth system of the sixth, and particularly the seventh, century comprised forts and fortified towns distributed across the entire peninsula, *castra* which controlled principal routes of communication, roads, rivers, and ports, all connected by the network of reconnaissance towers (Fig. 6).

The massifs of Učka and Ćićarija formed the first line of the Byzantine defense. A number of ruins of late Roman and Byzantine fortifications has been found in the area.<sup>99</sup> While it is not sure when these *castra* were founded, their number is disproportional to the density of local population, which implies that they could be a part of the northern defensive system of the peninsula. Some of them, besides being military outposts, probably served as refuges for locals in times of increased insecurity. The most important *castra* in this area were Bagnolium (Boljun), Pinguentum (Buzet), and Castrum Rotium (Roč), all of them important Byzantine fortresses guarding approaches from the north.

Near Pinguentum, the largest Byzantine necropolis in Histria – Brežac -- has been found, dated to the seventh century.<sup>100</sup> A number of other cemeteries have been found in an arc extending between Mejica, Veliki Mlun and Zajčji Brč, close to Pinguentum. Marušić attributed them to the “Romano-Slavic-barbarian” population, dating them between the late sixth and eighth century. They show a barbarisation of the Romanic tombs in both construction and also association of grave goods, with weapons forming the largest part (interestingly, *spathae* are quite rare, but arrowheads are common); the decoration, however, is prevalently Byzantine in character. These might be the graves of a barbarized Byzantine

<sup>99</sup> Levak, *Kastrizacija*, 97; also see A. Starac, *Unutrašnjost Histrije u vremenu Rimske vlasti*, 87-98.

<sup>100</sup> For necropolises in northern Histria, particularly that of Brežac, see B. Marušić, “Nekropole VII. i VIII. stoljeća u Istri” [The Eighth and Seventh Century Necropolis in Istria], *Arheološki vestnik* 28 (1967): 333-347. A general overview of other necropolises and gravesites can be found in Marušić, *Istria i sjevernojadranski prostor u ranom srednjem vijeku* [Istria and Northern Adriatic in the early middle ages] (Pula: Arheološki muzej Istre, 1995), 13.

frontier guard who defended the principal internal route along the Mirna river.<sup>101</sup> The location of these cemeteries broadly confirms this hypothesis: behind Pinguentum there are two sites near Montona (Brkač) and a further site that guards a road and river point near Buje, marking probably the southern limit of *numerus Tergestinus*.<sup>102</sup> The finds demonstrate a notable Slavo-Byzantine mixture in weaponry (the arrowheads are both Byzantine square-sectioned and Slavic winged-ala types).

South of the protective mountain fortress chain, in central Histria, the population gradually inhabited abandoned Iron Age hill fort ruins, thereby creating fortified settlements. The reason for the revitalization of hill forts was twofold. The peninsula was densely inhabited in prehistory, which had led to almost every hill being inhabited in the Bronze or Iron Age. Thus, there was simply no free place to build fortified settlements in Late Antiquity. The second, more important, reason is that, although these places had been abandoned for centuries, the fortification elements were more or less preserved. This made the late antique re-fortification process much easier and less resource-consuming. The new settlements probably acted as refuge centers in the beginning, but with time they became permanently settled places. There is evidence of three fortified settlements, Dvigrad (Duo Castra), Montona (Motovun), and Pedena (Pićan). This enclosed circle of strongholds was the basis of central Histria's fortification system.

One of the most prominent examples of castrization in Histria was Duo Castra (Fig. 7), a fortified hilltop settlement situated in the heartland of the Istrian peninsula, at the border of the *ager* of Parentium and Pola. The Duo Castra was probably founded during the fifth century as a refuge place for the population settled in the nearby valley. This is attested by the remains of the church of St. Sophia, the earliest phase of which was dated to the second half

<sup>101</sup> A general overview of other necropolises and gravesites can be found in Marušić, *Istra i sjevernojadranski prostor u ranom srednjem vijeku* [Istria and Northern Adriatic in the early middle ages] (Pula: Arheološki muzej Istre, 1995), 13.

<sup>102</sup> A. Tagliaferri, "Il Friuli e l'Istria nell'alto medioevo," *Antichita Altoadriatiche* 2 (1972): 290.



of the fifth century.<sup>103</sup> A favorable strategic position gave Duo Castra control over the important *via Flavia*, which connected the north and south of the peninsula; the immediate vicinity of Lim bay gave it access to the Adriatic Sea and thus to the cities of Aquileia and Ravenna.<sup>104</sup> The southern and western part of the Istrian peninsula lacks surface water sources; thus, a spring located in the immediate vicinity of the town was a rare commodity. Two other important towns that were built on hills overlooking the trade routes through the fertile Mirna Valley were Montona and Castrum Portulense (Oprtalj).

South of Duo Castra was *castrum Caltanium* (Stari Gočan). It is a compact type of settlement with one main street (Fig. 8). The significance of this site for defense of Histria can be seen in the remains of walls strengthened by eight rectangular towers. Finds of weapons (arrowheads) and ruins of a large cemetery church suggest that it was founded in the late fifth century.<sup>105</sup> Comparing Gočan's church with the cemetery church in Duocastra, which is considerably smaller, suggests that Gočan had greater importance during the Byzantine period.<sup>106</sup>

The castrization process increased settlement along the western coast of the peninsula, hilly territory relatively sparsely populated during the early imperial period. To the east of Castrum Caltanium there were also fortified towns encircled by walls, Alvona (Labin) and Flanona (Plomin), while Bagnolium and Castra (Kastav) were lay to the north, towards the border with Tarsatica (Rijeka).<sup>107</sup> Alvona, a Roman *municipium* founded in the first century,

<sup>103</sup> Because it is improbable that the church could have been built before the walls, this can be taken as the earliest date for the establishment of the settlement. See in B. Marušić "Dvograd, Sv. Sofija, Rovinj, Pula-srednjovjekovna sakralna arhitektura" [Dvograd, St. Sophia, Rovinj, Pula – Medieval Sacral Architecture], *Arheološki pregled* 6 (1964): 128; Marušić, *Nekropole VII. i VIII. stoljeća u Istri*, 49; G. P. Brogiolo, C. Malaguti, P. Riavez, "Nuovi dati archeologici dallo scavo della chiesa di Santa Sofia e dell'insediamento di Dvograd/Duecastelli, *Antichita Altoadriatiche* 55 (2003): 133-134. The name Duo Castra means two towns. Opposite Duo Castra was situated the Byzantine fort of Mons Parentin, for which there are almost no data. The present ruins of Duo Castra are actually the ruins of Mons Castellum.

<sup>104</sup> Matijašić, *Gospodarstvo antičke Istre*, 432; Levak, *Kastrizacija*, 70-71.

<sup>105</sup> B. Marušić, "Neki problemi kasnoantičke i bizantske Istre u svjetlu arheoloških izvora" [Some problems of late antique and Byzantine Istria in light of archeological evidence], *Jadranski zbornik* 9 (1976): 343.

<sup>106</sup> Levak, *Kastrizacija*, 72. Marušić, "Suton antike na istočnoj granici pulskog agera" [The Waning of Antiquity on the Eastern Border of Pola's Ager], *Jadranski zbornik* 15-16 (2002): 49-76.

<sup>107</sup> B. Matušić, *Neki problemi*, 343, 346. Also see V. Girardi Jurkić, *Kontinuitet utvrđivanja u Istri*, 9-20.

was not only the most important town in the area, but also overlooked the road connecting Nesactium (Vizace) in the south with Tarsatica in the north. It controlled the approaches to Flanona (Plomin), an important Byzantine military port.<sup>108</sup> Both Alvona and Flanona were devastated several times at the end of the sixth century during the first wave of Slav attacks.

Compared with the rest, the southern part of the Istrian peninsula consisted of relatively flat terrain with a few scattered hills. It was comprised of *ager Polensis*, the fertile and densely inhabited countryside of Pola. A hypothesis exists that in order to protect *ager Polensis*, a complete defensive system of guardhouses and fortified settlements was built, including Castrum Vallis, Castrum Caltanium, Mons Parentinus, Mons Marianus (Mutvoran), and the towers of Klenovac and Straža.<sup>109</sup> Besides Pola, the most important settlement there was Castrum Vallis, built on a hill controlling the *via Flavia*. The settlement was situated on the access point to the *ager Polensis*, guarding the road to the major city of Histria. Another important locality is situated close to Castrum Vallis. On the place of ancient Punta Cissana (Barbariga), archeologists have found the ruins of a large Roman oil works, and close to it, the remains of late antique walls. The finds from the oil works, handmade pottery, and some metal weapons (including two spearheads) suggest that the installation was in use, although reduced in size, perhaps as a military complex, until the late sixth century or even later.<sup>110</sup> Also, close-built settlements were built in close proximity – the actual prototypes of classical medieval villages.

<sup>108</sup> It is important to note here that during the Roman period both Alvona and Flanona were not part of Histria, and thus of Italy, but they were part of Liburnia, which itself was part of the province of Dalmatia. However, both towns had the same status and all the privileges as all other cities in Italy. By the Byzantine period, Alvona and Flanona became part of Histria. See more in A. Starac, *Rimsko vladanje u Istriji i Liburniji*, 76; M. Suić, *Antički grad*, 37.

<sup>109</sup> For limes that defended *ager Polensis* see Marušić, *Neki problemi*, 343. His idea has been accepted by a number of other scholars. See in L. Margetić, “Neka pitanja u vezi s Istrom” *Živa Antika* 32 (1982): 80; Margetić, *Histrica et Adriatica*, (Trieste: Unione degli Italiani dell’ Istria e Fiume), 153; I. Goldstein, *Bizant na Jadranu* [Byzantium on the Adriatic], (Zagreb: Zavod za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskog fakulteta, 1992), 55; V. Girardi Jurkić, *Kontinuitet utvrđivanja u Istri*, 14-15. M. Levak argues against such system, explaining that there is not enough archeological data to prove it. He further points out that such a system would be unnecessary if the whole peninsula was covered by fortresses, Levak, *Kastrizacija*, 98-99.

<sup>110</sup> B. Marušić, *Neki problemi*, 340

Besides developing fortifications in the interior, a great number of fortified settlements was built on the western coast of the peninsula, on the *agri* that had belonged to the former Roman colonies of Pola, Parentium, and Tergeste during the sixth and seventh centuries. This was the period when Justinian's Byzantine Empire re-established *thalassokratia*, dominion over the entire Mediterranean, the source of imperial wealth and power.<sup>111</sup> Byzantium had a strong navy situated in the area. The Byzantine fleet, based at Classe, had stations on the coast of Histria, as is attested for Grado, Pola, Brijuni Castrum, and Flanona. Histria remained an important logistical base for Ravenna. Control over the Adriatic Sea was of the utmost importance for the imperial government, providing the fastest and the safest route and connecting the two capitals, Ravenna and Constantinople.

Besides having a fleet, to protect this vital navigation route Justinian built a number of forts on the islands along the eastern Adriatic coast (Fig. 9).<sup>112</sup> Since all these forts had ports in nearby coves, sailing along the coast and between the islands became easier and safer because the ships could use these ports for shelter and to obtain provisions. By the construction of the forts along the eastern Adriatic coast, Justinian and his immediate successors created a powerful infrastructure which proved important after the collapse of the land route through the Balkans during the early seventh century. In many cases the forts on the islands had counterparts on the mainland, with which visual communication was made via fire or smoke signals.<sup>113</sup> A number of forts is attested in Histria. One of them, Kastril, was situated on the southernmost point of the peninsula, lying in an excellent position from which one could control the entire large surrounding sea zone.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>111</sup> A. Carile, *L'Adriatico in eta Bizantina*, Atti del Convegno, Ravenna 7-8-9 giugno 2001, 463-464.

<sup>112</sup> K. Regan, "Utvrdna Sv. Jurja u Caskoj na otoku Pagu" [The Fortress of Saint George in Caska on the island of Pag], *Prilozi Instituta za arheologiju u Zagrebu*, 19, No. 1 (2002): 141-148; Z. Brusić, "Kasnoantička utvrđenja na otocima Rabu i Krku" [Late Antique forts on the islands of Rab and Krk], *Izdanja HAD-a* 13 (1989): 114. Levak, *Kastrizacija*, 83-85.

<sup>113</sup> Levak, *Kastrizacija*, 86.

<sup>114</sup> Matijašić, Još jednom o Kastrilu na premanturskom rtu Kamenjak [Another Look at Kastril on the Premantura cape of Kamenjak], *Prilozi Instituta za arheologiju u Zagrebu*, 24, No.1 (Srpanj 2008), 221-228.

Probably the most important example of a Justinianic Byzantine fort is the Byzantine castrum, situated on the island of Veli Brijun, the external bulwark of Pola (Fig. 10). During the first century, on the western coast of the island in Valmadona Bay, a Roman *villa rustica* was built in the first century BC. During the second century the villa was converted into a dye works, and perhaps can be indentified with a *fabrica* listed in the *Notitia Dignitatum*.<sup>115</sup> The Castrum took on a military role probably during the sixth century, when the existing settlement was fortified with a strong wall. Its purpose was to guarantee the safety of the eastern Adriatic seaboard, to serve as a naval base and as a stopover for trade ships on the way from Pola to Ravenna.<sup>116</sup> The fortress had a rectangular layout, with four gates piercing the wall, of which the largest is northeastern gate. Inside are a cistern and the remains of a probable villa and other uninvestigated buildings. The ruins of a three-naved basilica featuring fifth- to sixth-century material can be dated to Byzantine period. Its position outside Castrum suggests that the settlement was so densely populated that there was no place for the church within the walls.<sup>117</sup>

The new fortified towns on the west coast used the defensive screen comprised of Justinian's forts, developing away from Classical urban centers, which also acted as naval bases protecting the vital sea route. Those towns are all mentioned in the seventh century *Cosmographia* written by the Anonymus Ravennatis.<sup>118</sup> Ruginium (Rovinj) and Ursaria (Vrsar) developed on the fringes of the coastal cities of Pola and Parentium, within their *ager*.

<sup>115</sup> Christie, *From Consatntine to Charlemagne*, 311.

<sup>116</sup> Begović-Dvoržak, Vlasta. "Fortifikacioni sklop Kastrum-Petrovac na Brijunima" [The Fortification Complex Castrum-Petrovac on Brijuni Islands]. *Histria Antiqua* 7 (2001): 186-187.; Schmiedt, *Le Fortificazioni*, 929-960.

<sup>117</sup> B. Marušić, *Kasnoantička i bizantska Pula*, 6. Marušić also suggested the existence of another, smaller, sixth-century church outside the city walls on the empty space close to southwestern entrance.

<sup>118</sup> See *Antička svjedočanstva*, *Cosmographia*, 326-336; The settlements are mentioned in order, Capris, Piranon, Silbio, Siparis, Humago, Neapolis, Ursaria, Ruginio, Albona, Phanas, Lauriana and Tarsaticum. The fourth-century Tabula Peutingeriana mentions only Silbio, Alvona, and Flanona besides three colonies; it is safe to assume that other settlements were founded during late antiquity or later.

Justinopolis (Koper), Piranon (Piran), Isola, Siparis, Humagum (Umag) and Neapolis (Novigrad) covered the coastline extending from Tergeste to the south.<sup>119</sup>

Of all of these towns, the most important was Neapolis. The town originated on the site of a rustic villa from the first century, but it achieved town status around the sixth century when it became a bishopric and a new cathedral was built.<sup>120</sup> The significance of the town grew after routes in the Adriatic hinterland, but also in Byzantine Balkan hinterland, were broken, causing the all traffic to be rerouted to the Adriatic seaway. Neapolis' importance can be seen in the fact that the Byzantine military governor, the *magister militum*, had his lands in the vicinity of the town, from which he supported himself, since from the late seventh century onwards the central government tried to shift the burden of maintaining the military to the province.<sup>121</sup> Neapolis is one of the rare towns of Histria that achieved its apex after the end of Byzantine rule, becoming the political and ecclesiastical center of Istria during Frankish rule in the eighth century.

