

THE EVOLUTION OF THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE AFTER THE DEATH OF EMPEROR CONSTANTINE THE GREAT UN- TIL THE TENTH CENTURY

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Abstract: Constantine the Great considered himself the representative of God on earth, but also the fact that through his mind is transmitted “divine intelligence.” This conception about the emperor manifested itself throughout the existence of the Byzantine Empire. The emperors who followed Constantine the Great intervened in problems that arose within the Church. Some of them supported it, and others who shared the heresies that appeared during this period, persecuted the important representatives of the Church who tried to defend the purity of Christianity.

Within the Byzantine Empire, numerous transformations will now take place in all fields, and these transformations will lay the foundations on which the Byzantine state developed.

Keywords: Byzantine Empire, Christianity, Church, emperors, council, heretics, culture, civilization.

Some historians agree that since the emperor Constantine the Great (306-337) laid the foundations of the “New Rome”, the very existence of the Byzantine Empire began. Because it was in the place where Europe meets Asia, but especially due to its military and economic importance, Constantinople was the best place and thus, around it, the whole Eastern world could gather.

Greek culture and civilization, especially strong in this part of the Empire, but especially the superiority conferred by Christianity, made the new capital differ in a very special way from the old capital, being now both the fulfillment

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of aspirations, but especially of the tendencies of the new Eastern world, which will materialize in a new tendency and conception of a new monarchy. The Roman Empire had been preparing it for a long time, and now the time has come to realize this desire.

The beginning of the fourth century will be the one that in contact with the Middle East will complete this transformation, and the emperor Constantine the Great wanted to make the power of the Empire an absolute authority, but also a divine right. To fulfill this wish, Emperor Constantine the Great had to surround himself with all the splendor of the costume, but especially with the oriental splendor offered by it, but also with the ceremonies at the imperial palace.

In the new given situation, the emperor Constantine the Great considered himself the deputy of God on earth, but also the fact that through his mind is transmitted "divine intelligence." He began to emphasize as much as possible the sacred character of the emperor, surrounding him with many solemn formulas, taking him out of the world, and organizing the terrestrial world as a divine court.

To increase the strength and prestige of the imperial institution, Emperor Constantine the Great wanted a well-hierarchical organized and strict administrative monarchy and at the same time to be closely supervised, and the entire authority to be exercised with authority by the emperor. Also, the emperor Constantine the Great was very generous, he distributed gifts without distinction to the Churches, bishops, but also to the citizens. Because he promoted Christians in the administration and in the army, he attracted the sympathy of all Christians in the Empire, especially by declaring Sunday a holiday, but also by abolishing the fights of gladiators, restricting divorce grounds, punishing rape and adultery. Emperor Constantine the Great banned pagan sacrifices and divination and confiscated the riches of pagan temples, covering most of the expenses for the construction of Constantinople.

Although most of the Empire's population was pagan, they passively accepted a Christian emperor, and many pagans converted to Christianity because some of them wanted to win the favor of the government, most believed that the emperor's victories Constantine the Great over his rivals proved that this Christianity was a good thing. Many pagans also admired the morality of Christians, their

concern for the poor, and the fact that during severe persecution they remained steadfast in the faith.²

Through the laws he promoted during his reign, Emperor Constantine the Great sought to achieve justice against all forms of deception, corruption, and theft that could be blamed on state officials. He wanted to create a strong state that would control all aspects of protecting citizens and their families.

By what he did during his life, Emperor Constantine the Great must be judged as one of the greatest political and military leaders, but also one of the most influential religious and cultural figures in human history. In his person, the cultural confluences of the fourth century managed to be equally embodied and the contradictions that cross it in places. His desire for unity means, without a doubt, the desire for a synthesis between *vetustas* and *innovatio*, between Latinism and Hellenism, mythology and faith, beauty and justice, taxes and generosity, between *hilaritas* and *gravitas*, a synthesis that surpassed them by rejection of bloody sacrifices, on all the previous Roman emperors and which embraces, in a universal way, a new form of Romanity, traditional, continuously founding and re-founding³ within the universal civilization.

