

THE WANING OF THE EMPIRE

THE DISINTEGRATION OF BYZANTINE RULE ON THE EASTERN ADRIATIC IN THE 9TH CENTURY

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The author pinpoints two different approaches in historiography to the problem of Byzantine overlordship on the Eastern Adriatic from the 9th to the 11th century. In accordance with R. Cessi, who's idea is that Byzantium lost its positions on the Eastern Adriatic in the second half of the 9th century, the author then goes on to evaluate the Byzantine sources, particularly the works of Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. Pinpointing Constantine's adherence to the conservative political ideology of the Empire, the author concludes that his works have to be treated with utmost caution and always confronted with the 'real time' data. In the second part of the paper the author thoroughly analyses accessible sources, and tries to reconstruct the chain of actual events. This leads him to the conclusion that the Byzantine overlordship on the Eastern Adriatic ended in 879, when the Byzantine protégé on the Croatian ducal throne, Zdeslav, was overthrown. After this the imperial presence on the Eastern Adriatic was confined to symbolical gestures and sentiments of the inhabitants of the Dalmatian towns.

The problem of the Byzantine presence on the Eastern Adriatic at the end of the early Middle Ages (9th to 11th century) is an elusive subject for every historian. Research on the subject, due to the existence of an already enormous secondary literature, seems to be more concerned with close distinction between the historical data on one side and the presumptions and conjectures of later historians on the other than on the actual research of the small quantity of historical sources, be they written documents or material finds. In order to clear up this unpleasant situation such a distinction has to be drawn beginning on the level of political affairs. As one scholar recently put it the problem is easy to define — “was there or was there not any direct Byzantine rule on the eastern Adriatic coast, i.e. were events controlled from Constantinople. If they were, Byzantium was there, if there was no such rule or control, there was no Byzantium”.¹ Simple as it may seem to be, the problem was resolved in two different and even opposite ways.

One current of thinking is detectable in the numerous scholarly papers and books written during the last hundred years,² and is based on the research of predominantly narrative Byzantine sources. Taking for granted historical works of Byzantine authors, modern scholars concluded that Dalmatia was until well into the 11th century under more or less direct control and rule of Constantinople. According to this view political authority was wielded and organised from the 870s in the form of the military unit called “thema” (θέμα), or in the words of the already cited scholar, “the coast was under ‘imperial authority’, the hinterland was the area of barbarian Σκλαβήναι”. “Byzantine Dalmatia” than comprised the old urban nuclei of Dubrovnik (*Ragusa*), Split (*Spalato*), Trogir (*Tragurion*) and Zadar (*Jadera*) with their immediate surroundings as well as numerous Adriatic islands, all under the rule of the military and civil governor “strategos” (στρατηγός) who was “at the end of ninth and the beginning of the tenth century ... sent to Dalmatia from Constantinople”³ to reside in Zadar. In the 10th century, due to a widespread deterioration of

imperial authority, this governor obtained a good deal of autonomy and this position from that time on was held by members of native dynasty from Zadar called “Madijevci” (offspring of Madius).

This line of thinking was not so long ago strongly challenged by one of the leading authorities on early Venetian history, Roberto Cessi, who feels that throughout the scholarly literature there is the presence “degli asseritori di un rigido bizantinismo nella Dalmazia romana”.⁴ After thorough examination of both Byzantine and sources of local provenience he concluded that already in the 880's “non esistesse in Dalmazia un funzionario imperiale che potesse tutelare e salvaguardare gli interessi locali e governativi”. Moreover, he continued and stressed, “nell' assenza di qualunque freno bizantino i Croati” intervened “nella vita cittadina prima con azione morale” and then at the end of the century, during the reign of the Croatian Duke Muncimir, acted “in sede giudiziaria ... e dando esecuzione al giudicato con la presenza personale in città”.⁵ Examining the effective conduct of political power as opposed to the Byzantine titles used by those who actually ruled in the cities, Cessi concluded: “il titolo bizantino dal priore sia un titolo d'onore no di ufficio effettivamente esercitato, analogo a quello conferito ai duchi veneziani”.⁶ In his words the Byzantine overlordship in the Dalmatian cities of the 10th and 11th century “si accetta simbolicamente in linea di diritto, non tradotta in un effettivo potere”.⁷ Nevertheless Cessi's careful phrasing and his remarks remained unnoticed even by the specialists in the field.⁸

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Starting with these convincing remarks formulated by Cessi, the intent of the present paper is to precisely analyse historical circumstances and sort out reasons behind the wearing down of imperial rule on the Eastern Adriatic in the 9th century. The only possible way to do this is to carefully examine and evaluate known sources trying not to forget the meaning of plain facts and their chronology. The first step on this path would be the evaluation of Byz-

antine narrative sources, primarily texts of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, in order to discern how far he was ready to go in shaping the facts and events according to his own ideological schemes. But before this it has to be stressed that there is no single official charter or document registering effective Byzantine rule in Dalmatia (in the sense of the actual control of events) between the 870's and 1160's. What is even more astonishing is that "real time" data points quite convincingly in the direction opened by Cessi, or to be more precise — conclusion seems to be inevitable that the effective control of events rested not in Byzantium but somewhere else. This is vividly visible on several occasions, most notably when Pope John X summoned the synod of Dalmatian bishops in Split in 925. In order to obtain firm assistance and support of the civil government he addressed *dilectum filium Tamisclaum regem Croatorum* and *Michaelem excelentissimum ducem Chulmorum* not even bothering to mention the Byzantine Emperor or any of his officials.⁹ Quite contrary to this, when the effective imperial authority and direct control over Dalmatian towns and greater part of Croatia was established in the 60's and 70's of the 12th century, during the reign of Emperor Emanuel Comnenus, this was visibly articulated even in the execution of notarial deeds. Namely, those deeds issued in the towns under imperial domination were rendered in Latin, Greek and Croatian.¹⁰ This obvious difference, in turn, explains why I insist on the narrative nature and thorough evaluation of the Byzantine sources which disclose the alleged rule of the eastern Emperor in Dalmatia during the 10th century.

To start with, it has to be pointed out that all works of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus reflect to a great extent conservative political theory and ideology formulated in the imperial circles of Constantinople.¹¹ This is specially true for his *De cerimoniis*, a work on the subject that was, according to his own statement, "more dear to his heart than any one other". This subject so "dear to his heart" was in fact the imperial ceremonial, a set of ritual acts designed for only one purpose — "the mystical glorification of the Emperor".¹² The Emperor was so overwhelmed with these ritual acts that he tried to impress with them even his guests and diplomatic envoys, like he did with Liudprand of Cremona who visited Constantinople in 949 and was showed one of the court ceremonies. After the ceremony the Emperor eagerly asked for Liudprand's comment to see whether he was impressed with the staged "show".¹³ How deeply rooted was Constantine in imperial ideology is also evident from his statement that the imperial crown and robe were not made by human hands, but were delivered to the Emperor Constantine the Great by an angel.¹⁴ Finally his appreciation and high esteem of the Emperor's position regarding other political factors is visible from his condemnation of the marriage between the Emperor's cousin Marie Lacapina and the first Bulgarian Emperor, Simeon. Constantine VII felt that this marriage ruined the reputation of the imperial institution and through this had a destructive effect on the political order of the world at large.¹⁵

This very important side of Constantine's intellectual profile, namely strict adherence to conservative imperial ideology, entered then in a special way into the works ascribed to him. In order to preserve the high esteem of the imperial throne and traditions of the old Empire, he and his aides, who compiled texts ascribed to him, were ready to shape accessible data so they fit into the frame of "glorious history of the *Imperium Romanorum*". This in turn

meant that almost every loss of territory or direct rule over this or that province was treated as "temporary" while the new powers that were evolving from once "barbarian" societies were treated as "usurpers".¹⁶ All of this is discernible when he, or some of his aides, treated the settlement and early history of the Croats, or the history of old Roman Dalmatia, in the chapters 29 and 31 of the renowned work *De administrando imperio*.