North of Neapolis, following the Via Flavia, the presence of four island sites is notable -- Humagum, Siparis, Piranon and Capris -- to which one can add Isola. All four replaced undefended mainland centres in late antiquity and grew in stature under Byzantium. Allegedly situated near Humagum was *castrum* Siparis. Like Humagum, Siparis was built on an island, which was easy to defend. Archeological survey shows that the inhabitants of Siparis were peasants, artisans, and soldiers. This is confirmed by numerous finds: an oil mill, ceramic

<sup>119</sup> R. Matijašić, "Alcune considerazioni sulle forme di insediamento rustico in Istria dal III al VI sec." *Atti dei Civici musei di storia ed arte a Trieste*, 13, No. 2 (1983-1984): 237-238.

<sup>120</sup> It is interesting to note that the cathedral was built outside the walls, a unique feat if compared with other fortified towns in Histria, where the church is usually set in the city's central square. Perhaps the only comparable place is *Castrum*. However, the explanation for the unique placement of Neapolis' church can be found in the settlement topography. The church is situated on the westernmost part of the promontory, approachable only by sea and, thus, the most secure place outside the city walls.

<sup>121</sup> Levak, *Kastrizacija*, 90.

artifacts, fishing equipment, parts of weapons.<sup>122</sup> To protect the settlement, a tower was built on the isthmus, the remains of which are preserved to the height of five meters.<sup>123</sup>

Further north was Isola, as the name implies, a settlement originally built on an island which was joined with the mainland in the thirteenth century, becoming a peninsula. Although Isola is first mentioned in the tenth century, the settlement must be much older, probably from the fifth century. A number of rustic villas and smaller villages were situated on the mainland, which implies that their inhabitants tried to find refuge on the island during times of increased insecurity.<sup>124</sup>

Echoes of the ancient tradition of giving a new-founded city the name of the ruling emperor can be seen in Histria, too. During the reign of Justin II (565-578), the inhabitants of the mainland area fled from the Lombards to a nearby island, establishing a city there and naming it Justinopolis in the emperor's honor.<sup>125</sup> Recent archeological excavations have found traces of settlement from the fifth century, identifiable with Ravennatis' Capris, from which it can be inferred that the Roman settlement was fortified in the wake of the Lombards' arrival in Italy.<sup>126</sup> The construction of the fortress on the highest point of the island would then be related to the widespread trend of further fortifying the maritime route, which became the only secure communication between Ravenna and Constantinople after the Lombards cut the *via Annia*.

By the seventh century the landscape of Histria had been transformed by a number of fortified settlements built on important strategic points, hilltops and promontories, guarding approaches to the major towns or principal maritime and land routes. Roman *villae* recorded

<sup>122</sup> B. Marušić, *Neki problemi kasnoantičke i bizantske Istre* (1976): 338-340; V. Girardi Jurkić "Građevinski kontinuitet rimskih gospodarskih vila u zapadnoj Istri od antike do bizantskog doba" *Histria Historica* 4 (1983): 82-83; Matijašić. *Alcune considerazioni sulle forme di insediamento rustico in Istria*, 236.

<sup>123</sup> Levak, *Katrizacija*, 90-91.

<sup>124</sup> Levak, *Katrizacija*, 92.

<sup>125</sup> Foundation of Justinopolis: *Huius tempore Ystrorum gens, barbarorum invasionibus graviter afflicta, in Caprariam insulam secedunt, et domos construunt, et in gloriam catholici principis fundatum oppidum Iustinopolim vocaverunt*, Šašel, "Koper," *Arheološki vestnik* 25 (1976): 451.

<sup>126</sup> J. Šašel, "Koper," *Koper med Rimom in Benetkami* (1989): 5-8.

earlier disappeared, with only the notable exception of Brijuni Castrum. While some Classical cities continued to prosper, others were destroyed. At the beginning of the seventh century, Nesactium ceased to exist as an urban settlement. The last mention of it is in the *Cosmographia*; it is absent from the list of Histrian cities in the *Placitum Risani*. This demonstrates that it probably came to an end during the period of Avaro-Slavic incursions into Histria, which also put an end to a number of other settlements.<sup>127</sup> This is probably also the time when Mutila, Faveria, and the enigmatic Cissa, all mentioned by Pliny the Elder, disappeared from history.<sup>128</sup>

The process of castrization resulted in a number of developments that had changed the landscape of Histria. It can be best described as a two-way movement. The old city centers, survived, being situated on the coast. However, they too experienced significant changes. Although strong walls saved the city from its demise, within the wall city had shrunk. The city of the late seventh century was more like a great village, than a classical city of the Roman imperial period. On the other hand, new settlements form evolved in the countryside, hillforts, defended harbours, island *castra*, refuges. Thus, castrization process although characterized by a state of great insecurity and permanent warfare actually revitalized the countryside, sparsely populated during the Roman period, building foundation for another process, that of the militarization.

<sup>127</sup> Traces of fire on the basilica's walls and walled entrances to the city could be used as evidence for such an event. Marušić, *Slavensko-avarski napadaji u svijetlu povijesne građe*, 63-70. Also see Levak, *Kastrizacija*, 116.

<sup>128</sup> For more about Mutila and Faveria see Matijašić. "Smještaj Mutile i Faverije (Liv., 41, 11, 7) u svjetlu topografije južne Istre" [The location of Mutila and Faveria (Liv., 41, 11, 7) in the Light of the Topography of Southern Istria], *Opuscula archaeologica* 23-24 (2000), 93-102.

### III. Living in a Militarized Society

#### The waning of the old order

War and the threat of war dominated the early medieval world to an extent which the twentieth century may find familiar. In the Germanic societies of Europe, conflict was everyday business because of the absence of a centralized state and because their society was dominated by a strong warrior nobility, geared for war. However, the situation in the Mediterranean heartland of the Roman Empire was more complex. As a consequence of having an organized political unit, the Roman society remained predominantly civilian, despite the turmoil of the fourth and fifth centuries and growing of the role of the army in the late imperial period. However, in both Italy and the East, the devastating wars of the sixth and seventh centuries inaugurated a period of insecurity and military domination. In this chapter, I examine the destructive effects of this continuous warfare and increased insecurity, and analyze particular social changes that war, primarily defensive one, had on the life of the local society in the Italian border zone, Byzantine Histria. In this chapter, I will try to demonstrate that, in its struggle to survive, the Histrian society showed remarkable resilience both in developing new institutions and retaining many Roman institutions from the past. Some elements will be examined that developed only in this region and were endemic to Byzantine Histria alone.

It is known that early sixth-century Italy, and with it, Histria, remained little affected by the invasions which had struck other provinces in the West. Neither the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476, nor Odoacer's, and later Theodoric's, rule over Italy caused a major break in the urban civilian society of its Roman inhabitants.<sup>129</sup> Life in Ostrogoth Italy

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<sup>129</sup> J. Moorhead, "Western Approaches 500-600," in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire*, ed. J. Shepard (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 200. For more about the Ostrogothic rule in Italy see T. S. Burns, *The Ostrogoths*, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984). For the relation between Justinianic



continued as in the empire's heyday, with the Ostrogoths closely cooperating with their Roman subjects. Not only Cassiodorus, but also Justinian's historian, Procopius, praised Theoderic as a good king.<sup>130</sup> However, the prosperity of the Gothic regime rested on fragile foundations. According to Thomas Brown, much of this supposed prosperity may be seen as a temporary recovery, which was not necessarily extended to the whole population.<sup>131</sup> The autarkic economy mainly favored the landowning senatorial élite who continued to maintain a special position at the Ostrogoth court. Whatever prosperity existed, it was certainly shattered by the Gothic wars that broke out in 536 and lasted for eighteen successive years.

As I pointed out in the first chapter, in 539, in the opening stages of the war, Histria came under firm Byzantine control, where it stayed for more than two hundred years. However, the administrative reorganization of the province had to wait for almost two decades. Only after the Byzantine victory, and the end of mopping-up operations against remaining enemy forces, could an administrative reform be carried out. The Ostrogoths in great part preserved Roman institutions in their new kingdom, but their Germanic origins meant that some changes in the political system were inevitable. Justinian's idea was to reverse all the changes that the Goths had made during their occupation of Italy and bring back the "old order." To achieve that, Justinian issued the *Pragmatica Sanctio* in 554.

The *Pragmatica Sanctio* consisted of twenty-six chapters that regulated the administration of Byzantine Italy, extending the validity of *Corpus Iuris Civilis* and the *Novellae* to the Italian legal system.<sup>132</sup> It also regulated the distribution of confiscated Ostrogothic lands, which were either returned to their first owners or given to soldiers or the

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Byzantium and the pre-war Ostrogoth kingdom see W. Pohl, "Justinian and the Barbarian Kingdoms," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. M. Maas (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 456-462.

<sup>130</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars* (Persian War II), book V, ed. H.B. Dewing (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1919), 12-13.

<sup>131</sup> T. S. Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers* (Rome: British School at Rome, 1984), 5-6.

<sup>132</sup> J. Ferluga, "L'esarcato," in *Storia di Ravenna*, II, *Dall'età bizantina all'età ottoniana*, ed. A. Carile, (Venezia: Marsilio Ed, 1991), 354; Also see Ferluga, "L'Istria tra Giustiniano e Carlo Magno", *Arheološki vestnik* 43 (1992): 176.

church. Justinian particularly favored the church of Ravenna, which acquired a considerable amount of land in Histria during his rule.<sup>133</sup>

The *Pragmatica Sanctio* left the administrative division and Roman municipal constitution in almost the same state as they were in 476.<sup>134</sup> Histria was reincorporated with Italy, which was reorganized as *praefectura Italiae*. Its capital was still set in Ravenna, with Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica remaining separate administrative units.<sup>135</sup> According to this document, most administration in the early years of Byzantine government was still in the hands of Roman civil officials, while the separation between civil and military powers was preserved.<sup>136</sup> It was important for Justinian to win back the senatorial élite. The imperial government wanted to rebuild large senatorial estates and to reinforce the senatorial class, thus retaining the old order. The last chapter of the *Pragmatica Sanctio* deals with this problem, allowing senators to travel freely to Constantinople or from the capital to Italy whenever they wanted in order to settle matters related to their possessions.<sup>137</sup>

The *Pragmatica Sanctio* of 554 was nominally addressed to both authorities in the newly reestablished prefecture of Italy, to the supreme military commander Narses, and to the highest civilian authority, the prefect Antiochus.<sup>138</sup> Ideally, this would mean that both men had their own sphere of influence. However, it would be wrong to think that the end of the Gothic war marked return to absolutely civil rule. Although the *Pragmatica Sanctio* does not

<sup>133</sup> For extensive possessions of Ravennate church in Histria see T. S. Brown, "The Church of Ravenna and the Imperial Administration in the Seventh Century," in *The English Historical Review* 94, No. 370 (Jan., 1979), 17-18. Also see Ferluga, *L'Istria*, 176. These lands, centred around Pola, known as the feud of St. Apollinaris, remained under ownership of Ravennate church until the medieval period.

<sup>134</sup> Benussi, *Nel medio evo*, 29.

<sup>135</sup> Sicily has been placed under the *praetor*, controlled directly from Constantinople, while Sardinia and Corsica were included into the *praefectura Africae*. See in Cosentino, S. Cosentino, *Storia dell' Italia bizantina*, Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2008), 20-21; Ferluga, *L'esarcato*, 354; Ferluga, *L'Istria*, 175-176.

<sup>136</sup> For separation of government in Histria see Ravegnani, "L'Istria Bizantina: Le Istituzioni militari ai confine dell'esarcato Ravennate," *Acta Histriae* 7 (1998): 77.

<sup>137</sup> PS, c. 23, *CJC*, III, 802, *pro reparandis possessionibus*, Ferluga, *L'esarcato*, 356-357; Also see Ferluga, *L'Istria*, 176.

<sup>138</sup> The *Pragmatica Sanctio* was addressed a *Narsi viro ill. Praeposito sacri cubicula e Antonio viro magnifico praefecto per Italiam*. PS, c. 23, *CJC*, III, 802. Also see Borri, "Duces e magistri militum nell' Italia esarcale (VI-VIII secolo)," *Reti Medievali* 6 (2005), 7; Ferluga, *L'Istria*, 176.

say much about the military government of sixth-century Italy, it cannot be taken as a blueprint for an exclusively civil government.

In fact, the division between civil and military authority may be seen in only one clause specifying that cases involving civilians should be tried by civil judges.<sup>139</sup> However, it is known that this procedure remained customary even into the period of recognized military dominance.<sup>140</sup> A similar situation also applied in other areas of Justinianic empire. Recent studies have pointed out the breakdown of the civil/military distinction in the East, where from 535 to 539 Justinian appointed several provincial governors who combined both military and civil functions.<sup>141</sup>

Thus, I will argue that the laws presented in the *Pragmatica Sanctio* represented an aspiration more than the reality of government, which was trying not only to restore a territory, but also to reinstate the laws and ideals of the Roman Empire. The *Pragmatica Sanctio* was created with a clear aim -- to restore the old Roman system -- but it could only function under ideal conditions. However, the situation in Italy after the Gothic war was far from ideal. The war raged for almost twenty bitter years, having ruined the Italian economy and destroyed its urban basis. In addition, the empire was ravaged by the plague, which decimated its population, in other words, decreasing manpower.<sup>142</sup> Thus, the recovery of Italy was not only hampered by bad local economic and political conditions, but by natural disasters and the empty imperial treasury.

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<sup>139</sup> PS c. 23 *CJC*, III, 802. *ut civiliter inter se causas audient*. For the interpretation, see Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 8-9.

<sup>140</sup> Brown argued that civil government continued to coexist with military at least until 600. See Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 9.

<sup>141</sup> Between 535 and 539 Justinian made a number of changes in the organization of the provinces, with governors assuming civil and military authority, predominantly in Asia Minor, but also in Thrace and Armenia. For more about administrative reorganization in the East, see A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, vol. I (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 280-281. Also in 539, the *dux* Aegypti received jurisdiction over civil and military matters in the province. Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, 347-350. According to Jones, the reason for the reorganization of provincial administration was not to reinforce defense against external enemies, as happened in Italy, but to efficiently fight brigands in Anatolia and internal revolts in Egypt.

<sup>142</sup> For the Justinianic plague see P. Holden "Mediterranean Plague in the Age of Justinian," In *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. M. Maas (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 134-161.

Moreover, the civil judicial powers were increasingly threatened by great landowners; many civil functions were taken over by bishops, who were backed by Justinian.<sup>143</sup> Justinian's legislation stated that *iudices*, i.e., provincial governors, should be appointed in every province, but the striking fact is that they were not appointed by the central administration but by bishops and the local magnates.<sup>144</sup> Also, the army was less open to intrusions on its rights than its civil counterpart and increasing military needs led to further intrusion into the sphere of civil officials.

Brown has shown the pressures facing civil officials by taking the example of the praetorian prefecture, which was intended to be the most powerful office in Byzantine Italy.<sup>145</sup> In accordance with *Pragmatica Sanctio*, the prefect of Italy held the exclusive power of issuing laws and had control over taxation. However, his inability in paying and provisioning the army was subject of complaints as early as the 550's. The development of the civil branch was stalled by a fact that a number of military officials also served as praetorian prefects during the sixth century, holding both civil and military power.<sup>146</sup> These examples of joint power reveal the prefect's weakness. There were also external obstacles. As Italy was entering into a state of crisis, it was logical for the most capable man on the spot to assume full authority, and once Italy came under constant enemy pressure it was inevitable that full control should be assumed by military commanders such as the exarch or *magister militum*.

One may assume that *Pragmatica Sanctio* was devised during initial Belisarius' *blitzkrieg* and it was planned to be proclaimed in Ravenna in 540. However the unexpected

<sup>143</sup> Diehl, *Etudes*, 84-85. Also see C. Rapp, *Holy Bishops in the Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 222-224.

<sup>144</sup> This clause is of great importance because it can be related to the period of the Exarchate, probably during the eighth century, when local élites, military aristocracy, and bishops elected the *magister militum*, who worked for their cause. J. B. Bury, *History*, I-II, 282-283, Ferluga, *L'Istria*, 176.

<sup>145</sup> Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 10-12. Also for development of the prefecture see Diehl, *Etudes*, 157-167.

<sup>146</sup> The most important of them are *praefect* Longinus who assumed supreme control over Italy after recall of Narses in 568 and he is recorded as building fortifications, conducting negotiations and carrying war operations against Lombards. *PLRE*, III 797, *HL*, II, 5.