In the fourth century the most important moment in the history of the Byzantine Empire was the gradual immigration of barbarians, more precisely of the Germans (Goths).⁴ Their presence in the Empire is not new, because the elite of the military troops will be recruited from among them. The barbarians will be received into the Empire as federates, receiving land, and their leaders will be quickly assimilated, thus coming to play an important political role.⁵

Thus, the most important events that marked the evolution of the Byzantine Empire in political and military terms during this period were the receiving of the Goths in 332, but also of the Visigoths in 382, as federates. The Persian invasions of Syria and Mesopotamia dominated the period between 337-363. At the borders of the Byzantine Empire, the Huns will appear, approximately in the year 375.

After the death of Emperor Constantine the Great, his three sons succeeded to the rule of the Empire. Unfortunately, the enmity that existed between the three

² W. TREADGOLD, *O scurtă istorie a Bizanțului*, Editura Artemis București, 2003, 35-36.

³ B. LANCON, T. MOREAU, *Constantin un împărat creștin*, Editura Basilica București, 2013, 285.

⁴ A. A. VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, Editura Polirom Iași, 2010, 107.

⁵ M. KAPLAN, *Bizanț*, Editura Nemira București, 2010, 17.

brothers was amplified even more by the wars they had to wage against the Persians and the Germans. Constantine and Constans were followers of the Nicene Creed, but during the ensuing civil war Constantine was killed in 340, and his brother Constans suffered the same fate in 350. Thus, from now on Constantius (337-361) will remain the sole emperor of the Empire.

He was an ardent supporter of Arianism and pursued an Aryan politics that sought to suppress paganism. In the year 356 Constantius promulgated a law that provided for the closure of all pagan temples, forbidding entry into them, and stopping the offering of sacrifices in all localities of the Empire.⁶ Whoever disobeyed these commandments was sentenced to death and confiscation of property. He also issued another edict sentencing to death all those who offered sacrifices and worshiped the gods. During his reign, paganism experienced some defeats, while Arianism gained ground. His Aryan policy created great divergences between him and the Nicene, who were supported by St. Athanasius the Great (295-373).⁷

After the death of Constantius, Julian the Apostate, the nephew of the emperor Constantine the Great, succeeded to the throne of the Empire. During his short reign between 361-363, Julian the Apostate wanted the restoration of paganism, and in this sense, he legalized paganism by reopening the temples and returned the lands that had been confiscated. He was aware of the advantage of a hierarchy of bishops for Christians and in this regard, he would create a parallel hierarchy of pagan priests. Also, Julian the Apostate overlooked some acts of pagan violence against Christians, and to encourage and deepen the division between Christians, he recalled St. Athanasius the Great and the other anti-Aryan bishops who were exiled by Emperor Constantius. In 363, Julian the Apostate started a war against the Persians, and died of a Persian arrow.⁸

The soldiers proclaimed Jovian king (363-364), who was a devoted follower of the Nicene Creed. He restored Christianity to its former form, and the church historian Philostorgius tells us that: *“Emperor Jovian restored the churches to their former good state, freeing them from all the persecutions to which [Julian] the Apostate had subjected them. He also recalled those sent into exile by him for*

⁶ TREADGOLD, *O scurtă istorie a Bizanțului*, 41.

⁷ VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 110-111.

⁸ TREADGOLD, *O scurtă istorie a Bizanțului*, 41-42.

*refusing to renounce righteous piety.*⁹ Emperor Jovian thus wished to restore the entire order of the Empire that existed before the reign of Julian the Apostate.

Emperor Valens (365-378) pursued a completely different politics, and after declaring himself a follower of Arianism, he became intolerant of all other Christian doctrines. He will also reconfirm Constantius' sentences of exile for St. Athanasius the Great and for the other Anitian bishops, which will arouse even greater opposition. Valens began the colonization of the Goths in Thrace, and when their numbers became too large, in 378 he attacked them at Adrianople. Thus, he and his army died as a result of a confused battle.¹⁰ Throughout his reign, the inhabitants of the Byzantine Empire went through a period of great unrest and fear.