To fully elaborate this statement we have to start with a thorough and scholarly precise analysis of cc. 29-31 of *De administrando* provided by the historian Lujko Margetić. In a very important paper he convincingly concluded that the discrepancies between two versions of the same events, rendered separately first in cc. 29 and 31 and then in c. 30, are the result of the fact that c. 30 is the work of an anonymous author who rewrote original cc. 29 and 31, but from a different angle and with a different purpose.¹⁷ As for the differences in the angle and purpose, Margetić rightly points out that in the Emperor's original text (c. 31) the tendency prevails to provide "ready-made material for the diplomatic struggle over the Balkans" while the text of c. 30 renders "antiquarian information".¹⁸ If we put it in different words, the text of cc. 29 and 31, written by the Emperor or under his supervision, lays down the story the way "it ought to be" and in accordance with imperial ideology, while the text of the c. 30 renders "real time" data as they were accessible in Constantinople. On top of this it may be safely supposed that the anonymous writer of c. 30 set down to rewrite specifically those chapters concerning the Croats and Dalmatia in which the Emperor and his helpers went too far, even by the standards of the imperial court, in shaping the facts and events according to their own schemes. The most striking difference between cc. 29 and 31 on one side and c. 30 on the other, and one that fully corroborates this conclusion, is almost total absence of Byzantium as a political factor in Dalmatia after the settling of the Croats, i.e. in the 9th century, in the c. 30.¹⁹

Such a discrepancy between "real time" data and ideological schemes is quite visible when Constantine puts Croatia on a par with *Sclaviniae* in the hinterland of the Eastern Adriatic.²⁰ The problem arises from the fact that under the same authorship Croatia was described as a contemporary "mid-size power", a state that was capable of rising an army of 160000 men and some 180 smaller and bigger ships. On the other hand, *Sclavinia* was, in the vocabulary of contemporary Byzantine authors, a type of amorphous state organisation, a mere "state to be" or, to be quite precise, a type of organised society that only had a potential to evolve into a state.²¹ In accordance with such categorisation and contrary to all known facts, the text of c. 31 readily states that the ruler of Croatia was "from the beginning", i.e. from the time of the alleged settling of the Croats under the Emperor Heraclius, subjugated to imperial rule.²² This statement about the time and the role of the Emperor Heraclius in the transmigration of the Croats has now to be confronted with what Margetić's analysis of c. 30 proved beyond any reasonable doubt, namely that the Croats came to Dalmatia only at the end of the 8th century. His conclusion is strongly corroborated by archaeological finds showing a totally new cultural layer datable by imported Frankish military products, such as swords and spurs.²³ To add more facts and put Constantine's text in the right perspective it has to be stressed that from the beginning of the 9th century until its last decades Croatian rulers slowly forged autonomous state organisation, start-

ing as a Carolingian *vasus* and “gentile ruler” (i.e. military commander of the Carolingian *limes* and a ruler of his *gens*), never entering the Byzantine political orbit except for a brief period at the end of the 870’s.²⁴

Such unwillingness to recognise plain facts concerning the loss of Dalmatia by Byzantium as portrayed here — or to put it in different words, the refusal to acknowledge the loss of direct imperial control over Dalmatia and the rising of the Croat ruler to the ascendancy in the old imperial province — is even more visible when confronted with occasional slips of “real time” data on the part of the Emperor-writer. When he, for example, freely and with no reference to political matters speaks in c. 31 about the remnants of Diocletian’s buildings (palace and hippodrome), Constantine VII uses everyday phrases stating that they are “even today in the land of the Croats” (καὶ παλάτια καὶ ἱπποδρόμια τοῦ βασιλέως Διοκλητιανοῦ ἐν τῇ τῶν αὐτῶν Χρωβάτων χώρα μέχρι τῆς νῦν περισώζονται εἰς τὸ κάστρον Σαλοναζ, πλησίον τοῦ κάστρου Ἀζπαλάθου), making it clear that the old provincial capital and the new nearby city were no longer parts of the Empire.²⁵

Evaluated in this way, the text of the two chapters (29 and 31) of *De administrando* now cease to be a reliable source for the historical reconstruction of the chain of events. With this statement I do not say that those chapters are worthless, but merely point out that they have to be used in this sense only with the greatest caution. In reality it means that only those events rendered in the two chapters that can be verified and corroborated by an independent source are admissible in the corpse of the “historical facts”. Almost the same attitude is advisable in dealing with different lists of state officials, called “*tacticons*”, so dear to historians used to work with the Byzantine sources.²⁶ As one of the leading authorities for the Byzantine history and very familiar with the source material, Ostrogorski in his paper on this subject warned more than once that those lists were not totally accurate and reliable. As he puts it, “the Byzantines were in no hurry to delete their lost possessions” from such lists, so occasionally “representatives of the lost regions were listed for several decades after their province ceased to be part of the Empire”.²⁷ The real meaning of this warning is that a historian is in no position to make firm conclusions just on the basis of such lists when dealing with the province or administrative unit whose dependence on the Empire poses problems for some very specific point in time. In other words, the mere presence of the Dalmatian “*strategos*” on some list dated to the 10th century does not qualify the conclusion that at this point in time there existed and functioned Dalmatian “*thema*” as a Byzantine administrative unit. Such a conclusion has to be proved with “real time” data showing the “*strategos*” as a full agent of the central government, meaning that he was sent from Constantinople and ready to obey every command that comes from the central government.

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If we now turn back to the task of reconsidering the role of Byzantium in the history of the Eastern Adriatic from the beginning of the 9th century it is advisable to start with one undisputed fact. During this century Byzantium organised and led two large-scale military campaigns in this basin. The first of them is dated to the beginning of the 9th century, during the reign of the Emperor Nicephorus I, while the second was led during the 70’s of the same century by the Emperor Basil I.²⁸ Further and thorough analy-

sis of the objectives and results of those campaigns will provide answers to almost all questions concerning the role Byzantium played on the Eastern Adriatic throughout two hundred years that are of concern here.

The first of those campaigns, the one organised at the beginning of the 9th century, was in fact the real end of the upheavals that lasted almost two decades. It all started with Charlemagne’s war against the Avars at the beginning of the 790’s. As his biographer Einhardus states, the Avar wars were, excepting the Saxon war, the greatest military effort of Charlemagne’s reign and they lasted for eight years.²⁹ This prolonged war brought Charlemagne in contact with the Byzantine territories in the south-eastern corner of Europe and provoked transmigration of his allies, the Croats. They were brought to the Eastern Adriatic basin in order to finally crush the last remnants of Avar power established along the old Roman roads and river valleys in the hinterland of the Eastern Adriatic.³⁰ Military campaigns and conquests (Istria was, for example, subjugated by Carolingians just before the Avar wars³¹), as well as settling of the new populace, shattered the existing order. Byzantium was not ready to react momentarily and a *hiatus* was filled by autonomous actions of local power. The result was that in the end of 805 two autonomous *duces*, one residing in Venice the other in Zadar and representing the community of *Dalmatarum* (i.e. inhabitants of Dalmatia whatever that meant at this time), came before Charlemagne in order to acknowledge Carolingian overlordship and to make arrangements for the establishment of a new administration.³² This finally provoked reaction of the imperial government, by this time already reorganised and reordered by the Emperor Nicephorus I. So Byzantine naval forces sailed into the Adriatic under the command of the patrician Nichetas and in a *tour de force* manner, with the objective to recapture the towns along the eastern coast and even the Venetian lagoon. The expedition was not entirely victorious and the quarrel was prolonged, but as the Byzantines were more successful in maritime warfare by 810 their military control over the coastal region was re-established.³³