Ostrogothic counteroffensive changed the plan, and when in 554, Narses finally conquered Italy, *Pragmatica Sanctio* could not be carried out as it was intended to be. The old institutions remained ineffective as a result of the country's impoverishment, and *praefectura Italiae* remained effectively under the military government of Narses and his commanders.<sup>147</sup>

The inefficiency of civil power at the highest level was reflected in the local situation in the provinces. This problem will be further elaborated in the case of early Byzantine Histria. The province was led by civil functionaries (*iudices provinciae*), whose authority was, in accordance with Justinian's *Pragmatica Sanctio* of 554, clearly separated from that of military officials (*iudices militares*).<sup>148</sup> The civil functionaries were invested by civil administration and by jurisdiction over the general populace, while the military authorities controlled the local army and auxiliary forces.

As in the rest of Italy, during first decades of Byzantine rule the cities and towns of Histria were self-governed, ruled by the *curia*.<sup>149</sup> However, the power of *curiales*, already insignificant in the late Roman period, could not regain the importance which Justinian attributed to them by the *Pragmatica Sanctio*. Perhaps to assure loyalty of impoverished local population, Justinian particularly tried to increase the power of the highest civil authority in the city, the *defensor civitatis*, giving him independence from the provincial governor, who could neither nominate nor depose him.<sup>150</sup> However, as in the rest of Italy, the political situation did not allow these men to fulfill the role given by the emperor; they had to give place to the rising military élite.

Justinian based his ambitious program of the reconquest of Italy on three principal points, the strong civil administration which would restore old Roman order, the church that

<sup>147</sup> G. Ravegnani, *I Bizantini in Italia*, (Bologna, Societa editrice il Mulino, 2004), 62-68.

<sup>148</sup> Diehl, *Etudes*, 5. Benussi, *Nel medio evo*, 29. Ferluga, *L'Istria*, 176.

<sup>149</sup> The evidence for the existence of curia can be found in an inscription from Trieste from 571, which mentions *Maurentius vir illustris*, where *vir illustris* indicates decurion. See in Diehl, *Etudes*, 113; Benussi, *Nel medio evo*, 30.

<sup>150</sup> He could be deposed only by the prefect of Italy and later by the exarch. More in Benussi, *Nel medio evo*, 30-31. However, it seems that defensor cared more about his class than about benefits of the empire. See in Margetić, "Italia bizantina ed Istria nel sec. VI," in *Histrica et Adriatica*, 106.

will help to stabilize the empire from inside, and the army that would protect it from external enemies. Such approach may perhaps work if Italy was conquered quickly. However the war that dragged out for almost two decades ruined Italian economy and emptied imperial treasury. Without the adequate funding the empire could not pay the army, necessary for protection of the province. To collect the necessary money the civil administration increased the taxes, which in turn caused deep resentment among local population, still affected by war. The resistance and rebellion found its expression in the Schism of Three Chapters that seriously worsened relations between Rome and Constantinople, opening a gap which would last until early eighth century. And so, the circle was closed. Unable to pay the army, and without support of locals, the Byzantine government could not stop the Lombard invasion in 568. Worse was yet to come. Beside the clear and present Lombard threat, in the next decade Italy saw a series of internal political and religious crises which seriously undermined the imperial authority which Justinian had fought so hard to recover. And the Lombard invasion resulted in the loss of most of the Italian territory, with the exception of a few Byzantine outposts situated along the Adriatic coast and in southern Italy. The situation was not improved by the simultaneous invasion of Persians in the East, which caused a severe shortage of manpower that was reflected in the weakness of the imperial army stationed in Italy. This demographic crisis was further accentuated by successive famines, floods, pestilences, and possible climatic instabilities.<sup>151</sup>

In such a state of emergency, the primary objective of the central government became the preservation of the provinces which remained in its possession from falling into enemy hands. The cost of army survival was the weakening of ties with the central government and dependence on local sources of supplies, recruits, and leaders. As a consequence, the authority and importance of military commanders grew significantly over the next decades,

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<sup>151</sup> For climatic changes and their influence on political and military events, see J. Koder, "Climatic changes in the fifth and sixth centuries?," *Byzantina Australiensia* 10 (1996): 270-284.

enlarging their sphere of action. The civil authorities passed into second place and were quickly subordinated to the military element.<sup>152</sup> Under constant enemy pressure, the ancient civil constitution was gradually transformed into a military government and all of Byzantine Italy, including Histria became a military zone.

### **Local potentates – The rise of the military élite**

As noted above, the Lombard invasion of 568 was crucial for the development of the militarization process in Italy. Italy was still affected by the consequences of the destructive Gothic war, and despite the pacification, the fifteen years following its end were still marked by chronic insecurity, particularly in areas of Northern Italy. The contemporary accounts certainly exaggerate in describing atrocities by Lombards, but the archeological record shows the disappearance of a number of settlements, especially on the frontiers between the empire and the Lombard kingdom.<sup>153</sup> As I argued when talking about *castrization*, in Byzantine Histria the Lombard threat caused the population to flee to the more secure hilltops and promontories, establishing new towns, as is seen in the case of Iustinopolis or Neapolis.

A high level of insecurity persisted through the seventh century despite the conclusion of several truces with the Lombards. This new and permanent state of clear and present danger caused significant changes in administration and in the way society functioned. By the seventh century, the old civil order had disappeared for good, being replaced by a militarized society. These new circumstances led to a number of social and administrative changes.

Historians generally see the militarization of the administration and society as a feature peculiar to the Byzantine Italy. The traditional view attributed this development exclusively to creation of the exarchate, which happened during the reign of the emperor

<sup>152</sup> Diehl, *Etudes*, 2. However, it seems that the institution of the *praefect*, although with diminished power survived until the middle of the seventh century. For more, see in Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 9-10.

<sup>153</sup> Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 40.

Maurice, around the year 584.<sup>154</sup> However, as Brown rightly pointed out, and I fully agree, the military takeover of the supreme power in Byzantine Italy was more a gradual and uneven, perhaps even *ad hoc*, process than a result of a centrally imposed imperial directive.<sup>155</sup>

There are two problems that have misled scholars. The first is an apparent contrast between the fully developed military society of the seventh and eighth centuries and the predominantly civil society attested by the *Pragmatica Sanctio* of 554. As I pointed out above, this imperial edict missed its initial aim, and the dominance the military exercised during the Gothic war continued well after the end of the conflict. A number of generals, who held both powers through successive years, demonstrate that the civil government actually never succeeded in re-establishing itself.

Another problem is that of Italy being the first Byzantine *thema*.<sup>156</sup> Some scholars have argued that after the Lombard invasion, Italian provinces, isolated and endangered, started to constitute a *thema*.<sup>157</sup> However, there is no contemporary evidence mentioning the term *thema* or any office characteristic for the thematic system in Italy or any of its regions.<sup>158</sup> The militarization was probably introduced at various times in different areas as a response to problems as they arose rather than as part of a general directive issued from Constantinople.<sup>159</sup>

And no province of the empire found itself so exposed to the enemy as Histria, detached as it was from the rest of Byzantine Italy following the Lombard conquest of the

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<sup>154</sup> Diehl was the first who attributed militarization with introduction of the exarch: *Etudes*, 17-18. This opinion was later taken by Ostrogorski, *History of Byzantine State*, 69.

<sup>155</sup> Brown argued that the separation between two powers, civil and military, still existed at the time of Gregory the Great, see in Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 54. Also see from the same author: "The interplay between Roman and Byzantine traditions," *Settimane di studio del centro Italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo* (1988): 34, 135.

<sup>156</sup> Brown strongly argued against the concept of the exarchate constituted as a *thema*, see Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 47; The traditional view is represented by Diehl, *Etudes*, 19; and Hartmann, *Untersuchungen*, 9.

<sup>157</sup> In case of Histria, see Benussi, *Nel medio evo*, 32; Vergottini, *Lineamenti*, 30-31 argued for Histria as a theme. However this opinion is now obsolete.

<sup>158</sup> Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 48-53, 151. Also see S. Cosentino, *Storia dell' Italia bizantina*, 141-145.

<sup>159</sup> For gradual introduction of the militarization, see Brown, *Interplay*, 127-160.



greater part of Venetia. The letters of Gregory the Great help demonstrate how the gathering of power in hands of the military authority in Histria happened in large part even before the end of the sixth century.<sup>160</sup> Endangered and isolated, Histria became the first military region in Italy and probably served as a model for organizing other regions of the nascent exarchate.

The hierarchy of exarchate's Italy can be seen clearly in the epigraphic inscription that was found in Torcello, dated to 639, which mentions that during the reign of *Imperante Domino Nostro Heraclio perpetuo Augusto*, the church was built *ex iussione pio et devote domno nostro Issacio excellentissimo exarcho Patricio* by *bene meritum Mauricium gloriosum magistromilitum Provincie Venetiarum residentem*.<sup>161</sup> On the apex of the hierarchy was the emperor in Constantinople, God's vice-regent on earth. In year 639, emperor Heraclius still ruled the empire; the highest authority in Byzantine Italy was exarch Isaac, who was Armenian by origin. The local authority was *gloriosus magister militum Mauricius*, residing at that time in Torcello. This provincial hierarchy will be examined in detail.

### *Exarch*

As other provinces of Byzantine Italy, Histria was subordinated to the military governor who resided in Ravenna. This official is known to historians, though not always to his contemporaries, as exarch. The exarch was the highest military authority entrusted by the emperor to govern the remaining Byzantine possessions in Italy, organized into a political and administrative unit known as the exarchate.<sup>162</sup> The scarcity of sources makes it difficult to determine when the Exarchate of Ravenna was founded. The foundation is usually attributed to emperor Maurice, who wanted to strengthen the Byzantine position in the West, creating

<sup>160</sup> Benussi, *Nel medio evo*, 33; Vergottini, *Lineamenti*, 31.

<sup>161</sup> A. Pertusi, A. Pertusi, "L'iscrizione Torcellana a tempi di Eraclio," *ZRVI* 8 (1964), 317-339, Ferluga, *L'Istria*, 178. For full text, see Fig. 11.

<sup>162</sup> The most detailed description of exarch's powers can be found in Diehl, *Etudes*, 157-167 and Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 48-53. For territorial extent of the exarchate, see M. Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, 298-302.

the exarchates of Africa and Italy. However, this idea has been disputed in recent historiography.<sup>163</sup> The office of exarch was a new institution, but it was not a creation *ex novo*.<sup>164</sup> His position was actually a continuation of that of the *strategos autokrator* of the Gothic wars, held by Belisarius and Narses.<sup>165</sup>

As commander-in-chief of the Italian army, the *exercitus Italiae*, the exarch's military competence was vast.<sup>166</sup> He not only controlled the imperial army stationed in Italy, but also, when he wanted, he could assume command *in loco* over every single provincial contingent, regardless of the opinion of its commander.<sup>167</sup> When exarch Romanus decided to move troops from Rome to reinforce Perugia, the commander of Roman garrison protested, knowing that the Lombard army was dangerously near the city. However, even if moving of troops could mean fall of Rome, he was not in a position to oppose the exarch's orders.<sup>168</sup> In a similar way, when the exarch moved with the army in the province, his authority automatically took precedence over that of the local *duces* or *magistri militum*. Thus, in 599, when exarch Callinicus headed northwards to fight the Slavs attacking Histria, he assumed command over *exercitus Histriae*, defeating the intruders.<sup>169</sup> The same happened after the murder of emperor Constans II, when exarch Gregorius led troops from Histria and Campania to crush the

<sup>163</sup> The term *exarchatus*, or exarchate, as the political and administrative unit is usually called, is misleading. The first mention of *exarchatus* in the sources comes from dates only after 751. Thereafter it is used only for the area around Ravenna, where the exarch had direct power. The official term used by imperial chancellery was *provincia Italiae*. About first mention of *exarchatus*, see Diehl, *Etudes*, 17. However, for the sake of simplicity, in this thesis I am using the term **exarchate**.

<sup>164</sup> An official with the title of *exarchus* is mentioned for the first time in 584. The reference to *exarchus* Decius can be found in a letter sent by Pope Pelagius II to deacon Gregory, his *apocrisarius* in Constantinople. For the source see Pelagii II, *MGH*, Ep. II, 441. First time is mentioned by Diehl, *Etudes*, 17. For prosopographical evidence about Decius, see *Prosopografia dell'Italia bizantina*, I, 55. However, the information available about him is vague. Also see Ferluga, *L'Istria*, 178; Ravegnani, *L'Istria bizantina*, 78. It is probable that Smaragdus became first exarch in 585. See in Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 48-49, Cosentino, *Cosentino*, *Storia*, 136, 198; Ferluga, *L'esarcato*, 356-357. Also see Ferluga, *L'Istria*, 178; Ravegnani, *L'Istria bizantina*, 78.

<sup>165</sup> This interpretation is justified in Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 48-50. Also see Borri, *Duces e magistri militum* 4; Ravegnani, *L'Istria bizantina*, 76. For traditional view see Diehl, *Etudes*, 17-18.

<sup>166</sup> The *exercitus Italiae* was the main army unit in exarchate, with center at Ravenna. Initially was composed from mix of eastern, Lombard and local troops, but by the seventh century it was recruited mainly from local population. For more about *exercitus Italiae*, see Ferluga, *L'esarcato*, 362.

<sup>167</sup> More on military office of the exarch, see Ravegnani, *L'Istria*, 76; Cosentino, *Storia*, 137; Ferluga, *L'esarcato*,

<sup>168</sup> Diehl, *Etudes*, 68-72. Also see Borri, *Duces e magistri militum*, 14-15.

<sup>169</sup> *MGH*, Ep. II, 40, Margetić, *Venuta degli Slavi in Istria*, in *Histrica et Adriatica* (Rovigno: Centro di ricerche storiche), 144-145. For *exercitus Histriae*, see Ravegnani, *L'Istria bizantina*, 77-84, Ferluga, *L'Istria*, 178.

rebellion in Sicily. Also during the rebellion of 727, before they elected their *duces*, the *exercitus* rejected the exarch's orders. This implies that prior to the rebellion they had been following the exarch on campaign.

Being appointed directly from Constantinople, the exarch acted more as the colonial viceroy than a local leader. To facilitate his position, the central administration delegated considerable power to the exarch. As the only representative of the emperor in Italy the exarch had authority over all military and civil matters, managed tax collection, and appointed lower officers such as the *magister militum*. He was the one who nominated, promoted, and sacked officers.<sup>170</sup> The exarch had the right to sign an armistice, but he could not sign a peace agreement or make alliances.

His Greek origin helped him to maintain close connections with the court in Constantinople, where he held the high title of *patricius*.<sup>171</sup> His close ties with the imperial court also assured his loyalty, which was of crucial importance at that time for retaining Byzantine power in Italy. Thus, during the religious schism, exarch Smaragdus personally intervened in Histria in 588, bringing the prisoners to Ravenna, including the patriarch of Grado, Severus, and the bishops of Tergeste and Parentium.<sup>172</sup>

However, as the imperial power decreased, the exarch's position weakened. In foreign policy, the lack of resources restricted exarch's maneuvers, forcing him to renounce an aggressive policy against the Lombards, in favor of the defensive strategy advocated by the

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<sup>170</sup> Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 151. Also see Ferluga, *L'organizzazione*, 383.

<sup>171</sup> Both exarchs who were active in Histria, Smaragdus, and Callinicus held the title of *patricius* at the Constantinopolitan court. Exarch Smaragdus, can be identified with a patrician of the same name who built a palace in Constantinople during reign of emperor Tiberius. For Smaragdus see *PLRE* III, 1164-1166. For Callinicus see S. Cosentino, *PIB* I, 259.