The reign of Emperor Theodosius the Great (379-395), who was a supporter and defender of the Nicene Creed, was of particular importance for the triumph of Christianity. He ordered that all the churches in Constantinople be handed over to the Nicene people. Ever since the reign of Emperor Constantine the Great, the *Ecclesia catholica* - Catholic (universal) Church has been delimited by *haeretici* - heretics, and during the reign of Theodosius the Great, the distinction between Catholic and heretic was definitively established by law. Thus, a Catholic became a follower of the Nicene Creed, and followers of other religious tendencies were considered heretics, while *pagani* - pagans were placed in a separate category.

By a decree of 380, only those who believed in the Holy Trinity, as preached in the Holy Gospels and the writings of the Holy Apostles, were considered *Catholici*, and the others were considered "*the foolish and reckless world,*" who adhered to "*the vile heretical doctrine.*" According to the *Codex Theodosianus*, XVI, 1,2 they did not have the right to call their meeting place as churches, being liable to the harshest punishments. Emperor Theodosius the Great also issued other decrees banning heretics from meeting in public or private gatherings, and their civil rights were increasingly restricted, especially those related to wills and inheritances. Those who were followers of the Nicene Creed would receive all the churches in Constantinople and throughout the Empire.

The last step taken by Emperor Theodosius the Great against paganism was the decree of 392. Thus, according to the *Codex Theodosianus*, IX, 45, 1, the old

⁹ FILOSTORGIU, *Istoria bisericească*, VIII, 5, Editura Polirom Iași, 2012, 245.

¹⁰ TREADGOLD, *O scurtă istorie a Bizanțului*, 43.

religion was considered the *gentilicia superstition* - a pagan superstition, being strictly forbidden sacrifices, burning incense, burning garlands, libations, divinations, but also all pagan practices. All those who will violate these decrees, will be guilty of offense to the emperor and sacrilege being liable to the most severe punishments. Thus, from now on, all pagan temples will be closed, and all pagan rites will be banned.

During his reign, Emperor Theodosius the Great faced two difficult problems. Thus, he first had to restore unity within the Empire, which was torn apart by divergent religious parties, but also to defend himself from the attacks of the Goths, who threatened the very existence of the Empire,¹¹ thus managing to skillfully solve all internal and external problems.

After the death of Theodosius the Great, his son Arcadius (395-408) came to rule the Byzantine Empire, ascending the throne when he was only seventeen. Obviously, at such an age, he did not have the experience or the will to occupy this rank. Under these conditions, he will be dominated by his favorites, who will lead the Empire in such a way as to offer personal benefits to them and their parties.

The most important issue during the reign of Arcadius was the Germanics. At the beginning of Arcadius' reign, Alaric, the leader of the Visigoths, launched a military campaign to Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia, but Rufinus' diplomatic intervention convinced him to abandon an attack on Constantinople. However, Alaric continued his military campaign in Greece as far as Athens, encircling the city walls. He gave up conquering it when he saw the goddess Athena Promachos in armor and the Trojan hero Achilles standing in front of the city wall. Alaric will plunder the cities of Corinth, Argos, and Sparta.

Arcadius died in 408 and was succeeded by his son Theodosius II the Younger (408-450), who was only seven years old. Theodosius II was not a gifted politician, nor was he particularly interested in matters of government. Throughout his long reign, he stayed away from the problems of the state, leading a solitary, monastic life, devoting most of his time to calligraphy, copying many old manuscripts. His sister, Pulcheria was one of the most influential people during his reign. She has written several works on religious topics, but also some in which she recounted certain political events.

¹¹ VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 119-122.