The imminent result of this military success, confirmed in the peace-treaty of *Aquisgranum* 812, was the establishing, or rather reinstalling of the Byzantine administration. Constantinople now took firm hold over Dalmatian towns as is quite vividly portrayed in the negotiations over the borderline between the Croats and neighbouring towns. The whole episode is to some detail described in Frankish *Annals*, but here it would suffice to point out that the Byzantine envoy Nichetas (maybe the same patrician Nichetas that led the Byzantine fleet in 806) came to *Aquisgranum* directly from Constantinople representing the Emperor Leo. His task was to discuss “the case of the Dalmatians”, but on behalf of the Emperor.³⁴ In this new situation when one of the imperial provinces, not connected by land with the metropolis, bordered with the territory under the overlordship of the western Emperor it was of vital importance for Byzantium to secure maritime route to distant outposts. The task was not an unusual one for the Byzantines who still were the great naval power, but here it will prove to be quite impossible. The problem arose from the fact that the Eastern coast of the Adriatic is flanked with numerous islands that form a kind of a “closed sea”. From the south-east tip of the island Korčula (*Curcula*) up to the southern tip of Istria there is a whole string of islands providing a barrier against the high sea, enabling relatively secure maritime traffic regardless of weather conditions.

During previous centuries the Byzantines secured their control over this maritime route maintaining numerous posts and guards on strategic points,³⁵ but at the beginning of the 9th century a new power suddenly arose that was capable of controlling the southern entrance into this basin.

This new power evolved from the amorphous *Scлавinia*, formed originally in the region centred at the mouth of river Neretva (*Narentum*), precisely at the time when the new Croat element settled in the neighbourhood. The former *Scлавinia* of the Narentanes (*Narantani sclavi*, *Arantani* — appellative derived from the geographical name points to amorphous Slavic mass as the ethnic basis) got a new leadership at the end of the 8th century that bore the same cultural pattern as is one that was archaeologically traceable among the Croats, with characteristic Frankish elements.³⁶ This Frankish influence is later on confirmed and to some point explained by the fact that at the beginning of the 70's of the 9th century the Emperor Louis II in one letter warned off the eastern Emperor Basil I from the encroachment on Louis' subjects — the Slavs.³⁷ As a naval power the Narentanes emerged only during the 830's, when they negotiated for the first time a peace-treaty with the Venetian Doge on their own behalf.³⁸ Their strongholds included those on mainland territory as well as those on the three big islands, Korčula, Hvar and Brač. Contrary to the big islands in the northern Adriatic where *civitates* as bishopric sees and centres of continuous social life survived the first centuries of the Middle Ages, on those southern islands signs of continuous social life are rare. This break of continuity is at best visible in the toponymy, so that it comes as no surprise when we learn that in the oldest sources from Korčula, namely the notarial deeds of the 14th century, there are no Roman toponyms at all. Furthermore, thorough analysis of those sources convincingly points to the conclusion that the whole system of toponymy on the island was created in the process through which Slavic/Croat populace conquered the land by agriculture.³⁹ This in turn provides the explanation how it was possible that the *Narentani* "suddenly" arose to power in the first decades of the 9th century.

With no strong centre, *i.e.* bishopric see or a larger town, neither on the mainland nor on the islands, as well as without abundant population basis, imperial control of this ample territory was easy to overthrow. When the new ruling strata once established its grasp over the Narentanes on the mainland and islands and after that organised control over the closed *aquatorium*, it was a relatively easy task to maintain this new situation. So, it was by no means accidental that in the 830's the ambassador of the Narentanes negotiated a peace-treaty directly with the Venetian Doge. Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, who states that during the reign of Michael II Amorian (820-829) Constantinople lost direct control over the Eastern Adriatic so that the inhabitants of the Dalmatian towns installed there autonomous governments, provides background information relative to those negotiations.⁴⁰ This is in a specific way corroborated by what we learn about the sojourn of Michael's envoys at the court of the Emperor Louis I the Pious. The envoys formally handed over Michael's letter addressed to the Frankish Emperor and asked only for the confirmation of the old *Aquisgranum* peace-treaty, trying as a matter of fact to procure recognition of Michael's ascension to the Byzantine throne.⁴¹

After this Dalmatia stayed completely cut off from Byzantium. Ensuing political void was partly filled by the

growth of the local, autonomous political authorities, but the inhabitants of the towns were nevertheless regarded by the neighbouring Croats as Greeks. The famous theologian Gotschalk, who visited the court of the Croat Duke Trpimir in the 40's of the 9th century, attests strongly to this conclusion. Later on, writing about theological problems and looking for a proper example, he remembered that the Duke conducted a military expedition *contra gentem Graecorum et patricium eorum*.⁴² There is no doubt that the Frankish theologian heard such a categorisation from his Croat hosts. Today we can only guess that such a notion among them was strongly backed by the fact that Dalmatian bishops still recognised at this time the patriarch of Constantinople as their church head.⁴³ On the whole, things remained this way until the reign of the Emperor Basil I (867-886). First years of his reign saw the growth of the Arabian menace in Adriatic. When Sicilian-based Arabs mounted in 867 a siege of Dubrovnik, citizens called for help of the Emperor. Basil responded after some time and sent at first only a fleet that forced the Arabs to leave the siege after 17 months.⁴⁴ The anti-Arabian war went on in South Italy in co-operation with the western Emperor, but it seems that the Byzantine fleet did not confine its actions only against Arabs.

Under shady circumstances and taking as pretext the liberation of the Pope's envoys, who were captured by the Narentanes, Byzantines "opened" the sea-route to Dalmatia. It seems that they crushed and subjugated, at least temporarily, the Narentanes. This conclusion is in line with the already mentioned and renowned letter of the western Emperor Louis II from 871, whose words about his Slavs, who were attacked by the Byzantine fleet under command of the *patricius Nicetas*, could only be interpreted as referring to the Narentanes.⁴⁵ In his letter the Emperor also mentions a crushed fortress (*quibusdam castris diruptis*) making it clear that the campaign was by no means small or a naive one. If we now take into account that after this the Byzantines organised a really working and efficient administration of Dalmatia in the form of the "thema", headed by the "strategos" sent from Constantinople,⁴⁶ the whole picture becomes more clear. But, Basil I did not stop here. With good reason a number of historians concluded that he organised from newly secured strongholds in Dalmatia a plot against the Croat Duke Domagoj in order to overthrow him and to install his own protégé.⁴⁷ The plot failed, but the Byzantines retained the upper hand in Dalmatia. A few years later Basil I finally crowned his offensive — after the death of Duke Domagoj in 876 and ensuing complications regarding the inheritance of the throne, he managed to install in 878 as new Duke his protégé Zdeslav.⁴⁸

Temporarily, as we can reconstruct from preserved sources, it seemed that the Byzantines managed to regain control over not only the coastal cities, but also of the whole Roman Dalmatia.⁴⁹ However, those preserved sources are so seldom and incomplete that there are great gaps in our knowledge to the point that we omit the completeness of the historical context. From subsequent events we can only deduce that Byzantine successes must have had provoked deep resentment and resistance among the Croats and the Narentanes. It is more than a guess that Zdeslav's rule was contested right from the start so that he stayed on the ducal throne for only one year and was deposed while trying to procure Pope's backing.⁵⁰ Information about Zdeslav's deposition comes from a series of letters sent by the Pope John VIII in June of the same year. In his turn, the Pope has

had a relatively clear picture of what happened in the old province of Roman Dalmatia (i.e. early medieval Croatia). His informer was a certain priest John from Venice, envoy of the Great Moravian Duke Svetopulk, who travelled across the province on the way to Rome and even brought a letter from the new Croat Duke, Branimir.⁵¹ The news that priest John brought to Rome, together with the Duke's letter, provoked Pope John VIII to send at least four letters, addressed to the new Duke, all the churchmen and "people" of his country, the elected bishop of Nin Theodosius, and finally to all Dalmatian bishops and churchmen as well as to the inhabitants of Zadar and Split.⁵²