<sup>172</sup> It seems that even during the reign of Justinian the bishops of Histria and the local population alienated themselves from Constantinople, opposing the Condemnation of the Three Chapters. The seriousness of the situation can be seen in exarch's personal intervention. See in Ferluga, *L'esarcato*, 360; L. Margetić, *Italia bizantina ed Istria nel sec. VI*, 104-105. The schism lasted for almost a century, ending at the Synod of Aquileia in 698.

court in Constantinople, which aimed to preserve the empire's remaining possessions.<sup>173</sup> This explains why there is no evidence of reinforcements sent from the East after the end of the sixth century. Once his duty as a military commander was replaced by administrative responsibilities, his Eastern origin became a source of weakness, since it alienated him from the local military aristocracy, who at that time began to increase the tendencies for autonomy. The exarch was usually appointed for a short time, very few ruled more than ten years, so he could bond with local aristocracy only during the military campaign.<sup>174</sup>

Although the empire's treaty of 680 decreased Lombard pressure, sporadic incursions continued in the border provinces, causing them to rely on the local authority and local militia.<sup>175</sup> Moreover, the treaty and the Lombard conversion to Catholicism weakened the exarchate's feelings of solidarity against a heretical enemy. This de facto autonomy led to the rise of separatist tendencies, particularly when the empire tried to reassert its power.<sup>176</sup>

### *Magister militum*

The administrative changes were reflected on the local level. Each province was governed by a high military officer known as *magister militum* or *dux*.<sup>177</sup> They were appointed by the exarch (*ordinatio exarchi*)<sup>178</sup>, however, probably with permission of the emperor. Originally both the *duces* and *magistri militum* were generals serving on active campaigns (*magister militum vacantes*).<sup>179</sup> During the initial period of the Lombard invasion

<sup>173</sup> About the signing of treaty with the Lombards in 680 and its implications, see T. S. Brown, "Byzantine Italy (680-876)," in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire*, ed. J. Shepard (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 436-437.

<sup>174</sup> Brown, *Interplay*, 135-136.

<sup>175</sup> A. Pertusi, "Ordinamenti militari, guerre in occidente e teorie di guerra dei Bizantini (secc. VI-X)," *Settimane di studio del centro Italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo* 53 (2006), 638-644.

<sup>176</sup> Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 52.

<sup>177</sup> Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 53 argued the the two titles synonymous; Also see Diehl, 141-143; Hartmann, *Untersuchungen*, 56-57. Borri argued that, at least initially, the two titles were distinct and that only later, between the seventh and eighth century, did they became synonymous. See Borri, *Duces e magistri militum*, 6-7.

<sup>178</sup> *LP*, I, 404. For interpretation see A. Carile, *Presenza*, 110-111.

<sup>179</sup> For more about magistrum militum, see: Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 53-56, Borri, *Duces e magistri militum*, 5; Ferluga, *L'organizzazione*, 384. During the late Roman period, *magistri militum* and *duces* were

they held temporary authority over the area where they conducted military operations. As time progressed and it became clear that the Lombard danger did not abate, these commanders settled in areas at the heads of garrison troops and both their high status and military ability led to their involvement in provincial administration.<sup>180</sup> As the civil administration collapsed, besides military duty, they took over numerous civil matters including court cases. By the late seventh century the supreme authority of the local military commanders was complete.

As already mentioned, like rest of Byzantine Italy, under the Lombard pressure, beginning with the last decades of the sixth century, Histria began to form a military district led by a *magister militum* who represented interests of the empire in the region. This can be seen in the letters of Gregory the Great that mention *magistri militum* Basil, Mastalone, and Gulfaris.<sup>181</sup> The *magistri militum* continued to exercise supreme power in Histria until the takeover of the province by the Franks as is shown by the *Placitum Risani*. This valuable ninth-century document mentions Constantine, Basil, Stephanos, and another Basil, all of them eighth-century *magistri militum* and wealthy landholders.<sup>182</sup> The names mentioned in the sources suggest that, unlike other provinces, the *magistri militum* of Histria were predominantly of Greek origin. This suggests that they maintained close connections with the exarch in Ravenna and the central government. The only notable exception is *magister militum* Gulfaris, who, judging by his name, was of Lombard origin.<sup>183</sup>

The *magister militum* was the supreme commander of the military in the province from the first days of Byzantine conquest, and his power was further accentuated by the fusion of the military element with the civil one. In the new circumstances, he not only had authority over the military, but also over the civil administration of the entire province of

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appointed by the emperor by *sacra epistula*. Such a custom probably continued during the Byzantine rule over Italy. For more about officer's appointment, see Ravegnani, *I Bizantini e la guerra*, 77.

<sup>180</sup> Brown, *Gentlemen and officers*, 53.

<sup>181</sup> For sources mentioning the *magistri militum* see *MGH*, Ep. V, 46 (*magister militum* Basilius) Ep. V, 47 (*magister militum* Mastalone) and Ep. IX, 93 (*magister militum* Gulfaris), for more on Gulfaris, see *PLRE* III, 563, Ferluga, *L'Istria*, 178.

<sup>182</sup> P. Kandler, *Codice Diplomatico Istriano*, I, 54.

<sup>183</sup> Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 52.

Histria. His residence was in Pola, then a major city and capital of the province.<sup>184</sup> The powers that Constantinople and Ravenna gave to him were considerable if not limitless. He appointed lower officials, controlled the local administration, and he was the one to whom subjects could express their complaints, particularly at the provincial assembly. Moreover, he had general supervision of the collection of taxes; he fixed extraordinary tributes, protected the privileges of the cities and respected their customs.

According to the *Placitum*, to facilitate the exercise of his function, the *magister militum* of Histria had in his service an “*officium*” of *adiutores*, a hierarchically organized group of officials led by a *primicerius*.<sup>185</sup> The reference to a *primicerius* that is found in Egyptian papyri of the seventh century indicates that he was the adjutant of the unit commander.<sup>186</sup> The function of personal assistant was fulfilled by the *cancelarius*, a military official who was at the same time the administrator of the *magister militum*’s estates.<sup>187</sup> Also in his retinue the *magister militum* had a number of *scribones*, *numerarii*, *scholastici*, and *chartulari*, a small army of functionaries who made up the central office of the provincial bureaucracy.<sup>188</sup>

By the eighth century, the effective military power was decentralized, and it was the local military commander who exercised the real power over the area that he governed. It is possible that after the rebellion against Constantinople in 727, and particularly after the fall of the exarchate in 751, the *magister militum* of Histria started to be elected from the ranks of the

<sup>184</sup> Benussi, *Nel medio evo*, 34. Ravagnani, *L’Istria bizantina*, 79. For source see Kandler, *CDI*, I, 112: *Primus omnium Primas Polensis dixit: quando Patriarcha in nostram Civitatem veniebat, et si opportunum erat propter. Missos Dominorum nostrorum, aut aliquo placito cum Magistro Militum Graecorum habere*. The importance of Pola can be seen from the speech of the *Primas Polensis* the *placitum*. Among 172 *capitanei* he spoke first. Pola is also the only *civitas* mentioned in the tribute list: *de civitate Polensi solidi Mancosi sexaginata*.

<sup>185</sup> Ferluga, *L’Amministrazione bizantina in Dalmazia*, (Venezia, 1978), 54-57.

<sup>186</sup> Hartmann, *Untersuchungen*, 61, 156-157. Also see Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 59.

<sup>187</sup> *CDI*, I, 54, *Cancellarius Civitatis novae mancosos duodecim, qui faciunt in simul mancosos*. The mention of 12 solidi Mancosi that should be paid not by the city, but by *cancellarius* suggests that this many was paid from *magister militum*’s estate, situated in vicinity of Neapolis. This is confirmed in next passage: *In nova Civitate habet Fiscum publicum, ubi commanet, intus et foras Civitatem amplius quam duos centum colonos, per bonum tempus reddunt oleo amplius quam centum modia, vino magis quam amphoras duocentum, alnona seu castaneas sufficienter*

<sup>188</sup> R. Udina, “Il placito del Risano,” *Archeografo Triestino* 45 (1952), 19.

local potentates, bishops, and great landholders (*primates*), and that in such a way the title became hereditary in selected families.<sup>189</sup>

### *Tribunus*

An equally dynamic development is evident in the case of the next rank in the provincial hierarchy, that of *tribunus*. In the purely military sense, this rank denoted a commander of a *numerus*, a military unit numbering between 200 and 400 men.<sup>190</sup> From an early date, however, *tribuni* of Histria exercised political authority in the cities and fortresses which they commanded.<sup>191</sup> Like the *magister militum*, *tribuni* were appointed by the exarch.<sup>192</sup> However, as the exarchate weakened, *tribuni* came to be selected from the local aristocracy.. As a military commander of the city or *castrum*, the *tribunus* was responsible for its safety, for guarding the walls, and for the construction of necessary defensive structures. He also controlled the surrounding area. Their role of being local military commanders helped them to strengthen the influence that they had over their communities, and by the late seventh century the *tribunus* became the most powerful person in each urban community

As the province gradually became more and more militarized, the *tribunus* acquired administrative duties. He gained authority over all administrative matters; he had judicial power and managed the tax collection.<sup>193</sup> From the *Placitum* it can be seen that every *tribunus* had the privilege of granting immunity from military requirements and taxes to five or more

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<sup>189</sup> PS, c. 12, *CJC*, II, 802. For general situation in the exarchate, see Diehl, *Etudes*, 141; Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 55. For the situation in Histria, see Udina, *Il Placito di Risano*; 18.; Carile, *La Presenza bizantina nell'Alto Adriatico fra VII e IX secolo*, 113; Margetić. *Neka pitanja*, 413-414.

<sup>190</sup> *Numerus Tergestinus*: Udina, *Il Placito del Risano*, 21, Ravegnani mentions a number of around 500 soldiers. Ravegnani, *L'Istria bizantina*, 31. Also see Cosentino, *Storia dell'Italia bizantina*, 152-153; Ferluga, *L'Istria*, 180; Ferluga, *L'organizzazione*, 383.

<sup>191</sup> Benussi, *Nel medio evo*, 89. Ferluga, *L'Istria*, 183.

<sup>192</sup> For nomination by the exarch see Ferluga, *L'organizzazione*, 384.

<sup>193</sup> For more about the administrative function of the *tribunus* - in Histria, see Diehl, *Etudes*, 114 - 116. Benussi, *Nel medio evo*, 37. *MGH*, Ep II, 31, VIII, 18., Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 59.

of free men who relied on his protection and worked in his service, in war and in peace, taking name of *excusati*.<sup>194</sup>

As the exarch's authority weakened, *tribuni* started to be appointed by the local aristocracy. Evidence from the *Placitum* shows that in eighth-century Histria the office had been appropriated by the substantial landholders; it became hereditary in the families of the original *tribuni*. By that time, the *numerus* became more than a military unit, as seen in the case of *numerus Tergestinus*, it had become the term denoting the county where soldiers lived and owned the land.<sup>195</sup> It is possible that during the eighth century the term *numerus* became a synonym for city, and the term *miles*, soldiers, for citizens.<sup>196</sup>

#### *Lower officers*

As the military danger gradually increased all political power in Histria was taken over by the military. During the seventh century the power passed from the *defensores* to the hands of *domestici*, *vicarii*, and *lociservatores*, officials who, together with the *tribunii*, were all subordinate to the *magister militum*.<sup>197</sup> They assisted the *magister militum* in governing the provincial cities and *castra*. One may assume that these terms represented the ranks in the hierarchy of the Byzantine army.<sup>198</sup> The term *domesticus* can have two meanings; one means adjutant to a higher official, the other is member of the palace guard. In the case of Histria this would mean the first, since the palace guard could only be found in exarch's palace in Ravenna. The rank of *domesticus* could be also a reward to soldiers who had distinguished themselves during a campaign or for their loyal service. The term *vicarius* signifies the deputy

<sup>194</sup> CDI, I, 54, 113 *Graecorum tempore omnis Tribunus habebat excusatos quinque, et amplius, et ipsos nobis abstulit*. This was further elaborated in Guillou, *La presenza bizantina*, 416.

<sup>195</sup> The *capitanei* lamented that Frankish dux took their lands. This would mean that prior to Frankish rule they had their own lands. For further explanation see Ferluga, *L'Istria*, 183. Also see Guillou, *La presenza bizantina*, 418.

<sup>196</sup> The identification of miles with citizen may show how the process of the militarization became implemented in the society. See in Ferluga, *L'esarcato*, 385.

<sup>197</sup> Udina, *Il Placito di Risano*, 19. Also see Ferluga, *L'Istria*, 190; Ravegnani, *L'Istria bizantina*, 81.

<sup>198</sup> For the further interpretation of the military ranks, see Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 59.



of a *tribunus* or other military commander. He was usually in charge of *castra* subordinate to the city governed by the *tribunus*.<sup>199</sup> Unlike the first two, the term *lociservator* had a more general application. It could mean deputy, applied to any of several lower civil officials, or clergy, but in case of Histria it meant a lieutenant who was subordinate to the *tribunus*.

One can note here that unlike the rest of the empire, Byzantine Italy retained the terminology of the sixth century through entire period of the exarchate. In the case of Histria, the terminology survived well into the period of Frankish domination.<sup>200</sup> Besides southern Italy and Sicily, no evidence can be found for the Greek terms such as *turmarch*, *moirarch* or *droungarios*, which appeared after Greek became official language of the army.

As seen the Lombard invasion resulted not only in creation of a new political and administrative unit, but also in thorough transformation of the local society. Its main aim was to preserve control of the empire in the distant province by giving all powers to its representative, the exarch of Ravenna. However, as the presence of the empire vanished as result of the attacks in the East, the local military élite was left on its own, and developed its own hierarchy. In it, the exarch became a stranger, and his place was taken by *magister militum*. As the autonomy of the provinces increased during the early eight century, the local élite started to elect their own leaders from their own ranks. In Histria such a hierarchy survived fall of the exarchate, lasting up to the arrival of Franks. Thus, this “fossilized” hierarchy was a feature that not only distinguished local élite from the rest of the empire, such as Byzantine possessions in Sicily or southern Italy. It gave them a sense of unity and solidarity.

<sup>199</sup> Diehl, *Etudes*, 12-16; Ferluga, *L'organizzazione*, 384-385.

<sup>200</sup> It is attested at the *Placitum Risani*, where all the titles are mentioned, *tribuni*, *domestici*, *vicarii*, *lociservatori*. *CDI*, I, 54, *Placitum Risani*. However, it is possible that by the late eighth century they did not indicated military offices, but a dignity. See Ferluga, *L'Istria*, 183.

## The Role of the Army in Frontier Society

In an empire beset by enemies the role of the army was central. In addition to the crucial function that a soldier had as a member of the military; he held an important and respected place in the Byzantine conception of society.<sup>201</sup> The role of the army was particularly important in Byzantine Italy, which faced the problem of continuous warfare and could survive only by creating a society geared to military needs. As seen above such a society was led by a particular type of élite, a military aristocracy, who provided a form of security and successfully contained the enemy pressure for two centuries. This transformation was greatly helped by existing Roman military institutions, which were adapted for events occurring through the seventh and eighth centuries.<sup>202</sup> Here I will discuss when and how the military came to exercise social leadership and the impact of this on local society.

The eclipse of the senatorial aristocracy and civil institutions associated with it and the destruction caused by the war and constant enemy threat resulted in the concentration of administrative power in the hands of the military. The disappearance of senatorial class resulted in threefold division of local society from the seventh century onwards: the clergy, the military, and the civilian population. Only by cooperation between these three groups could military officers rise to a pre-eminent social position achieving the monopoly on armed force, which in turn reinforced their prestige and authority and gradually gained them supreme power.<sup>203</sup>

The scarcity of written sources makes it almost impossible to estimate the size of this new military aristocracy. One may note that in Byzantine Italy the military profession as a whole denoted a distinct social category, not just rank. The commanding officers exercised a level of power, particularly political power, which was far greater than the power exercised by

<sup>201</sup> For interpretation of the soldier's status in the seventh century Byzantine society see J. Haldon, "Ideology and Social Change in the Seventh Century," *Klio* 68, Berlin (1986): 139-143. Also see Haldon, "Some Considerations on Byzantine Economy in the Seventh Century," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 10 (1985):95-96.

<sup>202</sup> Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 82.

<sup>203</sup> Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 399.

an ordinary soldier. However, the ordinary soldiers, *milites*, also had high status within the society, as they are frequently recorded as holding considerable amounts of land.<sup>204</sup> Some observations related to the military in general will be useful in furthering the discussion here.