During the reign of Theodosius II, the Byzantine Empire was not so subject to military events, but nevertheless had to face the threat of the Huns, who advanced as far as the walls of Constantinople, and until relations were established. friendship, Theodosius II was forced to pay them a large sum of money, but also to cede the territory south of the Danube. However, the Huns under Attila (395-453), who was their strongest leader, continued their incursions into Illyricum and Thrace in 447. After defeating the imperial armies, they led the empire to evacuate the north Illyricum's, but also to pay a higher tribute.¹²

One of the important events during his reign was the construction of the walls of Constantinople in 413, which will protect the capital from the land and thus, the capital's area will double to now reach seven hundred hectares.¹³

The oldest collection of decrees, which were given by the Roman emperors, dates from the time of Emperor Theodosius II. The *Codex Theodosianus* was published in Latin in 438. The *Codex* contained decrees that were issued by Christian emperors, from Constantine the Great to Theodosius II. It is divided into sixteen books, which have been subdivided into an exact number of titles. Thus, each book deals with a certain aspect of government: about administration, military issues or those related to religious life, and in each title, the decrees are coordinated chronologically. *Codex Theodosianus* has a great historical importance because it is the most important source, which presents information from the IV and V centuries. Also, the *Codex* of Theodosius II, along with previous collections, will be an important source for the legal activities of Emperor Justinian (527-565). After the publication of the codex all the decrees that will appear will be called *novae leges novellae*.

Despite all his weaknesses, but also his lack of ability as a statesman, the long reign of Theodosius II was very important for later history, especially from a cultural point of view.¹⁴

Zeno (474-491) became emperor at the age of fifty and became a perfect intriguer, and for this he was disregarded by the people due to the combination of Isaurian harshness and non-Isaurian cunning.¹⁵

¹² TREADGOLD, *O scurtă istorie a Bizanțului*, 48-49.

¹³ KAPLAN, *Bizanț*, 17.

¹⁴ VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 128-140.

¹⁵ TREADGOLD, *O scurtă istorie a Bizanțului*, 70.

During Zeno's reign, some changes took place within the Byzantine Empire. Thus, during this period, the Germanic influence at court will be replaced by that of the Isaurians, a wild race of which Emperor Zeno was also a part. From now on, the Isaurians will occupy the best positions, but also the highest positions in Constantinople.

Zeno's reign was marked by important strong events. From the second half of the fifth century, the importance of the leaders of German troops will increase significantly. It came to the situation that the will of these leaders was almost decisive in the appointment or removal of Roman emperors from the West.

Thus, on August 28, 476 Odoacer, removed Romulus Augustus, the last Western emperor, and became ruler of Italy. For the safety of his reign, Zeno will send ambassadors from the Roman Senate with the assurance that Italy will not need a separate emperor and that he will be able to rule the entire Empire. In this sense, Emperor Zeno will offer Odoacer the title of Roman patrician and the administration of Italy. After becoming the leader of Italy, Odoacer adopted a visible independence from Zeno. Aware that he will not be able to attack Odoacer, Zeno will adopt another strategy.

Because Theodoric, the king of the Ostrogoths organized devastating incursions into the Balkan Peninsula, threatening even Constantinople, Emperor Zeno managed to draw his attention to the rich provisions of Italy. Theodoric will head for Italy, defeating Odoacer and settling in Ravenna. After Zeno's death in 493, Theodoric established his Ostrogothic kingdom in Italy, with its capital at Ravenna.

During Zeno's reign, the most important issue, which caused much unrest, was religion. Since in Egypt, Syria, but also to some extent in Palestine and Asia Minor the population was mostly Monophysite, and religious disputes led to numerous conflicts, the Patriarch of Constantinople Acacius (472-489), who was initially a follower of the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon, together with Peter Mong, the patriarch of Alexandria, decided to find a way to reconcile the religious parties. In this sense, they proposed to the emperor Zeno to try to make the opponents reach a mutual agreement through concessions made by the two parties.