All these letters point to one inevitable conclusion — the change on the Croatian ducal throne signalled profound alteration of the whole political context on the Eastern Adriatic so that the letter of the Duke, cited by the Pope, spoke not only of his reverence for the papal authority but also of willingness of his subjects to follow him.⁵³ Even more significant seems to be the Pope's decision to direct a special letter to Dalmatian bishops and inhabitants of Zadar and Split. In this letter he admonishes them to revert in obedience *ad sedem beati Petri apostoli ... et ad nos, qui ei diuinitus presidemus*.⁵⁴ There can be no doubt that this papal invitation was grounded on the informations brought to Rome by the envoy, priest John. Obviously he spoke with a number of people during his stay at Croatian ducal court and in one or both of the cities, and from those contacts ascertained that there is a willingness among the bishops, churchmen and people of the Dalmatian towns to change their overall orientation. They, or at least the greater part of them, were ready to switch their obedience in church matters from Constantinople to Rome. This was not an easy move, for Pope gave assurances to the Dalmatians (i.e. inhabitants of the Dalmatian towns) that he will help them in case Greeks or Slavs in future find this switch an offence.⁵⁵ We do not know whether this willingness to change orientation among the Dalmatians was a result of their free will or was forced upon them after the change on the Croatian ducal throne and the replacement of the Byzantine protégé with a Duke ready to comply with traditional pro-western politics. But, in any case such a profound change of political atmosphere on the Eastern Adriatic in 879, as is registered in the papal letters, helps us to understand how direct Byzantine rule over Dalmatia really ended.

Even the idea to replace patriarchal jurisdiction with the papal one is an unmistakable sign that in this particular moment Constantinople was not in a position to exert direct influence over the course of events on the Eastern Adriatic. We do not know precisely under what circumstances the Byzantines made the decision not to interfere here. It is true that the Emperor was engaged at the end of the 70's in an offensive war with the Arabs on the south-eastern border while at the same time Arabs took over Syracuse on Sicily. In the meanwhile, in 878 and 879 preparations were made to hold a church synod in Constantinople with the downright aspiration to obtain papal sanction for the raising of Photius to the post of the patriarch. On top of all of this, in 879 Basil's older son and the co-ruler Constantine died, and this provoked a state of deep depression of the Emperor who spent the last years of his rule in this condition. But, on the other hand, the Byzantines improved their positions in southern Italy, making it even possible to exert more influence on the papacy now.⁵⁶ All things considered, the Emperor and his government were not in a position making them unable for a strong response if there was

a need for one. So, the only probable explanation why there was no intervention after the change of the political context on the Eastern Adriatic is that the whole question was not regarded as of prime interest for the government in Constantinople.

Still it is true that the Dalmatians voiced their concern for the eventual reactions on the part of the Byzantines in the future, but at this point in time it was regarded only as a far-away possibility. Moreover, from accessible data it is possible to conclude that a change of the church jurisdiction over Dalmatian towns in 879 really took place and that from this time on the Pope was regarded as the ecclesiastical leader instead of the Constantinopolitan patriarch. This was clearly verified few years later, when Pope Stephen VI reiterated that it is properly his duty to ordinate every new archbishop of Split (i.e. the head of the Dalmatian church) and confer the *pallium* to him.⁵⁷ This whole picture becomes suddenly more convincing, colourful and precise if we now turn to what the author of c. 30 of the *De administrando* has to say regarding Basil's arrangement for the Dalmatian "thema", i.e. the arrangement of the civil government in the province as a whole. The story tells us that the Emperor at some point in time received the envoys sent by the inhabitants of the Dalmatian cities who wanted to settle their troubles with the Croats. The source of all these troubles, as is clearly visible from the way the author of c. 30 renders his story, was sheer existence of the Byzantine "thema". Inhabitants of the towns paid their dues to the "strategos" and not to the Croats, who in their turn were displeased to the point that normal life and the functioning of the cities were impossible.⁵⁸ The story is quite precise and clear, but problems arise when we try to define its chronology. If we consider everything that has been said here earlier, the most probable conclusion is that such a state of affairs could have existed after the change on the Croatian throne in 879.

Here we have to consider the chronological order of the facts as they were verified in the previous discussion. According to this chronological framework first comes the military conquest of the Narentanes in 870/871 and the "opening" of the sea route to Dalmatian towns. After those events followed the process of founding and administrative organisation of the "thema" with its first "strategos", certain "spatar" Brienius who came from Constantinople together with his clerks — the core of his "office". We know for certain that Brienius spent some time on the position of the "strategos" and after that his rank was upgraded to the position of the "protospatar".⁵⁹ It is then safe to suppose that all of this could have covered the years 872-879. During this time the Byzantines organised the first unsuccessful plot against Duke Domagoj, most probably in the first half of 874.⁶⁰ Two years later the Duke died (876) and that opened a crisis regarding the inheritance of the throne. Byzantine government had high stakes in the ensuing conflicts and finally managed to install its own candidate Zdeslav in 878. All of this convincingly points to the conclusion that during those seven or eight years one of the prime objectives of the Byzantines was to perpetuate the existence of "thema" as an administrative framework and starting point of all their actions. On the other hand, for the greater part of those seven or eight years relations between the Byzantine administration in the cities and neighbouring Croats must have been tense and on the brink of open conflict. The ferocious response of Duke Domagoj, who killed one of the accomplices in the unsuccessful plot

in spite of papal intervention, speaks for itself and vividly depicts an atmosphere of brutality and open hatred.

If we now go back to the story in c. 30 of *De administrando* and consider the response of the Emperor to the requests formulated by the Dalmatian envoys the whole picture suddenly changes. According to the author of c. 30, Basil was convinced by the arguments laid out in front of him and decided to practically annul the "thema" as an effective administrative unit of the Byzantine government. What he did was to order that from now on the cities were to pay their fiscal dues not to the "strategos" but to the Croat ruler while reserving only a small portion of the money for the "strategos" just as a token of subjection to the Byzantine Emperor.⁶¹ The story must not be understood in the literal sense but must be put in the mental context of the imperial court, and not taken at its "face value".⁶² If the reading is done in this way then there are strong reasons to interpret Basil's move as an admittance of a failure on the part of the Byzantines. Moreover, measured by the standards of the conduct on the imperial court this was as far as anyone from those circles was ready to go in doing something like this. Practically, the decision to channel the flow of the revenues into the hands of the Croat ruler left the "thema" and its "strategos" an empty shell. With no money to finance its activities future heads of the "thema" were doomed to remain titular functionaries whose situation is quite convincingly described by Cessi: "Tale situazione conferiva al centro zarantino e ai suoi reggitori la presunzione di esercizio di funzioni giurisdizionali già competenti all'autorità governativa ad anche di assumerne il nome senza effettivo potere, o almeno appena incidentale".⁶³

A touch of resignation detectable in the imperial decision not to react to the changes in the political context on the Eastern Adriatic and to retain only symbolical yoke over the cities is not hard to explain. All military campaigns and elaborate schemes built through the 870's were crashed almost at once in the *coup d'état* of 879. To top this the inhabitants of the Dalmatian cities were no longer ready to withstand the weight of the conflict with the Croats, clearly showing their unwillingness by the change of the church jurisdiction as well as by sending their envoys to Constantinople with request for reordering of the administration and its intentions. All of this, in turn, bore witness that Byzantium from now on was no longer in position to effectively wield power and control events in the former

province, which gives a precise answer to question raised here at the beginning. Instead of the effective control over events, Byzantium retained its presence on the Eastern Adriatic most visibly in the symbolical gestures and by means of the diplomatic actions.