Byzantine field armies fighting in Italy were small by modern standards. Belisarius conquered Italy with a force numbering less than 15 000, and the greatest army fighting in the Gothic war, that of Narses, consisted of no more than 25 000 men.<sup>205</sup> From this it can be concluded that the number of officers leading these troops was also small, since there could hardly be more than a few commanders in a *numerus* of 200 to 400 men.<sup>206</sup> It is logical to assume that as exarchate's territory had shrunk, the number of soldiers decreased too. However, through that period many *castra* and cities had its own local forces (*militia*), and a number of *militia* could be recruited in the countryside.<sup>207</sup> The total number of the military élite that led those forces should be then counted in the hundreds.<sup>208</sup>

The élite's minority in numbers was compensated by their domination in landholding and in their holding political assets. Thus, when *missi* were dispatched by Charlemagne to investigate actions of Frankish *dux* John, the people of Histria were represented by 172 *homines capitanei*, all of them landholders of a certain military standing.<sup>209</sup> Also, the evidence from the *Placitum Risani* shows that even on the eve of the Frankish conquest, the

<sup>204</sup> Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 63, 101-108. Also see Cosentino, *Storia dell'Italia bizantina*, 266-269.

<sup>205</sup> The numbers mentioned in the text are taken from Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 60; Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 251-252 argued that following the Gothic war the imperial army in Italy, *exercitus Italiae*, numbered no more than 15 000. For comparison, all field armies stationed in the Justinianic empire numbered 154 000 men.

<sup>206</sup> This interpretation is justified in Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 64.

<sup>207</sup> The local militia is attested as early as the Gothic war. Procopius mentioned *militia* in Rome that helped the imperial army to defend the city walls. Similarly, in Milan, Belisarius created the special units from the local militia, however, they were not incorporated into imperial army. See in Ferluga, *L'organizzazione*, 380. Thus, it can be assumed that as imperial influence weakened in Italy, the importance of local militia increased.

<sup>208</sup> This was particularly stressed by Pertusi, *Ordinamenti militari*, 681-682.

<sup>209</sup> *CDI*, I, 54, 113, ...in loco qui dicitur Riziano, ibique adunatis venerabili Viro Fortunato Patriarcha, atque Theodoro, Leone, Stauratio, Stephano, Laurentio Episcopis, et reliquis Primatibus, vel Populo Provinciae Istriensium, tunc eligimus de singulis Civitatibus, seu Castellis homines capitaneos numero centum septuaginta et duos; The officials mentioned here were referenced as the *primates*. This could mean that this title had degenerated by the eighth century, assuming a different meaning as the society of Byzantine Italy became more localized.

tax was still collected from the cities and *castra*, and stored in the *palatium* of the *magister militum* in Pola, from where the money was sent to Constantinople.<sup>210</sup>

In initial years of the Byzantine rule over Italy the élite was still made mainly of easterners. It was argued above that leading governors and generals, exarch or *magister militum* were predominantly of Greek origin, sent from the East, usually enjoying high status at the Byzantine courts. The exarchs held a dignity of *patricius*, one of the highest dignities that could be given by the emperor.

Besides the High command, there was also a considerable number of soldiers or officials of eastern origin who lived on the territory of the exarchate, at least during the late sixth century. They mainly settled in Ravenna, working in the administration or the military.<sup>211</sup>

It is likely that Histria, being initially unaffected by the war and with its coastal towns situated in close proximity to Ravenna, attracted its share of easterners. Those were mainly the soldiers who remained in Italy after the majority of the imperial army was disbanded or sent to other regions or to other fronts. Evidence for this can be attested by an inscription from 571-579, found in Grado, which mentions the *numerus equitum Persoianorum*.<sup>212</sup> As the name says, this was a military cavalry unit comprised of Persian prisoners of war who were sent to Italy to fight in the Gothic war. An eastern origin can be determined for the *numerus Cadisianus*, probably also comprised of Persian prisoners, while the *numerus Tarvisianus* and *numerus Tergestinus* were of local origin.<sup>213</sup> Inscriptions can also be used as an evidence for their social background, because soldiers mentioned in inscriptions were wealthy enough to make a donation for a mosaic floor in the newly built church of St. Euphemia.<sup>214</sup>

<sup>210</sup> CDI, I, 54, 112: *Isti solidi tempore Grecorum in Pallatio cos portabat*. Here the *palatium* refer to the treasury.

<sup>211</sup> Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 68-69; *Interplay*, 134.

<sup>212</sup> Ferluga, *L'organizzazione*, 380. Also see Ravegnani, *L'Istria bizantina*, 31.

<sup>213</sup> Ravegnani, *Soldati*, 82; Ferluga, *L'Istria*, 177.

<sup>214</sup> These soldiers are: Laurentius, son of Domnus, belonging to *numerus Tarvisianus*, 25 floor tiles; Johannes, *miles* of Persoianini, and Johannes, belonging to *numerus Cadisianus* together with his wife Severina, 25 tiles

Another important element in society of early exarchate were barbarians. In response to the Lombard invasion, new troops were requested from the capital, however, the aid received was scarce at best. The only emperor who sent substantial reinforcements to Italy was Justin II, while his successor, Tiberius II, sent financial help and a smaller contingent of soldiers.<sup>215</sup> With most of the army occupied in the East or in the Balkans, the central government could not provide additional troops for the defense of Italy. This left the exarch with a rather small armed force which could hardly hold the much larger Lombard army. To compensate for the loss of easterners and to replenish the ranks the Byzantine government started to recruit Lombard renegades.

This was not the first time that Byzantines turned to the barbarians. A large number of barbarians served in Justinian's army as mercenaries. There was a significant barbarian element that decreased following the defeat of the Goths, but after the Lombard invasion of Italy in 568, Lombard renegades made up a major element in the imperial forces.<sup>216</sup> The extent of imperial dependence on these soldiers of fortune during the initial years of the Byzantino-Lombard conflict can be seen by examining the origin of the highest provincial officers. Of the 26 *duces* and *magistri militum* recorded between the Lombard appearance in Italy and the death of Gregory I, no less than 14 were Germans by birth.<sup>217</sup> One of them was the aforementioned Gulfaris, probably Ulfaris, a Lombard *dux* of Treviso who, after crossing to the Byzantine side in 599, was rewarded with the title of *glorious magister militum* and the rule over Histria. As mentioned in the Chapter Two, there is clear archeological evidence of

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of mosaic decoration. There are also inscriptions recording donations of *primicerius* Zimarcus and soldier Stephanus, both belonging to *numerus Tarvisianus*. For more about use of inscriptions, see A. Carile, *L'Adriatico in eta bizantina*, 472-474. See also Fig. 12.

<sup>215</sup> Ferluga, *L'organizzazione*, 380. A late seventh-century inscription from the church in Portogruaro mentions Stephanus, a lower official from the *schola* of Armaturae, the imperial guard, probably sent to Italy by emperor Tiberius II.

<sup>216</sup> Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 70. Narses disbanded most of his Lombard auxiliaries after the victory in Italy. Also see Ferluga, *L'organizzazione*, 383; Ferluga, *L'Istria*, 176.

<sup>217</sup> Ferluga, *L'organizzazione*, 383.

Slav settlement starting in the early seventh century, however, if they served in the army, they never held significant position.<sup>218</sup>

By the seventh century no new reinforcements had been sent from the East. Also, the number of barbarians serving in the army diminished as the resources required for their recruitment decreased with the shrinking imperial territory. To compensate the loss, the exarchate's administration began to appoint local men to lesser military posts.<sup>219</sup> Also, a number of great landholders joined the army. These ambitious aristocrats realized the opportunity given by a military career when the old order was breaking down. Some of the exarchs acquired their fortunes in the West, continued to live in Ravenna, rather to return to Constantinople.<sup>220</sup>

It seems that by the late seventh century, easterners in the territory of the exarchate had assimilated with the local population, and Latin had become the predominant language of the élite. An anecdote from Agnellus can serve as an example. The story goes that the exarch Theodore II (677-687) had problems finding a local scribe who knew Greek, and the only person that he found was Agnellus' great-great-grandfather, Iohannicus. Even though Agnellus' story may be an exaggeration, it illustrates the linguistic isolation of the exarch and his entourage as the leading aristocracy came to be predominantly Latin-speaking.<sup>221</sup> Thus, if Ravenna, the exarchate's metropolis, was predominantly Latin-speaking, it is safe to assume that in a border province such as Histria it would be difficult to find a person who knew Greek.<sup>222</sup>

As the ties weakened, not only with Constantinople, but with Ravenna, too, the highest provincial officer – *magister militum* started to be appointed from the ranks of local

<sup>218</sup> For most recent work about Slavs in Histria see M. Levak, *Slaveni vojvode Ivana* (Zagreb:Leykam international, 2008).

<sup>219</sup> Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 68, 169-170. The military élite of Histria said that their ancestors held the office of the *tribunus ab antiquo tempore*.

<sup>220</sup> The exarch Isaac, who was of Armenian origin, was buried in Ravenna together with his family. *PLRE* III, 719-721. Also see *LP*, I, 328.

<sup>221</sup> Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 51, 136.

<sup>222</sup> Agnellus, *Liber pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis*, 120.

aristocracy, with formal approval of the emperor. Local military units remained stationed in the territories still held by the exarchate; promotions occurred on the spot; the soldiers lived with their wives and families and owned land on the territory belonging to the *numerus*.<sup>223</sup>

The practical function of the administration, in particular the army, created a greater scope for able individuals to step upward on the hierarchical social pyramid, than the closed circle of the senatorial aristocracy. But what was the exact status that military élite held in society? A wide range of terms was used to denote the high status of this local military aristocracy. From the seventh century onwards, the term *iudices* reflected the élite's holding of offices, while others such as *optimates* or *primates* were more general terms denoting a higher degree of social pre-eminence.<sup>224</sup> Soon after establishing their position in society, the new leading class laid claim to high birth and the term *nobilis* started to be used. In Histria, as in Ravenna or Rome, an originally specific military term such as *tribunus* or *dux* started to be used for the aristocracy in general. The use of these terms shows that the élite was able to take over a number of criteria of social status, reserved previously only for the senatorial class, like wealth or an aristocratic life-style. As their importance in society rose, by the eighth century the military officials who became landowners had made their titles hereditary.<sup>225</sup>

It is likely that in Ravenna, as in Histria, commanders were still keen to obtain codicils of consular rank from the capital. It was this privilege, which clearly showed the superiority of the military aristocracy over the general population, giving them status which previously only the senatorial class had enjoyed. In Byzantine Histria, the highest military rank following *magister militum* was that of *tribunus*. If a man exercising the duty of *tribunus* was wealthy enough, he could travel to the imperial court and get the dignity of *hypatos* or *consulus* from

<sup>223</sup> A good example here is that of *magister militum* Maurice, who owned the land, A. Pertusi, *L'iscrizione Torcellana a tempi di Eraclio*, 315-339. An inscription from Jesolo shows that *tribunus* Antoninus was buried together with his wife, Agnella, some time during the seventh century. F. Sartori, Antoninus tribunus in una epigrafe inedita di Iesolo (Venezia). Also see A. Carile, *Presenza*, 114-115.

<sup>224</sup> Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 62.

<sup>225</sup> Guillou, *La presenza bizantina*, 418-419.

the emperor, entering the class of the privileged, the *ordo honorum*.<sup>226</sup> This title was purely honorary, without giving any additional power, indicating only a grade of ancient nobility, imagined by the Byzantine court. However, it was the award of dignities that kept the military élite tied to Constantinople by conferring status and defining the individual's place in the imperial hierarchy.<sup>227</sup> In the case of Histria, the person who held the honor of *hypatos* had the privilege of sitting next to the *magister militum* during assemblies, which may have meant that he had some degree of influence on decisions that were made there.<sup>228</sup> So, for example, if the *tribunus* of Parentium got (or bought) the dignity of *hypatos*, he would have a better place than the *tribunus* of Pola, the most prominent city in Histria.

The dignity of *hypatos* is the only such honor attested in Histria. Provincial officials probably would follow their colleagues from Venice, Dalmatia, southern Italy or Sicily in obtaining other dignities such as *protospatharius*, however, the Frankish occupation, around 788, forever detached Histria from the empire.

The example of the *hypatos* or *consulus* shows how the value of dignities had sunk. Once denoting one of the most important offices in the Roman empire, by the eighth century it had been transformed into a minor dignity which could be bought for cash, increasing the influence of some provincial aristocrat. Other offices were also debased. The high office of *magister militum*, which in the sixth century still denoted a commander of *praesental* armies, by the eighth century had degenerated to the status of provincial commander. The same happened with the titles *illustris*, *gloriosus*, and *magnificus*, once reserved for senatorial élite, but by this date being attributed to exarchs, *magistri militum*, *duces* and *tribuni*. For instance,

<sup>226</sup> CDI, I, 54, 113: The *capitanei* lamented how they lost the privilege to be chosen as *hypatos*: *et qui volebat meliorem honorem habere de Tribuno, ambulabat ad Imperium, quod ordinabat illum Ypato.*

<sup>227</sup> For interpretation see Benussi, *Nel medio evo*, 37; Vergottini, *Lineamenti*, 35; Ferluga, *L'Istria*, 180. Also see Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 53-60, 205-208; Brown, *Interplay*, 136.

<sup>228</sup> CDI, I, 54, 113: *...et qui volebat meliorem honorem habere de Tribuno, ambulabat ad Imperium, quod ordinabat illum Ypato. Tunc ille qui Imperialis erat Ypatus, in omni loco secundum illum Magistrum militum procedebat.* From this passage it is clear how the dignity system worked, all through the eighth century. By conferring the dignity to individual, the court increased prestige of that individual in the society. On the other hand, the title of the individual could function only in closed Byzantine society, so it was beneficial for him to protect imperial interests in the province.



Gulfaris held the title *gloriosus magister militum*. Only the title of *patricius* preserved its high status, being confined to the exarch only.<sup>229</sup>

This widespread diffusion of the formerly highest titles in Italy may be a reflection of diminished role of the exarchate in the imperial *realpolitik*. One should not forget that during the late seventh century the focus of the Byzantine government in Italy shifted from the north to Sicily and southern Italy, which became heavily Hellenized. A good example is the military expedition of emperor Constans II that never reached further north than Rome; the emperor himself settled in Sicily.<sup>230</sup> Also, by the eighth century the military titles such as *tribunus* did not necessarily indicated their original meaning only. However in the provincial society such titles became a matter of prestige. To explain this phenomenon Brown used an expression of titles: “being used as a big fish in smaller and smaller ponds.”<sup>231</sup>, for which I think that it could not be more appropriate, given the examples.

### **Was there a professional army in Byzantine Histria?**

It is difficult for a historian to assess the position of the army in Byzantine Histria. There is no legislation dealing with the military organization of the province and accounts of conflicts are few and give scarce information. Moreover, during the late sixth century, the well-documented imperial army that had won the Gothic war transformed into an army fighting for its very survival.<sup>232</sup> The question is how the provincial defense force based mainly on local resources and manpower, succeeded in surviving the assault of a much larger enemy?

The status of the army can be determined by examining several features: first, the methods of recruitment, second, army organization and tactics, third, the methods of support

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<sup>229</sup> Ferluga, *L'esarcato*, 358.

<sup>230</sup> On the significance of Constans II expedition, see Ferluga, *L'esarcato*, 364-365.

<sup>231</sup> Brown, 130.

<sup>232</sup> Ferluga, *L'organizzazione militare dell'esarcato*, 379.

and supply, fourth, the extent of army mobility, and fifth, the strength of the ties it had with the central government.

For Histria there are two principal sources that can help to illuminate this issue, the *Strategikon* and *Placitum Risani*. The *Strategikon*, a late sixth-century military manual supposedly written by emperor Maurice, explains the Byzantine military organization in the empire in detail, which also applied to Italy. In order to survive against the constant Lombard pressure the imperial army had to change the tactics that had won it victory in the Gothic war.

Among other things, the *Strategikon* discusses in detail tactics that should be employed against the principal enemies -- Lombards, Avars, and Slavs -- and appears to be based on the actual conditions in Italy. It discusses enemy weaknesses that should be exploited, modes of fighting, and advocates the use of guerilla warfare, a novelty introduced by the Byzantines to compensate for a chronic lack of manpower. Also, it describes the line-up of the army developed for the Italian theatre, which demanded a great deal of precise drill, suggesting that the Byzantines still maintained a high standard of training.<sup>233</sup>

Sadly, much less is known about armament of the imperial army than about that of their enemies. Christianity ended the tradition of burying weapons in the graves of soldiers. One important source, however, is a letter by Pope Martin I, which records that soldiers were equipped with a lance, sword, bow, and shield, the same weapons mentioned in the *Strategikon*. The emphasis this treatise puts on the cavalry seems apt, especially in the ranks of the military aristocracy. The wealth and privileged position of the soldiers in Byzantine Italy is consistent with their position as an élite cavalry.<sup>234</sup> Also, the mobility by which local forces moved through Italy suggests that the army still consisted mainly of cavalry. The problem of mobility will be addressed later.