Thus, in the year 482 at the proposal of the Patriarch Acacius, the emperor Zeno will issue an act of union, *Henoticon*, which addressed the Churches that were under the jurisdiction of the patriarch of Alexandria. The *Henoticon* tried to avoid any sign of the orthodox and Monophysite teaching on the union of the

two natures, divine and human, in the person of the Savior Jesus Christ. The *Henoticon* recognized the decisions of the three Ecumenical Synods, anathematizing Nestorius, Eutychius, and their followers. The 12 Anathematisms of St. Cyril of Alexandria (370-444) were also accepted, but he stated that Jesus Christ was: “*deity with the Father after the Godhead and of the same nature with us after mankind.*” The use of the terms “*one nature*” or “*two natures*” was also avoided, and the decision of the Council of Chalcedon regarding the union of the two natures in the person of the Savior Jesus Christ was not mentioned.

Although at first the *Henoticon* seemed to improve the situation in Alexandria, in the long run it would displease the Orthodox and the Monophysites, and the number of religious parties would become even greater. Pope Felix III (483-492) will also protest the *Henoticon*, analyzing the complaints of the Eastern clergy dissatisfied with the decisions of the decree of union, through two synods that he held in Rome on July 28, 484 and October 5, 485. anathematized Peter Mong the Patriarch of Alexandria, Peter Fullo the Patriarch of Antioch and Acacius, the patriarch of Constantinople, the signatories of the document. In response, Patriarch Acacius will erase from the diptychs the name of Pope Felix III and break any ties with Rome, and thus the thirty-five-year-old Achaean schism will be unleashed.¹⁶

Consequently, this was the first serious rupture between the Eastern and Western Churches, which continued until 518, when Justin I (518-527) ascended the throne of the Byzantine Empire.¹⁷ He will communicate to Pope Hormisda (514-523), on August 1, 518, his accession to the throne of the Byzantine Empire. Emperor Justin wanted to reconcile the two Churches and in this sense on September 7 a delegation led by the Gratus committees will leave for Rome with letters to the Ostrogothic king Theodoric and Pope Hormisda. He was invited to come to Constantinople, or if he could not come to send delegates to discuss the issue of the Achaean schism. The delegation also had a letter from Patriarch John II (518-520) and Caesar Justinian, asking Pope Hormisda to express his position about former Patriarch Acacius. In his response, Pope Hormisda said that Patriarch Acacius and his successors up to Patriarch John II were removed from diptychs. Emperor Justin also informed Pope Hormisda of the measures he had

¹⁶ N. CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului*, I, Editura Universității „Lucian Blaga“, Sibiu, 2007, 199-201.

¹⁷ VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 142-144.

taken to restore the authority of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451.

Pope Hormisda will positively appreciate the new situation created and, in this regard, he will send to Constantinople a delegation, which will consist of Bishops Ghermanos and Ioan, the priest Blandus and the deacons Felix and Dioscor. This delegation will be received on March 25, 519 by Justinian with great pomp, and the next day it will be received by Emperor Justin I and Patriarch John II. In the reconciliation formula, Pope Hormisda demanded the anathematization of Nestorius, Eutychius and Dioscorus, as well as the reading from diptychs of the patriarchs of Alexandria Timothy Elur and Peter Mong, the patriarch of Antioch Peter Fullo, the patriarchs of Constantinople Acacia (472-489), Fravitas (489-490), Euphemia (490-496), Macedonia II (496-511) and Timothy I (511-518), who shepherded during the Achaean schism. Pope Hormisda also called for the acceptance of the dogmatic Epistle of Pope Leo I (440-461) to the Patriarch of Constantinople Flavian (446-449).

On March 28, 519, the reconciliation formula will be signed by Patriarch John II, the bishops present in Constantinople, the archimandrites of the monasteries and the senators. The reconciliation of the two Churches will be consecrated through a service in St. Sophia Cathedral in the presence of the signatories and the people. Pope Hormisda will thank Emperor Justin I and Justinian for their help in reconciling the two Churches.