Symbolically the old Empire was present in the name of the actual Emperor in the deeds and charters issued in Dalmatian towns, as well as in the title of the local official called "strategos" who in reality had no contacts with imperial government. Closely connected to those symbolic gestures were the sentiments articulated by the inhabitants of the cities, who in their attitudes remained loyal to the idea of the Empire, building even their cultural identity on the basis of this idea and in opposition to the "barbarous" world of their neighbours. Those sentiments were articulated most convincingly in the anonymous hagiographic text entitled *Translatio beati Grisogoni Martyris*.⁶⁴ In the text, roughly dated to the 9th or 10th century, *cives Jaderani* are juxtaposed as cultural entity against the *Mirimidones*, where this mythological name of the great antiquity stands as cultural definition for the inhabitants of Great Moravia living in the typical "Slavic" sunken-floored houses.⁶⁵ As for diplomatic actions, the Byzantine ruling circles saw Croatia as a potential political and even military counter-balance to Bulgaria: this was for the first time pointed out by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus in his *De administrando*,⁶⁶ and successfully used at the end of the 10th century by the Emperor Basil II during the conflict with the Bulgar Emperor Samuel. At this point, overridden by the Bulgar forces, Basil II was prepared even to recognise the fact that for more than a century Croatian rulers wielded power on the Eastern Adriatic, and so conferred on King Držislav the title *rex Dalmatiae et Croatiae*.⁶⁷

On the other hand, the political void created by the Byzantine withdrawal was filled in by the growth of the autonomous forms of government in the cities as well as by the slow but irreversible integration of the old urban nuclei into the fabric of Croatian society. The decisive step on this path was taken at the church synod held in 925 in Split under the auspices of the Croatian king Tomislav.⁶⁸ The mere fact that at this instance jurisdictions of the old bishopric sees were extended to encompass Croatian territories points to the conclusion that the process of integration was already highly evolved. All circumstances and side-effects of this process are the subject of a different study.

¹ I. GOLDSTEIN, Byzantine Presence on the Eastern Adriatic Coast 6th-12th Century, *Byzantinoslavica* LVII/1996 (Prague), p. 257.

² See, for example, E. MAYER, La costituzione municipale dalmato-istriana nel medio evo e le sue basi romane, *Atti e memorie della società istriana di archeologia e storia patria* XXII/1906 (Trieste — originally published as Die dalmatinisch-istrische Munizipalverfassung im Mittelalter und ihre römischen Grundlagen, *Zeitschrift der Savigny Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte* 24/1903), p. 354 pp.; J. FERLUGA, *Vizantijska uprava u Dalmaciji*, Beograd 1958 (translated, revised and only slightly changed as *L'amministrazione bizantina in Dalmazia*, Venice 1978; hereafter I will use the Serbian edition because of the impact this version made on Croatian and Serbian historians who dealt with the problem); Ž. RAPANIĆ, Istočna obala Jadrana u ranom srednjem vijeku (enlarged and slightly changed Croat version of the *La costa orientale dell'Adriatico nell'alto medioevo. Considerazioni storico-artistiche*, in: *Gli Slavi occidentali e meridionali nell'alto medioevo. Settimane di studi del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo* 30/1982, tome II, Spoleto 1983), p. 11, 21; D. OBOLENSKY, *Vizantijski komonvelt* (Serbian translation of *The Byzantine Commonwealth*), Belgrade 1991, p. 19, 24, 122-5; GOLDSTEIN, *op.cit.* p. 257 ff.

³ GOLDSTEIN, *op.cit.*, p. 258.

⁴ R. CESSI, La Dalmazia e Bisanzio nel sec. XI, *Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti (Classe di scienze morali, lettere ed arti)* CXXV/1967 (Venezia), p. 89.

⁵ CESSI, *op.cit.*, p. 100-1.

⁶ CESSI, *op.cit.*, p. 109.

⁷ CESSI, *op.cit.*, p. 114.