<sup>233</sup> *Strategikon*, on the Lombards XI, 3, for Slavs, XI, 4, for drill for Italy, VI, 5. For interpretation see G. T. Dennis, *Maurice's Strategikon*, 119-120.

<sup>234</sup> On the letter of pope Martin I, and its application to Byzantine cavalry, see Brown, *Gentlemen and officers*, 93-108.

As noted above, after the imperial supply of soldiers dried up, to defend itself the exarchate needed to raise its own army. It seems that in the seventh-century exarchate two methods of recruitment were applied, voluntary recruitment and the hiring of barbarians, the latter only during the first period of Byzantine rule.<sup>235</sup> Histria can be assumed to have had a similar situation. The *tribuni* present at the plea held near Rižana mentioned that they were going to battle accompanied by free men.<sup>236</sup> The need for disciplined, well-trained troops and the privileged status of soldiers make it unlikely that a third method, forced recruitment was necessary. The prosperous position of soldiers in Ravenna, where they are recorded as owning land at the earliest in 591, could indicate that this privilege made military service attractive. The *Placitum Risani* records that the *magister militum* of Histria owned substantial land around Neapolis, with more than 200 men working on it.<sup>237</sup>

To retain the army's morale -- crucial for survival of the society under siege -- the soldiers enjoyed a special status. Soldier's conditions were relatively good in the late sixth and seventh century.<sup>238</sup> The high commanders in Byzantine Italy, exarchs, *duces* and *magistri militum*, received annual *stipendium* from the emperor, which, at least formally, made them equal with their eastern counterparts. The pay did not always arrive regularly, but this seems to have been a chronic problem of Byzantine administration.<sup>239</sup> Unlike ordinary *milites*, who received pay on spot, the provincial commanders had to send their emissaries to Ravenna to receive their pay, but it seems that this was not without difficulties.<sup>240</sup>

<sup>235</sup> For methods of recruitment in the Byzantine army, see Haldon, *Recruitment and Conscription in the Byzantine Army c. 550-950. A study on the origins of the Stratiotika ktemata*. (Vienna, 1979), 20-8, Also see Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, vol. 2, 668-669.

<sup>236</sup> *CDI*, 54, I, 113: *Tribunatos nobis abstulit;liberos homines non nos habere permittit, sed tantum cum nostris servis facit nos in hoste ambulare,libertos nostros abstulit advenas hostes ponimus*. The free men mentioned here, *liberos homines*, are soldiers, as the people who lamented to the *missi* had been prior to Frankish arrival *tribuni*, the military commanders.

<sup>237</sup> As argued Pola was center of the Byzantine Histria, but it may be possible that Neapolis had a role of the *magister militum*'s temporary seat, as he had his lands around the town. Ferluga, *L'Istria* 180.

<sup>238</sup> Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, vol 2, 678-679; Also see Pertusi, *Ordinamenti militari*, 663-664.

<sup>239</sup> Ravagnani, *Soldati*, 104-115.

<sup>240</sup> For more about obtaining the pay see Borri, *Duces e magistri militum*, 14.

In addition to the pay, soldiers had a number of privileges that kept them at their posts, such as partial immunity from taxation, the right to occasional gifts from the emperor (accession *donatives*) and from their commanders. Living at the frontier, they had a special benefit of to share any booty.<sup>241</sup> In the early seventh century the allowances for supplies and equipment were paid in cash, and the troops appear to have preferred this system, presumably because they were able to keep part of the sum for themselves.<sup>242</sup>

During the late seventh and eighth century, as the situation worsened, the cash payments were replaced by giving land to soldiers. This made possible considerable income from landholdings. Pay still resumed, however, its delay could cause unrest. The delay in pay cost Maurice his throne and his very life.<sup>243</sup> Also, the lack of pay caused the sack of the Lateran palace by a Roman garrison and troops from surrounding strongholds in 638.<sup>244</sup>

It is possible that cash pay ceased in the late seventh century, as it is not recorded among the allowances of the *tribuni* of Histria mentioned in the *Placitum Risani*. Even if this was the case, a *magister militum*'s control over his soldiers was not weakened because he still had other sources of payment.

These examples show that the military had complete control over the administration and could offer substantial opportunities to soldiers. At least until the end of the seventh century the local military authority could still provide soldiers with at least a portion of their rations and supplies, since there is a record of the compulsory purchase of grain in 686.<sup>245</sup> By the seventh century soldiers could live and produce from the rents of their lands. This land did

<sup>241</sup> Maurice, *Strategikon*, IX, 3. For interpretation see in Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 86.

<sup>242</sup> Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 87, Haldon, *Recruitment*, 23, 67-68.

<sup>243</sup> M. Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, 69-72.

<sup>244</sup> *Liber Pontificalis*, I, 23 Particularly interesting is the information that their leader, *chartularius* Maurice, incited the troops to break into the palace by assuring them that the pay that emperor sent from time to time was stored there, which implied that Roman pontiff was some sort of a banker. Was there perhaps a similar situation in Histria, with patriarch of Grado being a banker for provincial troops?

<sup>245</sup> *LP*, I, 366. The purchase of grain demonstrates that although a large number of soldiers did possess land, the local military authorities still could maintain traditional Roman policy of supplying their soldiers on regular basis, if not in money, then in nature, providing an additional pay. Also see Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 231-232.

not need to be obtained only by military service, but could also be acquired by inheritance, marriage, abuse, and rent, and this gave soldiers a major incentive towards the vigorous defence of their own properties and communities.<sup>246</sup> The soldier's privileged status preserved the strong Roman tradition of military organization and sharply differentiated *exercitus Italiae* from irregular troops of Lombards, Avars or Slavs.

Besides constant hostile pressure and religious schism, interruption of pay was one of factors which weakened ties with Constantinople. With the gradual reduction of the financial resources at the emperor's disposal, during the seventh century the troops stationed in Italy assumed an increasingly local character both in their recruitment and their hierarchy. However, this did not lead to a breakdown of discipline and cohesion, although it weakened army's ideological basis and changed the course of warfare. In other words, the exarchate's army of the late seventh and eighth century no longer fought to preserve the possessions of the government in Constantinople, but to preserve their own possessions. They developed a strong identity that strengthened ties among the military provincial class, but alienated them from the exarch and emperor.

Mobility is another piece of evidence which shows that the exarchal army retained a high degree of professionalism and discipline. Evidence for mobility can be found through the period of Byzantine dominance over Italy and Histria was no exception. It was already mentioned the case of exarch Callinicus who in 599 personally led the army in Histria, where he defeated Slav invaders. When emperor Constans II was murdered in Syracuse in 668, units of *exercitus Italiae* rushed from Campania and Histria to suppress the rebellion.<sup>247</sup> Also in 733, troops from Venetia, and supposedly Histria, too, marched to Ravenna to recover the capital from the Lombards.<sup>248</sup> These cases demonstrate that the armed forces of Byzantine

<sup>246</sup> Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 88; Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, Vol. 2, 678-679.

<sup>247</sup> *HL*, 5,12, *Milites alii per Histriam, alii per partes Campaniae, Africae, Sardiniae*, Ferluga supposed the existence of *exercitus Histriae*, 180,

<sup>248</sup> Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 91.

Histria remained mobile until the end of the Byzantine period and that they played an important role in the *exercitus Italiae*.

The garrisons of the local strongholds assembled at a central rallying point before going to war. The principal gathering point for the *exercitus Italiae* was Ravenna.<sup>249</sup> For Histria this was Pola, which is known to have already served as an assembly point during the Gothic war, and likely continued its function even into period of the exarchate. Pola was the seat of the *magister militum*, and it is possible that the *exercitus Histriae* assembled there prior to going to crush the rebellion of 668.

There are other indications that the army retained much of its professional character. Various attempts were made to strengthen ties with Constantinople. A detachment from the *exercitus Italiae* served at the imperial palace in 687, and troops from Ravenna, and possibly from Histria, may have been involved in the coup against Justinian II in 695.

The army also played an important role in the official ceremonies. On the occasion of a visit by a high official, the leaders of the local garrison met the dignitary some distance from the city and acted as his escort during his ceremonial entry. Based on evidence from the *Placitum Risani*, McCormick has shown that during the eighth century the imperial ritual of *adventus* was still performed in Byzantine provincial society.<sup>250</sup> If the patriarch of Grado, the metropolitan of Histria, came to Pola to meet with a high Byzantine official, *magister militum Graecorum*, he was welcomed in an *adventus* ceremony featuring standards, candelabra, and incense. These standards should be identified as military banners (*signa*), paraded by flag bearers of the Histrian *numeri*. Furthermore, from the *Strategikon* it can be seen that these flag bearers still held an important position in the Byzantine army. Brown has argued that great

<sup>249</sup> Ferluga, *L'organizzazione*, 383.

<sup>250</sup> McCormick, "The Imperial Edge: Italo-Byzantine identity, Movement and Integration," in *Studies on the internal diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*, ed. Helene Ahrweiler and Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection), 47.

importance was attached to the standard as a symbol to encourage loyalty to the central government.

These activities of local army units should not be seen simply as an expression of political and social power, but as evidence that they still constituted a distinct imperial body with its own traditions and discipline. This, together with their voluntary recruitment, their mobility, their adherence to military procedures, and responsiveness to commands from superiors refute the view that the provincial army had degenerated to a mere social stratum composed of landowners who only fought part-time.<sup>251</sup>

In Rome, numerous references to *florentissimo atque felicissimo romano exercitu*, show that the army was, even at beginning of the eight century, a basic component of the society. It is true that *duces* and *magistri militum*, being soldiers themselves, did not have difficulty to attain the trust of their men, having similar experiences as *milites* that they commanded.<sup>252</sup> Many of them were ordinary soldiers who proved their ability in the field, being rewarded with an office. This caused strong sense of solidarity.<sup>253</sup>

Perhaps the most dramatic example of the cohesiveness of the imperial forces in Italy is a Latin seal which carries the inscription *deus adiuta exerchitus Italiae*. This is a rare case of a Byzantine seal that commemorates a corporate body rather than an individual.<sup>254</sup> Such distinctiveness helped build up the solidarity that reinforced army strength. Constantine IV recognized this when he addressed an edict concerning the prompt ordination of popes to the clergy, the people, and the most fortunate army. Thus, despite a chronic shortage of resources and reinforcements, a highly disciplined and professional army helped the Byzantines to

<sup>251</sup> Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 93.

<sup>252</sup> More about the status of the army in Hartmann, *Untersuchungen*, 66-67.

<sup>253</sup> Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, 386, Ravegani, 83 PIB, 73, f344, Haldon, *Byzantium*, 180

<sup>254</sup> Zaccos, *Verglery, Byzantine Lead Seals, I*, (Basle, 1972)

maintain a resilient and aggressive posture in their remaining possessions as late as the eighth century.<sup>255</sup>

### **The Evolution of Autonomy Tendencies in Histria**

It is not easy to describe relationship between the exarchate and the empire. During the late sixth and early seventh centuries, being under imperial umbrella was generally favorable for the local military élite. They enjoyed a powerful and privileged position, and were prepared to use central machinery whenever it suited them, as in the case of obtaining dignities from the capital. Thus, rebellions were quite rare, and when they happened they were not connected with separatist activity.

The revolts appear to be less the expression of individual than the movement of the whole population. The scope of most revolts was limited, and the primary motives were either fiscal or religious.<sup>256</sup> Paradoxically, it was the empire's treaty with the Lombards in 680 that weakened exarchate's feelings of defensive solidarity against the common enemy. The constant threat from the Lombards and the inability of the central government to intervene strengthened the positions and solidarity of local élites. The local élite's passive acceptance of the empire continued as long as it did not threaten local life and independence. But once the empire's intervention became irksome, and it proved unable to repel serious threats, this acceptance crumbled rapidly.

The first "real" case of separatism occurred in the revolt of 726-727, when exarchate opposed iconoclastic policy of the emperor Leo III. This led to murder of exarch Paul and election of local *duces*. The both powers held by the exarch, civil, but particularly military

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<sup>255</sup> The Exarchate fell in 751, after almost two centuries of being under constant Lombard pressure. Byzantine armies had even some success, like when they forced the Lombard patriarch of Aquileia to move his seat to Cormons, or when they defeated king Liutprand's army in 739. *HL*, VI, 51, 54, 56.

<sup>256</sup> The revolt of *chartularius* Maurice in 640 can be interpreted more like dissatisfaction for delayed pay, than as a retaking of power. In the same way the unsuccessful rebellion of exarch Eleutherius in 619 should be seen connected more with Heraclius' defeats against Persians, which encouraged exarch to proclaim himself as emperor, perhaps in hope of more effectively opposing the enemies of the empire from more secure base in Italy. For more about rebellion see *Haldon, Ideology and Social change*, 178-179; *Ferluga, L'esarcato*, 362-363.



one vanished in front of rising autonomy of ducats. Thus, in the eight century the duchy became keystone of Byzantine administrative system in Italy, with *duces* taking the political leadership. The fall of Ravenna in 751 marked the end of the exarchate, with Byzantine forces focusing primarily in the southern Italy.

Besides Venice, which formed its own duchy in 726, only remaining Byzantine possession on northern Adriatic was Histria. Although having a considerable autonomy during the late Byzantine period, it seems that Histria remained loyal to the empire.<sup>257</sup> The evidence for the loyalty can be found in *Placitum Risani*, a document recording the provincial assembly in 804, during the initial years of Frankish rule over Histria. *Placitum Risani* is full of references to the good conditions that local military élite had in the *antiquo tempore*, during the Byzantine rule. From their complaints one can clearly see the transformation of the old Romano-Byzantine system to the feudal one. However, to analyze all of them a new thesis will be necessary, so I will limit myself to examples that describe relation between Histria and Constantinople.

A confirmation of ties with Constantinople is mentioned by the *capitanei* remembering good old times, when instead being humiliated they were honoured with imperial dignities. Recalling their past glories, the local élite described their striking links to the centre of power, links that suggest more than friendly relations only.<sup>258</sup> It is mentioned that during the Byzantine period local élite collected gifts (*exenia*) for the emperor and personally deliver it to him.<sup>259</sup> Also, once in a year the landowners who had a hundred or more sheep would each contribute a one sheep as a tribute to the emperor. It seems that this

<sup>257</sup> Different idea is supported by Ferluga. He argues that if unity of Venetia et Histria was not broken, the Histrian troops may participate in the 726' rebellion as a part of *Venetiarum exercita*. My opinion is that this cannot be the case, as the rebellion resulted in appointment of local *duces*, including the *dux* of Venice; and from the *Placitum Risani* one could see that the eighth century Histria was still led by the *magister militum*.

<sup>258</sup> PR, Latin quote

<sup>259</sup> CDI, 54, 1, 114, *Colligamus exenia ad Dominum Imperatorcm sicut tempore Graecorum faciebamur, et veniat Missus de Populo una mecum, et ofl'erat ipsos exenios ad Dominum Imperatorem*.

tribute was collected by imperial envoys, who visited Histria only for that occasion.<sup>260</sup> Close to the end of the document a striking statement may be found, a statement of the *capitanei* that if Charlemagne will not help them, it is better for them to die, than to live in such conditions.<sup>261</sup> This may suggest not only that Histria during their life was still under the Byzantine rule, but it also indicates strong ties with the emperor.<sup>262</sup>

Moreover, from the *Placitum* it can be seen that at the end of the assembly, the privileges of the local élite were restored. Why this happened? To find the solution, one must take a look on the contemporary political events. The first decade of the ninth century was a time of the war between Byzantium and Franks for control of the Adriatic. It is possible that following fall of Ravenna, the Histrian nobility achieved considerable power, being a desirable ally to both Byzantines and Franks. One may remember the bishop Maurice from the first chapter who was blinded by locals under a charge for being a Frankish spy. Comparing this with evidence from *Placitum*, it seems that power held by Histrian élite by 780s reached its apex. The power that they gathered created a possibility of establishing their own state, under protection of Byzantium. However, the peace of Aachen in 812, between Byzantium and Franks, resulted in Byzantine recognition of the Frankish state and Histria became Frankish territory. Deprived of help from Constantinople the élite could not oppose introduction of the feudal system, after which it lost all powers and disappeared from the records.