- ⁸ Cf. the ample bibliography in I. GOLDSTEIN, *Bizant na Jadranu (Byzantium on the Adriatic)*, Zagreb 1992, p. 202, who notes four other titles by Cessi but not this very important one.
- ⁹ Pope's letter in J. STIPIŠIĆ — M. ŠAMŠALOVIĆ, *Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae* I, Zagreb 1967, p. 34-5.
- ¹⁰ One transaction concerning the purchase of land in Trogir was registered by notarial deed "scriptum litteris latinis, grecis et sclavis", later on in the 14th century mentioned in a cadastral document called "Zavod", but without exact date. For the details and dating see M. HORVAT, Das Trogirer "Zavod"-Buch vom Jahre 1326, *Studien zur alteren Geschichte des Slawentums und Osteuropas* I, Graz-Köln 1956, p. 48 ff. How Byzantine administration worked in western provinces is depicted in R. MORRIS, Dispute settlement in the Byzantine provinces in the tenth century, in: *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe* (ed. W. DAVIS and P. FOURACRE), Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- ¹¹ On the nature of Byzantine political theory and ideology see E. BARKER, *Social and Political Thought in Byzantium*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1957, p. 2 ff.; H. AHRWEILER, *Politička ideologija vizantijskog carstva* (Serbian translation of *L'idéologie politique de l'empire Byzantin*), Beograd 1988, p. 63 ff. makes Constantine's works one of the corner stones of Byzantine political ideology.
- ¹² G. OSTROGORSKI, Vizantijski car i svetski hijerarhijski poredak, u: *O verovanjima i shvatanjima Vizantinaca; Sabrana dela Georgija Ostrogorskog* vol. 2 (Serbian translation of The Byzantine Emperor and Hierarchical World Order, *The Slavonic and East European Review* XXXV/84/1956), p. 265.
- ¹³ On Liudprand's story about his sojourn in Constantinople see K. LEYSER, Ends and means in Liudprand of Cremona, in: *Idem. Communications and Power in Medieval Europe. The Carolingian and Ottonian Centuries*. The Hambledon Press, London and Rio Grande, 1994, p. 128. On the link between the ritual communication and ideological schemes from the anthropologist's standpoint see M. BLOCH, From cognition to ideology in: *Idem. Ritual, History and Power, Selected Papers in Anthropology*, The Athlone Press, London and Atlantic Heights 1997, pp. 122-3.
- ¹⁴ OSTROGORSKI, *op.cit.*, p. 266.
- ¹⁵ G. OSTROGORSKI, Vizantijski sistem hijerarhije država, u: *O verovanjima...* (Serbian translation of Die byzantinische Staatenhierarchie, *Seminarium Kondakovianum* 8/1936), p. 253. For the whole problem of Simeon's pretensions, of which the marriage with Maria was only the "tip of ice-berg", cf. OBOLENSKY, *op.cit.*, p. 127-140.
- ¹⁶ Regarding the relation between cognition and ideology it is of interest to cite anthropologists again. BLOCH, *op. cit.*, 129, points out that "ideology is ultimately built up from a non-ideological cognitive base, but it is built up by a process which violently transforms it to create a picture of the world which in many ways negates it."
- ¹⁷ L. MARGETIĆ, Konstantin Porfirogenet i vrijeme dolaska Hrvata (Constantino Porfirogenito e la venuta dei Croati), *Zbornik Historijskog zavoda JA 8/1977*, p. 18 ff.
- ¹⁸ MARGETIĆ, *op. cit.*, p. 20 n. 22.
- ¹⁹ Cf. MARGETIĆ, *op.cit.*, p. 17-18, where the differences are graphically rendered. It has to be added here that the introductory part of the c. 30, besides being literary "common place", in the light of those explanations has a totally new meaning.
- ²⁰ In his *De Cerimoniis* Constantine states that the ruler of Croats enjoys the same status as rulers of *Scлавinae* such as *Tribunia*, *Canali*, *Zacholmie*. His title in the correspondence ought to be $\alpha\rho\chi\omicron\nu$ and the letter has to be in form of "order" (keleusiz). See the text in H. LEICH — I. REISKE, *Constantini Porphyrogeniti De cerimoniis aulae byzantine* I, Lipsiae 1751, p. 691. Serbian translation and commentary by B. FERJANČIĆ accessible in *Vizantijski izvori za istoriju naroda Jugoslavije (Byzantine sources for the history of Yugoslav nations)* II, Beograd 1959, p. 78.
- ²¹ Text from the c. 31 of *De administrando* with cited figures, according to Bonn edition, in F. RAČKI, *Documenta historiae Chroaticae periodum antiquam illustrantia (Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum medionalium VII)*, Zagrabiae 1877, 398. Commentary on those high figures and their significance in R.J.H. JENKINS, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus. De Administrando Imperio* vol. II — Commentary, London 1962, p. 129-130. The nature of *Scлавinae* is well defined in G. OSTROGORSKI, Vizantija i Južni Sloveni (Byzantium and the South Slavs), in: *Vizantija i Sloveni (Sabrana dela Gerogija Ostrogorskog* vol. 4, Beograd 1970), p. 10, and OBOLENSKY, *op.cit.*, p. 72.
- ²² Constantine's text from the c. 31 in RAČKI, *op.cit.*, 360. JENKINS, *op. cit.*, 128 leaves the statement with no comment.
- ²³ MARGETIĆ, *op.cit.*, p. 60 ff.; cf. also RAPANIĆ, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-4. For archeological coroboration see for example J. BELOŠEVIĆ, *Materijalna kultura Hrvata od 7-9. stoljeća (Die materielle Kultur der Kroaten vom 7. bis zum 9. Jh.)*, Zagreb 1980; Z. VINSKI, O nalazima karolinških mačeva u Jugoslaviji (On the Findings of Carolingian Swords in Yugoslavia), *Starohrvatska prosvjeta* XI/1981; now with necessary emendations and corrections by V. SOKOL, Arheološka baština i zlatarstvo (Archeological Treasuries and the Art of the Goldsmiths), in: *Hrvatska i Europa. Kultura, znanost i umjetnost*, Zagreb 1997, pp. 117-145.
- ²⁴ For the Carolingian sizeranity of the Croatian rulers and their role of the "gentile ruler" through the 9th century see M. ANČIĆ, From Carolingian Official to Croatian Ruler — The Croats and the Carolingian Empire in the First Half of the Ninth Century, *Hortus artium medievalium* 3/1997 (Zagreb-Motovun). The position of the Carolingian *vasus* is amply discussed by R. MCKITTERICK, *The Frankish Kingdoms Under the Carolingians 751-987*, Longman 1993, p. 66 ff. For the survey of earlier theories regarding the growth of early Croat state as well as the author's own view see S. VILFAN, Evoluzione statale degli Sloveni e Croati, and Discussione sulla lezione Vilfan, in: *Gli Slavi occidentali e meridionali nell'alto medioevo. Settimane di studio del Centro Italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo* 30/1982, tome I, Spoleto 1983.
- ²⁵ The text is rendered according to RAČKI, *o.c.*, p. 272. In his comment N. TOMAŠIĆ, *Konstantin Porfirogenet. O upravljanju carstvom*, Zagreb 1994², p. 85 n. 341, rightly points to this "slip" in the Emperor's train of thoughts, while JENKINS, *op.cit.*, p. 126, does not bother even to comment the statement.
- ²⁶ On those lists and their nature as historical sources see G. OSTROGORSKI, Taktikon Uspenskog i Taktikon Beneševića (Tacticon of Uspensky and Tacticon of Benešević), *Iz vizantijske istorije i prosopografije: Sabrana dela Georgija Ostrogorskog* vol. 3, pp. 157-179. The lists were at large and indiscriminately used by FERLUGA, *op. cit.*, p. 50 ff.
- ²⁷ OSTROGORSKI, *op. cit.*, p. 164; see also pp. 171 and 175.
- ²⁸ GOLDSTEIN, *Byzantine Presence ...*, 257.
- ²⁹ Einhard's text (according to G.H. PERTZ — G. WAITZ, 1905 edition) in EINHARD, *Život Karla Velikog*, Zagreb 1992, c. 13 (pp. 70-2).
- ³⁰ The forms of the Avar domination over the Slavs during the 7th and 8th century are amply discussed in MARGETIĆ, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-74.
- ³¹ I. GOLDSTEIN, *Hrvatski rani srednji vijek (Croatian Early Middle Ages)*, Zagreb 1995, p. 142.
- ³² CESSI, *op. cit.*, p. 93; ANČIĆ, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
- ³³ G. OSTROGORSKI, *Istorija Vizantije* (Serbian translation of *Geschichte des byzantinischen Staates*), Beograd 1969², pp. 192-6, points rightly to the feats of the Nicephorus' administrative reorganisation as a basis of his military achievements. FERLUGA, *op. cit.*, 49, on the basis of one Frankish source, assumes that the expedition of patrician Nichetas in 806 really ended war. CESSI, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-3, puts the Byzantine action in the years 808 to 810, but does not give clue to his reasoning. Cessi's reasoning is all in all more in accordance with numerous statements in Frankish and Venetian sources compiled and published in RAČKI, *op. cit.*, pp. 311-3.

- ³⁴ Statement concerning position and role of the Byzantine envoy, in *Annales regni Francorum*, MGH SS I, ed. G.H. PERTZ, 203, (cited according to RAČKI, *op. cit.*, pp. 317-8) goes like this: "legatum Leonis imperatoris de Constantinopoli pro Dalmatorum causa missum, Niciforum nomine, suscepit".
- ³⁵ GOLDSTEIN, *Bizant na ...*, p. 32 ff., discusses configuration, importance and, to some point, control of this maritime route in the 7th and 8th century. Cf. also RAPANIĆ, *op. cit.*, p. 11, who points out that even Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus was aware of the importance of this maritime route.
- ³⁶ Archeological finds from this region are at length discussed in M. ZEKAN, Karolinški i poslijekarolinški nalazi iz Bosne i Hercegovine (Carolingian and Post-Carolingian Finds in Bosnia and Herzegovina), *Livanjski kraj u povijesti*, Split-Livno 1994. For the discussion on the Narentani and build up of their maritime power see also F. ŠIŠIĆ, *Povijest Hrvata u vrijeme narodnih vladara (History of the Croats During the Reign of the National Dynasties)*, Zagreb 1925, p. 413, and FERLUGA, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-8.
- ³⁷ The whole episode will be at length discussed later on in this text. Emperor's letter speaks of "castra nostra dirupta et tot populis Slavinae nostre in captivitate ... substractis" during the campaign of patrician Nichetas (text of the letter in RAČKI, *op. cit.*, pp. 361-2).
- ³⁸ *Johannis diaconi Chronicon Venetum*, in: MGH SS VII, ed. G.H. PERTZ, Hannoverae 1846, p. 16, renders how "missus Sclavorum de insula Narrentanis ad domnum Johannem ducem veniens ... pacem cum eo instituens" (cit. according to RAČKI, *op. cit.*, 334).
- ³⁹ Cf. S. DOKOZA, Prilog proučavanju unutrašnjih prilika na otoku Korčuli u srednjem vijeku (Contribution to the Research on Inner Conditions of the Island of Korčula in the Middle Ages), *Radovi Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Zadru* 39/1997, pp. 123-4, Very similar results would be obtained through the analysis of the oldest sources from Brač, published in Dj. ŠURMIN, *Acta Croatica I (Monumenta historico-juridica Slavorum meridionalium vol. VI)*, Zagrabiae 1898, pp. 6-9, and M. VRSALOVIĆ, Prinos iz bračkih starina (Contribution to the Brač Antiquities), *Vjesnik za arheologiju i historiju dalmatinsku* L/1928-29 (Split 1932), pp. 279-288.
- ⁴⁰ Constantine's text from c. 29 in RAČKI, *op. cit.*, 338.
- ⁴¹ The whole episode is at some length discussed in FERLUGA, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-4. Ferluga here, as usually, tries to undermine the meaning of every source that may be interpreted in the way contrary to position he advocates, namely the strong and direct Byzantine rule over Dalmatia. But, the point here is that Constantine's story how Byzantium lost Dalmatia is corroborated with two different sources.
- ⁴² Text from Gotschalk's work with clear autobiographical notions in L. KATIĆ, *Rasprave i članci iz starije hrvatske povijesti (Articles and Studies on the Older Croatian History)*, Split 1993, p. 108, who otherwise amply discusses the theologian's sojourn at the court of the Croatian Duke.
- ⁴³ Dalmatian bishops attended the synod at Nicea in 787 (cf. R. KATIĆIĆ, *Uz početke hrvatskih početaka (At the Beginning of the Croatian History)*, Split 1993, p. 25 ff.). Only in 879 Pope John VIII asked same bishops to change this and to acknowledge his authority (cf. Pope's letter in STIPIŠIĆ — ŠAMŠALOVIĆ, *Codex diplomaticus ... I*, pp. 16-7). Attempt made by V. KOŠČAK, Pripadnost istočne obale Jadrana do splitskih sabora 925-928 (Sway in East Adriatic Coast up to the Split Synods), *Historijski zbornik XXXIII-XXXIV/1980-1981*, p. 298 ff., to prove that Eastern Adriatic churches were never subjected to the authority of the Constantinopolitan patriarch remains totally unconvincing.
- ⁴⁴ OSTROGORSKI, *Istorija ...*, pp. 232-3.
- ⁴⁵ Cf. note 35 here. The letter is subject of a thorough analysis from the different angle in F. DÖLGER, Europas Gestaltung im Spiegel der Fränkisch-byzantinischen Auseinandersetzung des 9. Jahrhunderts, in: Idem, *Byzanz und die europäische Staatenwelt*, Darmstadt 1964.
- ⁴⁶ FERLUGA, *op. cit.*, p. 70, dates organisation of the "thema" in the years 872 or 872 with good arguments.
- ⁴⁷ Cf. ŠIŠIĆ, *op. cit.*, pp. 353-4; GOLDSTEIN, *Hrvatski rani ...*, p. 255.
- ⁴⁸ For Zdeslav's ascension to the throne see ŠIŠIĆ, *op. cit.*, pp. 360-3.
- ⁴⁹ Events are interpreted in this way in FERLUGA, *op. cit.*, p. 70.
- ⁵⁰ In his letter addressed to *Glorioso filio Sedesclauo, glorioso comiti Sclauorum*, Pope John VIII says in the beginning of 879: *Quia fama tue dilectionis atque bonitatis et religionis in deum ad nos usque peruenit* (letter in STIPIŠIĆ — ŠAMŠALOVIĆ, *Codex diplomaticus I*, p. 12, with the discussion on the date), clearly showing Duke's efforts to establish communication with Rome.
- ⁵¹ For the role and position of the priest John from Venice see I. BOBA, *Novi pogled na povijest Moravie* (Croat translation of *Moravia's history reconsidered. A reinterpretation of medieval sources*), Split 1986, pp. 20-1.
- ⁵² All four papal letters in STIPIŠIĆ — ŠAMŠALOVIĆ, *Codex diplomaticus I*, pp. 13-7. First three letters are dated June 7th, while the fourth letter, the one directed to the Dalmatian bishops, was written on June 10th.
- ⁵³ Letter addressed to *Dilecto filio Branimir* has this opening sentence: *Relegentes nobilitatis tue litteras ... quantam fidem et sinceram deuotionem circa ecclesiam sanctorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli et circa nos habeas, luce clarius nouimus* (STIPIŠIĆ — ŠAMŠALOVIĆ, *op. cit.*, p. 14). In the letter addressed to *Omnibus uenerabilibus (!) sacerdotibus et uniuerso populo* opening sentence runs as follows: *Cum litteras principis uestris (!) Branimir ... legeremus, non solum illius deuotionem, sed etiam fidei uestre sinceritatem et dilectionem, quam circa sanctum Petrum ... et circa nos habetis, cognouimus* (STIPIŠIĆ — ŠAMŠALOVIĆ, *op. cit.*, p. 13).
- ⁵⁴ STIPIŠIĆ — ŠAMŠALOVIĆ, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
- ⁵⁵ *Porro si aliquid de parte Grecorum uel Sclauorum super uestra ad nos reuersione ... dubitatis, scitote pro certo, quoniam nos ... uos adiuuare auctoritate curabimus* (STIPIŠIĆ — ŠAMŠALOVIĆ, *op. cit.*, p. 17).
- ⁵⁶ Cf. OSTROGORSKI, *op. cit.*, pp. 233-5.
- ⁵⁷ Letter of Pope Stephen VI from 886/887 in STIPIŠIĆ — ŠAMŠALOVIĆ, *op. cit.*, p. 21. Cf. also KOŠČAK, *op. cit.*, pp. 318-9, who thinks that actions of John VIII were crowned with success on the synod held at the end of 879 in Constantinople, when he obtained jurisdiction over Bulgaria and Dalmatia/Croatia.
- ⁵⁸ The text from the c. 30 in RAČKI, *op. cit.*, p. 372. FERLUGA, *op. cit.*, p. 74 ff. on the basis of this story precisely and convincingly calculated the sum of the fiscal dues. All the cities of the "thema" brought together 11 litres of gold or 792 "nomismas" that were delivered to the "strategos" before the Basil's reform.
- ⁵⁹ See the discussion of FERLUGA, *op. cit.*, p. 71 ff., based on the seals that belonged to Brienius and his "protomandator". Contrary to this and with no apparent reason CESSI, *op. cit.*, p. 99, concludes: "Non si può però parlare di una restaurazione bizantina nella Dalmazia greca nel senso di ripristino di un governo diretto".
- ⁶⁰ Cf. letters of the Pope John VIII in STIPIŠIĆ — ŠAMŠALOVIĆ, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-1.
- ⁶¹ The text in RAČKI, *op. cit.*, p. 372.
- ⁶² FERLUGA, *op. cit.*, p. 75, points that the amount granted to future "strategos" is just "symbolic gesture of recognition of the Byzantine overlordship", but later on in the text (p. 79 ff.) forgets his own words and treats the "strategos" of Dalmatia as a regular Byzantine official.
- ⁶³ CESSI, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

⁶⁴ The text edited in Č. M. IVEKOVIĆ, *Crkva i samostan sv. Krševana u Zadru (Church and Abbey of S. Grisogonus in Zadar)*, Opera Academiae scientiarum et artium Slavorum Meridionalium, Zagreb 1931, pp. 49-52.

⁶⁵ According to the legend relics of the saint were stolen by three monks who had taken them to the *provincia que dicitur Marab*, inhabited by the people ironically called *Mirmidones*. M. SUIĆ, *Zadarski i ninski Mirmidongi (The Zadar and Nin Inhabitants — “Myrmidons”)*, *Radovi Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Zadru*, 38/1996, p. 15, points to Moravia (early medieval *Marava, Marahava, Margus* — cf. BOBA, *op. cit.*, p. 27) as possible significance of *the Marab*, but later on drops his interpretation and without apparent reason locates *terram Marab* in the vicinity of Zadar. However, his argument that the name *Mirmidones* denotes people living in the sunken-floored houses (p. 21 ff.) deserves full attention. Otherwise, the whole complex of problems related to the legend need re-interpretation in an individual study.