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<sup>260</sup> *CDI, Tempore Graecorum colligebamus semel in anno, si necesse erat, propter Mi-ssos Imperiales: de centum capita ovium, q. habebat, unum.*

<sup>261</sup> *CDI, 54, 1, 114. Si nobis succurrit Dominus Carolus Imperator, possumus evadere: sin autem melius est nobis mori, quam vivere.*

<sup>262</sup> Another evidence can help to date events mentioned in *Placitum*. In the tribute list *solidi mancosi* are mentioned as a mean of pay. This coin is recognized as a *mancus*, a Byzantine derivate from the Arab *manqush*, which came in use only during the late seventh century. Thus, the events described in *Placitum* can be dated to this period. See, Ferluga, 183.

## Conclusions

I have tried to demonstrate in the thesis that the *provincia Histria*, although it was part of the exarchate, acted more as an anomaly. Until the Lombard invasion, there were no significant military conflicts, in sharp contrast with the rest of Italy. Through the Ostrogothic and Justinianic period the region prospered, experiencing its last Indian summer.

However, the arrival of the Lombards in 568 changed everything. Being close to the Lombard capital in Forum Iulii (Cividale), during the late sixth century Histria found itself on the first line of fire, suffering plundering and devastation. In 568 the Lombards severed the mainland communication route, conquering a major part of Venetia, which isolated Histria from the rest of Imperial Italy. Through that troublesome period Histrian society evolved. In the thesis I tried to show its transformation from the Late Roman urban society to the provincial military aristocracy. To do that I analyzed two processes which characterized Byzantine period, *castrization* and militarization. Both of them carried some unique features, which separated Histria from the rest of the Byzantine Italy, or the empire itself.

To establish the topical framework, the first chapter presented geographical and historical background. Also, a short overview of administrative changes was made to ease to the reader understanding of historical processes.

The Lombard incursions caused a sense of permanent insecurity, so the population started to search for shelter on hilltops or islands, leaving lowland settlements. As the danger intensified, this resulted in the process of castrization, explored in the second chapter; which saw the entire peninsula walled and fortified by the seventh century. Unlike the rest of Byzantine Italy, where the Lombard invasion caused the widespread de-urbanization and ruralization of the landscape, in Histria, the castrization process and breakup of the ancient *agri* revitalized the hinterland, which was sparsely populated during the Roman period. It also caused foundation of the new coastal towns as Justinopolis and Neapolis. As seen from

the *Placitum Risani* by the late eighth century many of these *castra* became important centres and continued their role during the Frankish period. Many of them continued to be inhabited until the present day and can still be seen dominating the landscape of modern Istria.

Besides changes in the landscape, the enemy incursions caused thorough changes in administration of the province. These changes were analyzed in the third chapter. As Italy was in troubles, interventions of the exarch were rare, and there is no record of an exarch coming to Histria after Callinicus' episode in 599. The eastern and barbaric element dried up by the seventh century, and the local élite took control over the administrative matters. Opposed by Lombard, Slav, and Avar forces, the local military élite developed a certain military ethos, fighting more to preserve their own lands than for the exarch or the emperor. Also, as seen in the thesis, the local military élite developed a kind of solidarity, which further strengthened their group. In their conception of society the exarch was replaced by the *magister militum*, who was chosen from their ranks, and who knew well the local situation.

However, while the alienation of exarch became common in whole of imperial Italy, Histria kept some endemic features. Despite being under siege, the province was not in complete isolation, and it continued to maintain regular communication not only with Italy, but also with Constantinople. Although gradually developing autonomy, the local military aristocracy still felt "Byzantine". As evidence from *Strategikon* or *Placitum Risani* demonstrated, the local élite continued to maintain professional and highly disciplined army, which despite being reduced in the number, could still intervene if a need for it arose, like in the case of the *exercitus Histriae* during the rebellion in Sicily in 668. It was this, the highly professional army, which assured Histria's survival, for two centuries.

The matter that I found particularly interesting during my research was the maintaining of a strong link with the emperor in Constantinople. This was done in different ways. As I argued in the third chapter, the conferring of dignities was one of the most

efficient ways to strengthen ties. However, the thing that I found quite puzzling, and which requires more research, is the close connection between Constantinople and Histria, mentioned in *Placitum Risani*, which was maintained even after fall of the exarchate.

Partly due to the scarcity of sources, partly due to the lack of interest, the Byzantine period in Istria, which I regard as crucial in transition from ancient to the medieval period, and which consequences can be seen even today, is often overlooked. This thesis is my contribution to fullfil that gap. However, I know that there is much to say about the transformation of society and administration in Byzantine Histria. To build upon this research, this study needs to be extended in geographical terms. Here I would stress the need for comparative approach to the study of the process of militarization in the eastern Adriatic, and establish the patterns between societies of Histria, Dalmatia and nascent Venice. Also, some other aspects like the church should be explored. Only then a full insight can be given into transformation of the society of Byzantine Histria, which played an important role in the Byzantine *oikumene*, although living in the province situated at the fringes of Justinian's *restauratio imperii*.

## Appendix

### *1. Chronology of the most important events*

<b>177BC</b>	Roman conquest of Histria
<b>18 – 12</b>	Histria incorporated into Roman Italy -- <i>Regio X Venetia et Histria</i>
<b>170 AD</b>	Creation of the <i>Praetentura Italiae et Alpium</i>
<b>300</b>	Histria in the <i>provincia Venetia et Histria</i>
<b>493</b>	Histria in the Ostrogothic kingdom of Italy
<b>539</b>	During the Gothic war, Histria comes under Byzantine rule
<b>569</b>	Lombards destroy Tergeste, Justinopolis founded
<b>588</b>	Lombard <i>dux</i> Ewin invades Histria
<b>599</b>	Exarch of Ravenna Callinicus defeated Avaro-Slavic forces, earliest date for the Avaro-Slavic invasion in Histria
<b>611</b>	The end of Avaro-Slavic attacks into Histria, peaceful Slav settlement follows
<b>640-642</b>	The mission of abbot Martin to Histria and Dalmatia, to ransom prisoners and transfer relics to Rome
<b>ca.776</b>	Bishop Maurice blinded by the local élite
<b>788</b>	Frankish occupation of Histria
<b>804</b>	<i>Placitum Risani</i>
<b>812</b>	Treaty of Aachen, Byzantium recognizes Frankish suzerainty over Histria

## 2. Figures



Fig. 1 Satellite map of Istrian peninsula



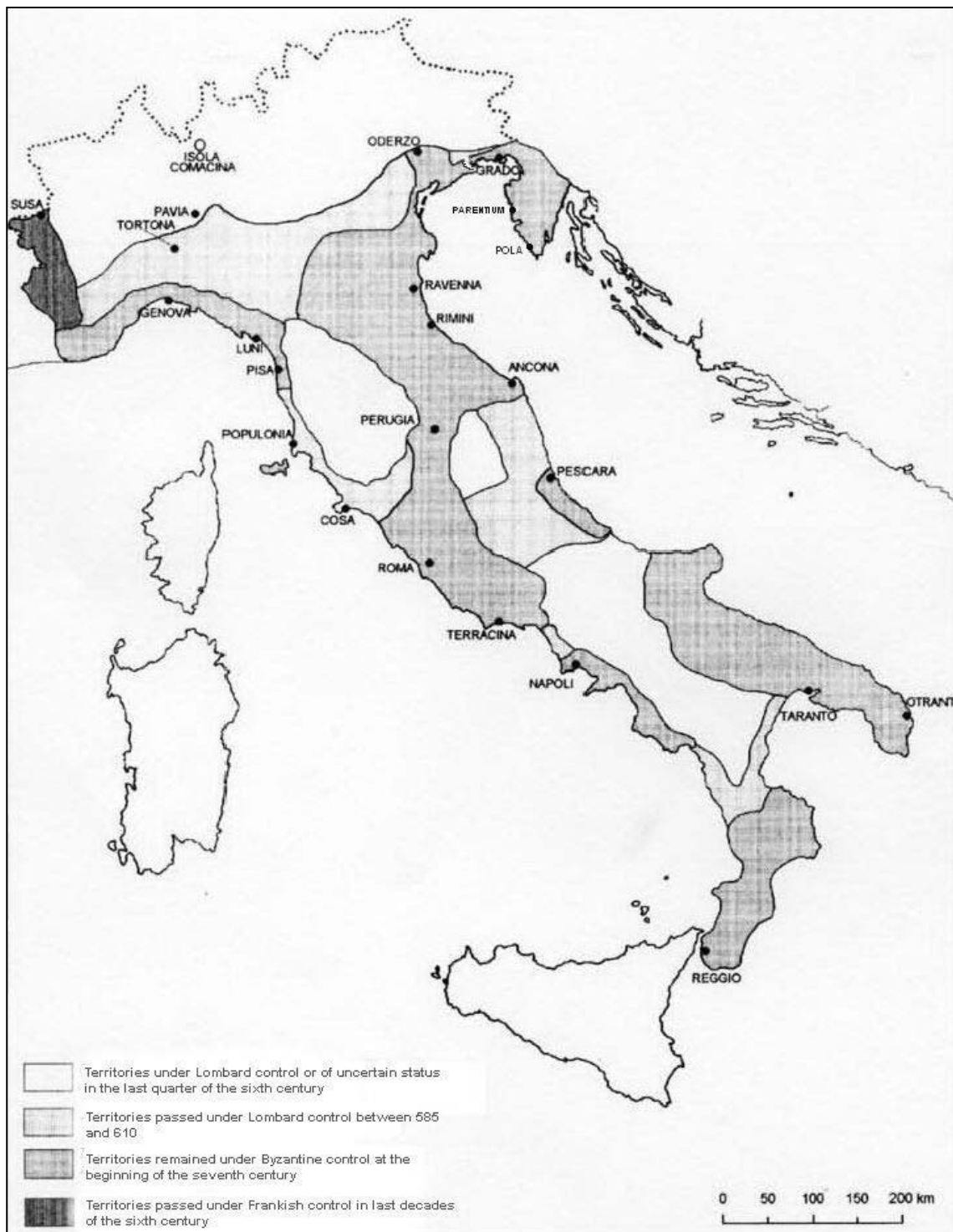
Fig. 2 Histria as the part of *Regio X Venetia et Histria*



**Fig. 3 The administrative division of Byzantine Italy (Histria is painted black) in 554<sup>263</sup>**

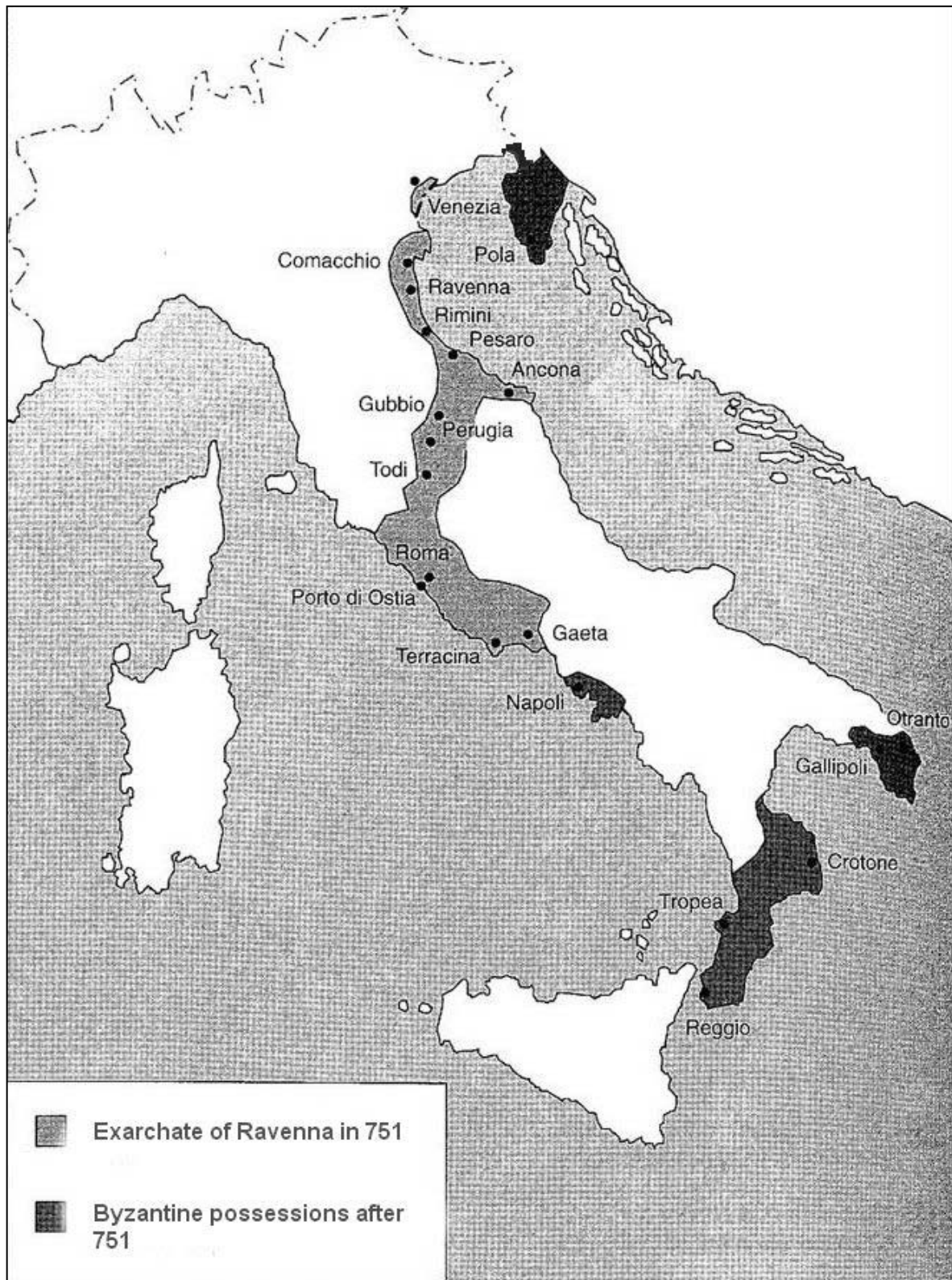
<sup>263</sup> E. Zanini, *Le Italie bizantine: territorio, insediamenti ed economia nella provincia bizantina d'Italia (VI-VIII secolo)* (Bari: Edipuglia, 1998), 39.





**Fig. 4 Byzantine Italy during first decades of the Lombard conquest<sup>264</sup>**

<sup>264</sup> E. Zanini, *Le Italie bizantine: territorio, insediamenti ed economia nella provincia bizantina d'Italia (VI-VIII secolo)* (Bari: Edipuglia, 1998), 55.



**Fig. 5 Byzantine Italy during second half of the eighth century<sup>265</sup>**

<sup>265</sup> G. Ravegnani, *I Bizantini in Italia*, (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 2004), 218.