⁶⁶ Constantine points out in the c. 31 of the *De administrando* relations of the Croats with Bulgars (text in RAČKI, *op. cit.*, 360).

⁶⁷ For the diplomatic actions of the Emperor Basil II see now M. ANČIĆ, *Srednjovjekovni montaneji (Medieval Montanei)*, *Starohrvatska prosujeta* 24/1997 (in print).

⁶⁸ The acts of the synod in STIPIŠIĆ — ŠAMŠALOVIĆ, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-2.

JESEN IMPERIJA

NESTANAK BIZANTSKE VLASTI NA ISTOČNOM JADRANU U IX. STOLJEĆU

SAŽETAK

Autor polazi od uočenog dvojakog pristupa problemu bizantskoga vrhovništva nad istočnom obalom Jadrana u posljednjim stoljećima ranoga srednjeg vijeka (9. do 11. stoljeće). Na jednoj, naime, strani stoje povjesničari koji se bezrezervno koriste djelima suvremenih ili nešto kasnijih bizantskih pisaca, dok na drugoj strani, gotovo usamljen, stoji povjesničar Roberto Cessi koji je jasno uočio znatne razlike između onoga što nude suvremena prvorazredna vrela i slike povijesti 9. stoljeća kakvu zrcali, prije svega, poznato djelo *De administrando Imperio* cara-pisca Konstantina VII. Porfirogeneta. Dajući za pravo Cessiju, autor navodi jasne i nedvojbene primjere iz kojih je razvidno kako se od kraja 9. stoljeća više ne može govoriti o stvarnom bizantskom vrhovništvu i djelotvornom carskom nadzoru nad političkim gibanjima na istočnoj obali Jadrana sve do 60-ih godina 12. st.

Susljedno takvu zaključku, autor se okreće djelima Konstantina VII. Porfirogeneta sa željom da utvrdi u kojoj se mjeri njegov tekst odnosi na stvarna povijesna gibanja, a u kojoj je on mjeri tek eksplikacija konzervativne imperijalne političke ideologije. Polazeći od rezultata do kojih je 1977. došao Lujo Margetić razglabajući znatne razlike između tekstova 29. i 31. poglavlja s jedne, te teksta 30. poglavlja s druge strane, autor zaključuje kako tekst 29. i 31. poglavlja, pripisan samome caru ili njegovim suradnicima, predstavlja tek sliku povijesnoga gibanja kakvo je “ono trebalo biti” po zamislama carskih krugova. Za razliku od toga, tekst 30. poglavlja donosi gotovo neutralno predočene stvarne informacije, one i onakve kakve su bile dostupne u Konstantinopolu. Iz svega, pak, toga jasno proizlazi kako car Konstantin VII. Porfirogenet, čija se djela i inače drže za kamene-temeljce bizantske imperijalne političke ideologije, zajedno sa svojim suradnicima naprosto nije mogao prihvatiti činjenicu da je tijekom 9. stoljeća na istočnojadranskom prostoru, zapravo na velikom dijelu antičke provincije Dalmacije, izrasla nova i relativno snažna politička tvorba — hrvatska kneževina. Ta je nova državna tvorba, s osloncem i pod vrhovništvom karolinškoga carstva, postupno istiskivala Bizant s toga prostora, što vrlo jasno zrcali i tekst već spominjanog 30. poglavlja djela *De administrando*, koji je danas nepoznat autor naknadno dopisao kao svojevrsni “ispravak” izvornoga teksta. Uza sve ovo, autor upozorava i na potrebu opreza kod korištenja listama

bizantskih dužnosnika iz 9. i 10. st., tzv. “taktikonima”, budući je već odavna i sam Georgij Ostrogorski upozorio kako se Bizantincima nikada nije žurilo brisati s takvih lista dužnosnike provincija koje je carstvo izgubilo.

Nakon ovakve raščlambe izvornoga materijala bizantske provenijencije, autor u drugom dijelu rada pokušava na temelju dostupnih vrela što preciznije rekonstruirati stvarni tijek povijesnoga gibanja, polazeći od nedvojbene činjenice da je tijekom 9. st. Carstvo u dva navrata na istočnojadranskoj obali vodilo ratne operacije većih razmjera. Zaključujući kako je prvi od tih ratnih napora, onaj iz prvoga desetljeća 9. st., bio okrunjen punim uspjehom, autor upozorava kako su te tečevine ratnih uspjeha uvelike kompromitirane za vladavine cara Mihajla II. Mucavca, 20-ih godina. Razlog tomu je suvremeni uspon i rast pomorske moći Neretljana, nad kojima je krajem 8. st. zavladao i uspješno ih organizirao tada doseljeni hrvatski ratnički element. Uspon pomorske moći Neretljana značio je prekid komunikacija između dalmatinskih gradova i središta Carstva, što je dovelo do snaženja i rasta autonomnih vladajućih struktura u gradovima na istočnojadranskoj obali. Autor posebice ističe kako su u očima suvremenih Hrvata tadašnji stanovnici gradova još uvijek “Grci”, pri čemu nemalu ulogu igra održavanje crkvenog vrhovništva patrijarha iz Konstantinopola nad gradskim biskupijama.

Drugi ratni pohod Bizanta na istočnu obalu Jadrana i pokušaj obnove vrhovništva autor povezuje s arapskom provalom u jadranski bazen potkraj 60-ih godina 9. st. i tada pokrenutim ratnim pohodima za njihovo izbacivanje iz toga prostora. U prvoj fazi bizantske pomorske snage lome moć i pokoravaju Neretljane, što izaziva prosvjede tadašnjega zapadnog cara, Ludovika II., koji se još uvijek smatrao njihovim vrhovnim gospodarem. Otvorivši na ovaj način za svoje brodove poznatu istočnojadransku “pomorsku magistralu” (pomorski put koji osigurava mirnu plovidbu između obale i niza otoka), Bizant ponovno uspostavlja puni nadzor nad priobalnim gradovima te organizira stvarnu i djelotvornu provincijsku administraciju u formi “teme”. Koristeći se gradovima kao polaznom točkom, carska vlast nastoji svojim utjecajem prodrijeti i na područje zaleđa te organizira oko 874. i neuspjelu urotu za svrgavanje hrvatskoga kneza Domagoja. U nemirima koji su izbili nakon što je nešto kasnije, 876., Domagoj umro, Bizant uspijeva za

hrvatskoga kneza nametnuti svoga štićenika, Zdeslava, te se za kratko (878/879.) čini kako su svi ciljevi bizantske politike ostvareni. Kada, međutim, u proljeće 879. Zdeslav bude nasilno zbačen s hrvatskoga kneževskoga stolca jasno se pokazuje ono što malobrojna sačuvana vrela skrivaju — bizantski su uspjesi stajali na slabim temeljima i izazvali ogorčeni otpor. Iste 879. dalmatinski gradovi priznaju crkveno vrhovništvo rimskoga pape te šalju poslanstvo u Konstantinopol sa zahtjevom da se prekinu sukobi s Hrvatima koji onemogućuju normalan život. Car Bazilije I. pristaje uz predočene argumente poklisara i donosi odluku (ubuduće

se porez dotad plaćan "strategu" ima plaćati hrvatskim vladarima) kojom će se nedavno organizirana "tema" praktično svesti na lokalnu i autonomnu zadarsku administraciju, čija je jedina veza s Bizantom tek nazivlje — nepostojećom "temom" upravlja "strateg" čije se stvarne ingerencije ograničuju na zadarsko područje. Od tada, pa sve do 60-ih godina 12. st., nazočnost se Carstva na istočnoj obali Jadrana osjeća tek u simboličkim gestama (ime cara unosi se u datum isprava; administrativno nazivlje) i diplomatskim potezima. S druge strane, ovakva situacija otvara vrata procesu integracije gradova u srednjovjekovno hrvatsko društvo.