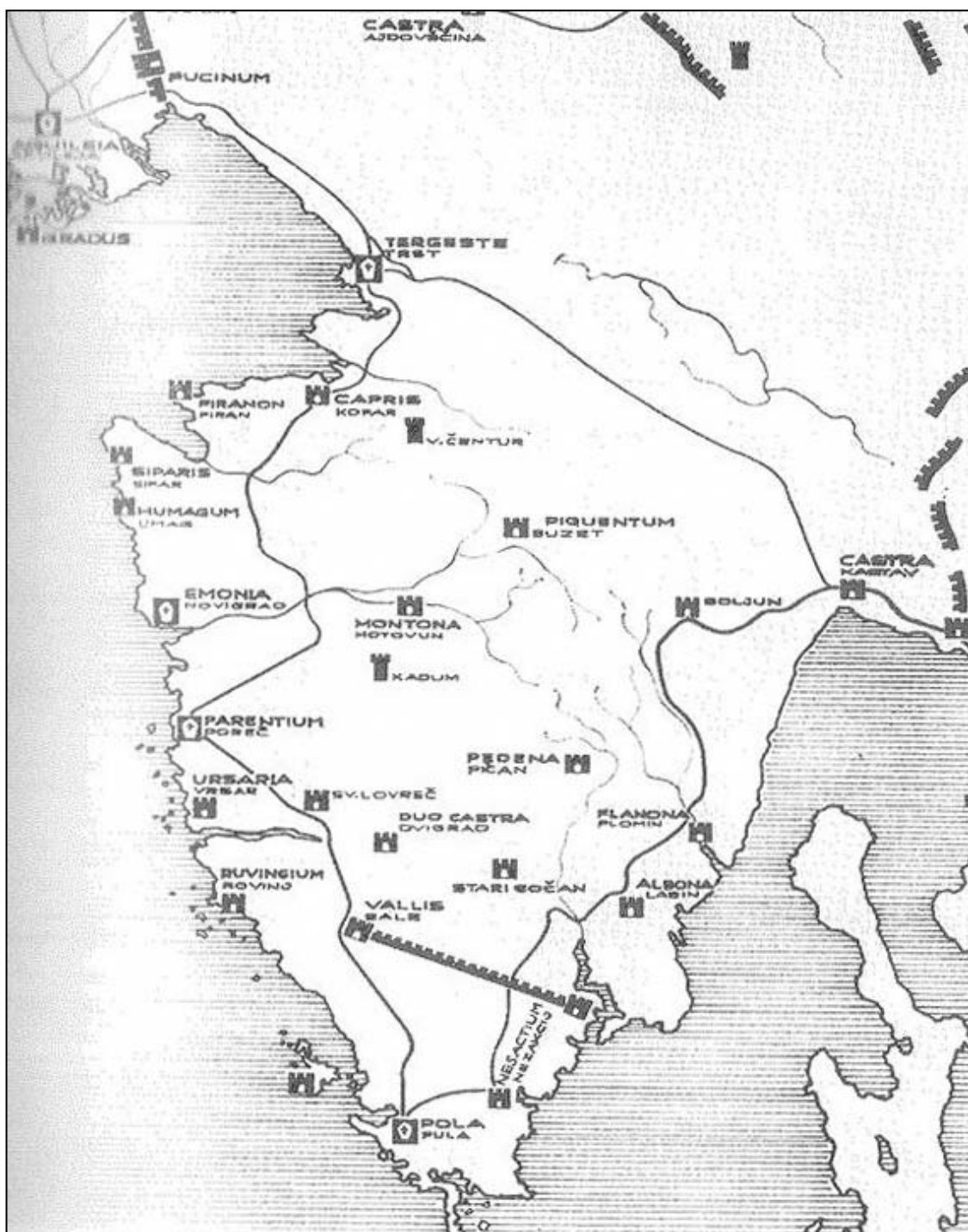
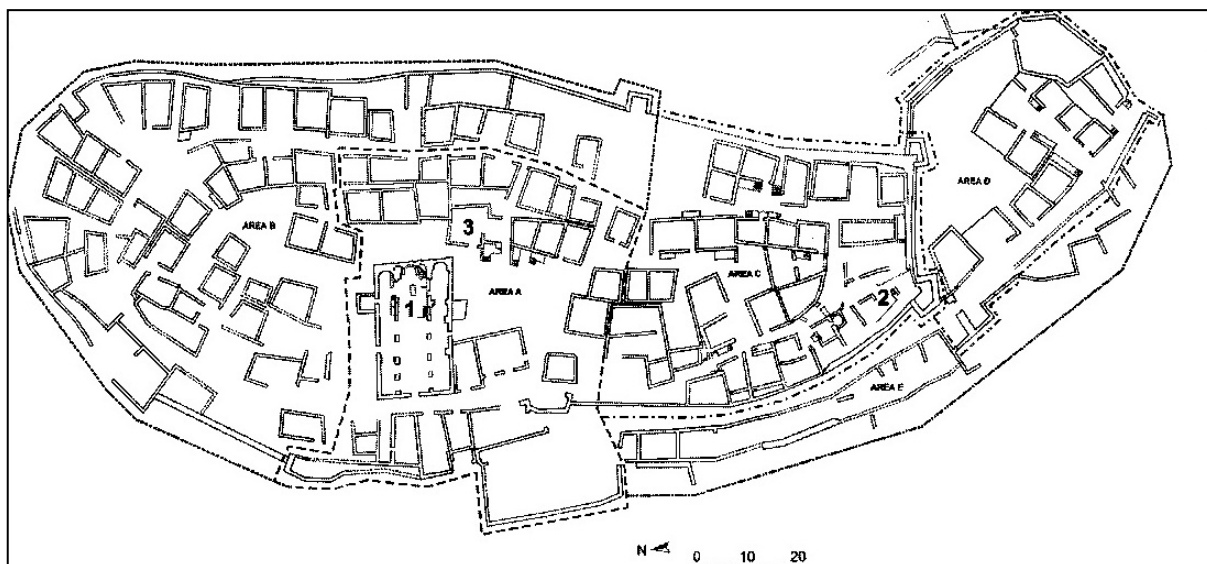
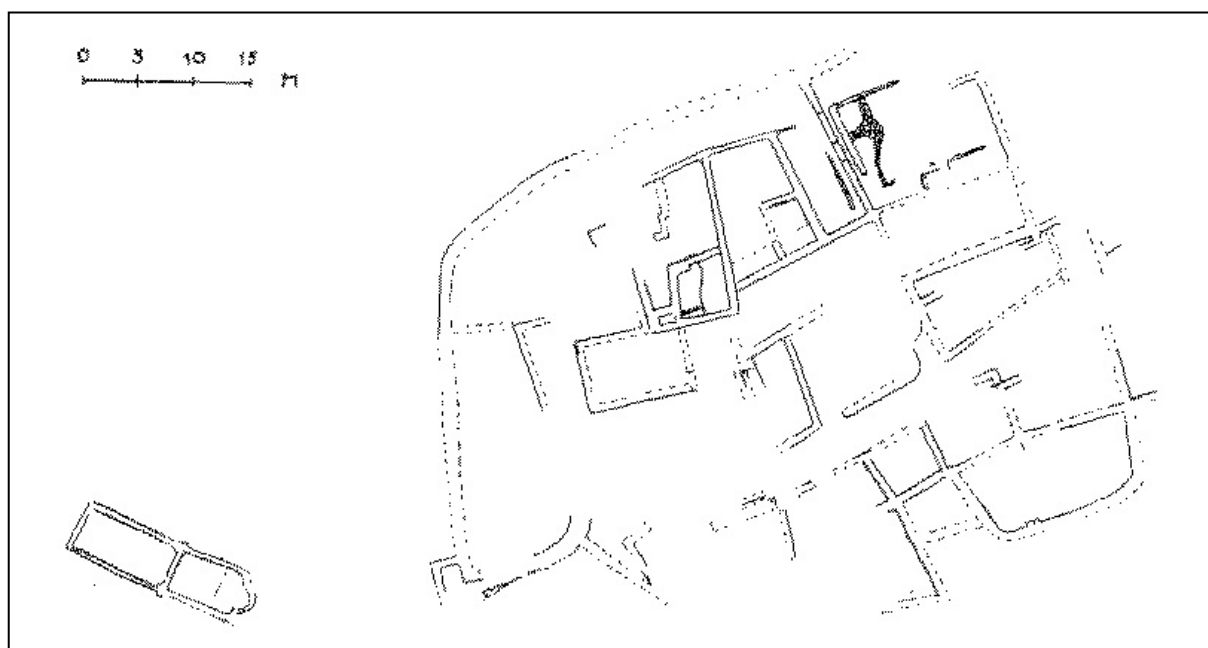


Fig. 6 The principal *castra* of Byzantine Histria<sup>266</sup>

<sup>266</sup> B. Marušić, "Neki problemi kasnoantičke i bizantske Istre u svjetlu arheoloških izvora", *Jadranski zbornik* 9 (1976): 345.



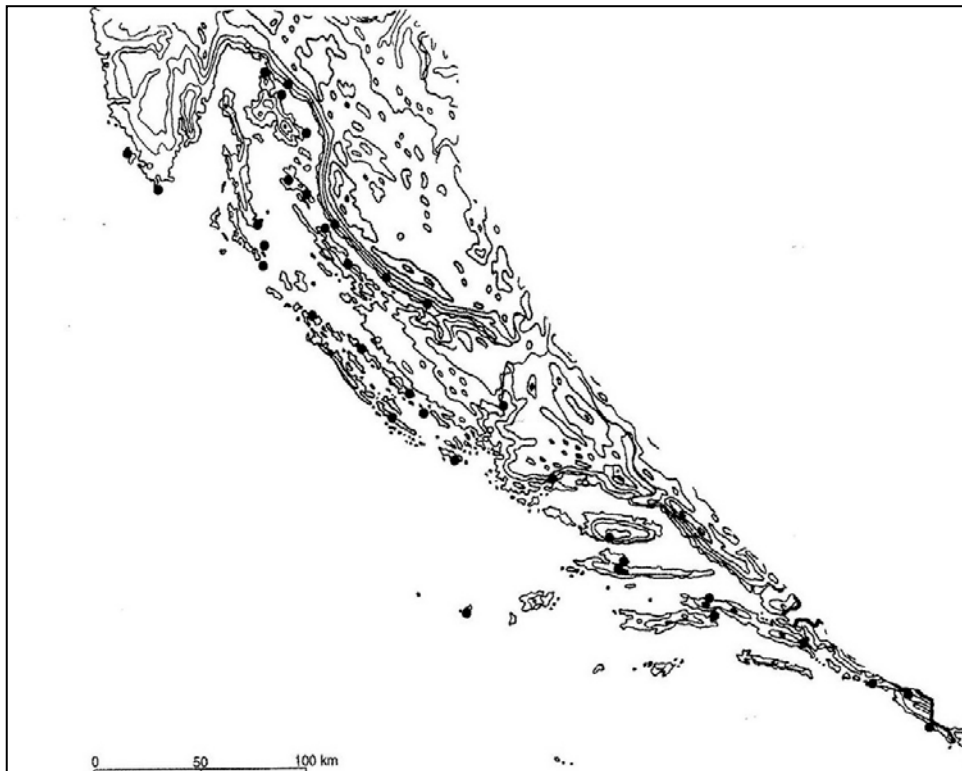
**Fig. 7 Plan of Duo Castra (Dvigrad)<sup>267</sup>**



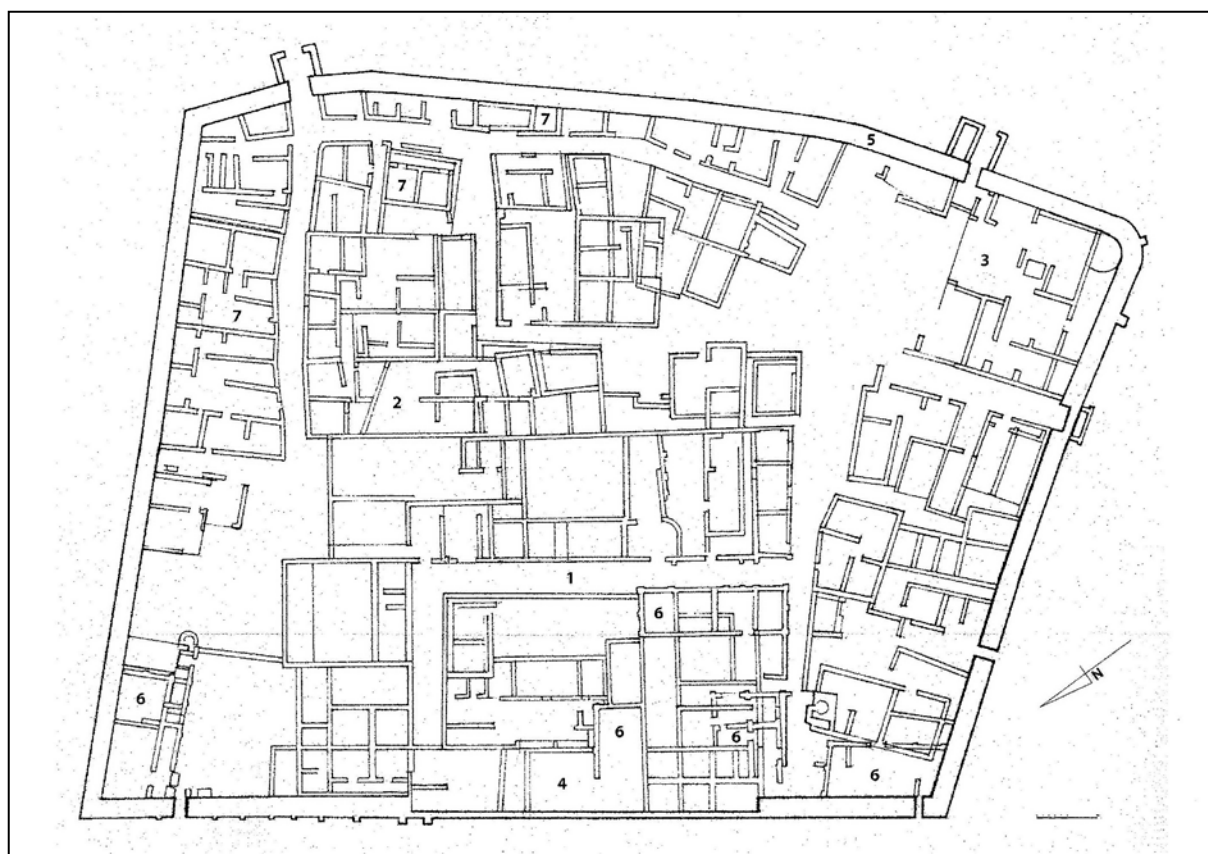
**Fig. 8 Castrum Caltanium (Stari Gočan)<sup>268</sup>**

<sup>267</sup> G. P. Brogiolo, C. Malaguti “Nuovi dati archeologici dallo scavo della chiesa di Santa Sofia e dell’insediamento di Dvigrad/Duecastelli, *Antichita Altoadriatiche* 55 (2003): 212.

<sup>268</sup> B. Marušić “Neki problemi kasnoantičke i bizantske Istre u svjetlu arheoloških izvora”, *Jadranski zbornik* 9 (1976): 344.



**Fig. 9 Justinian's forts in the Northern Adriatic Area<sup>269</sup>**



**Fig. 10 Plan of Byzantine Castrum<sup>270</sup>**

<sup>269</sup> M. Vicelja-Matijašić, *Istra i Bizant* (Rijeka: Matica Hrvatska, 2007), 25.

<sup>270</sup> V. Begović-Dvoržak, "Fortifikacioni sklop Kastrum-Petrovac na Brijunima" *Histria Antiqua* 7 (2001): 179.



[IN N(OMINE) D(OMI)NI D(E)I N(OSTRI) IH(SO)V XP(ISTOV) IMP(ERANTE) D(OM)NO  
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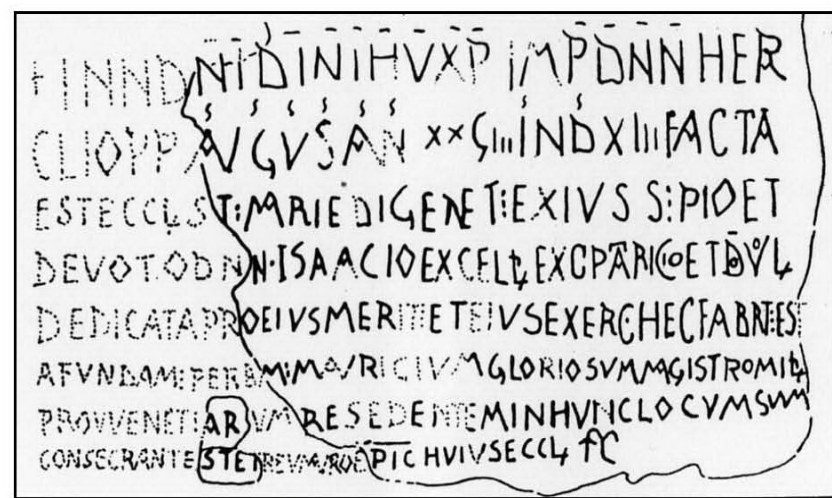


Fig. 11 The inscription at Torcello<sup>271</sup>



Fig. 12 The mosaic inscription from Grado mentioning Johannes, soldier belonging To the *numerus Cadisianus* (author's collection)

<sup>271</sup> A. Pertusi, "L'iscrizione Torcellana a tempi di Eraclio," *ZRVI*, 8 (1964): 324.

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