Between 491-518 the Byzantine Empire was shaken by numerous popular uprisings, during which time the Slavs came to threaten the walls of Constantinople in 517.¹⁸

From the year 518, a brilliant new epoch will begin in the history of the Byzantine Empire, an epoch that will bear the name of the great emperor Justinian (527-565). The "Justinian era" was what marked the heyday of the Byzantine Empire, both politically, militarily, economically, but especially culturally. At the accession to the throne, Justinian had the ideals of a Roman and Christian emperor. Considering himself the successor of the Roman Caesars, he considered that he had a sacred duty in restoring the unity of the Empire, in the same borders that it had in the I-II centuries.

As a Christian emperor, Justinian considered that his mission was to spread the true faith among unbelievers, both among heretics and among pagans. With

¹⁸ CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului*, I, 199-202.

this ideology, Justinian as a statesman dreamed of conquering the whole known world.

Now it will be Emperor Justinian who will control the great legislative work, which will later bear his name. His theological culture gave him the opportunity to intervene in the problems that troubled the Church during this period.

From the beginning of his reign, the main goal of Justinian's church policy was to establish close relations with Rome and therefore he was the defender of the Council of Chalcedon, because the decisions of this synod were completely rejected by the eastern provinces. Thus, during the reign of Justinian, the Papal See of Rome enjoyed supreme ecclesiastical authority. In the letters that Justinian sent to the bishop of Rome, he addressed him with the nickname "Pope", "Pope of Rome", "Apostolic Father", "Pope and Patriarch". This title of pope was used exclusively for the Bishop of Rome. In one of the epistles, Emperor Justinian told the pope that he was: *caput omnium sanctarum ecclesiarum*, "head of all the holy churches."¹⁹ Also in *Novella 131* Emperor Justinian clearly decided that: "it ranks second after the holy apostolic see of Old Rome."

During his reign, Emperor Justinian came into conflict with Jews, pagans, and heretics: Manichaeans, Aryans, Nestorians, Monophysites, but also with representations of other religious doctrines, which were less important. In 529, to completely eliminate the traces of paganism, he closed the famous philosophical school in Athens (Platonic Academy), which was founded by Plato (427-347 BC) in 387 BC. During the nine hundred years of the Platonic Academy, it trained the best philosophers, who influenced the thinking and spiritual life of the civilized world, even after it was abolished. After the reorganization of the University of Constantinople by Emperor Theodosius II in 425, the Platonic Academy declined. Emperor Justinian failed in his policy of eliminating paganism, as it would continue to exist in secret in more remote parts of the Empire.²⁰

At the end of 541, an unforeseen disaster befell the Byzantine Empire. The bubonic plague, which had not been known in the Mediterranean until then, entered Egypt, from Ethiopia. This disease was transmitted by fleas to rats and thus, the epidemic will be brought by the ships that supplied Byzantium with wheat, which the rats ate. It hit Constantinople for four months, and the real impact of

¹⁹ A. KNECHT, *Die Religions-Politik Kaiser Justinians I*, Würzburg, 1896, 2005, 62-68.

²⁰ VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 165-181.

the epidemic will remain controversial, so it will be able to weaken for a long time several cities that were already weak.²¹

Unfortunately, this disease spread quickly in the army, in rural areas and spread massively to cities, managing to include most of the cities in the East in early 542: Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem. The pandemic also spread to the Byzantine provinces of North Africa at Carthage in 543, to Arles in Gaul, after which it spread to Rome and Central Italy in 544, and from there to Illyria and Thrace in 545. The evolution of the pandemic was different depending on each province, with successive waves. Thus, in 558, the second wave of even greater intensity will come to Constantinople, and in 560 it will wreak havoc in Arabia and Mesopotamia, so that in 561 it will be present in Cilicia and Nisibis. In the year 589, the pandemic will reach Rome again, at the same time as the outpouring of the Tiber which will destroy the barns and thus trigger a famine that will weaken the immune system of the population. Pope Pelagius II (579-590), who during the pandemic was close to the sick through the health and spiritual care he provided them, became contaminated and died of the plague on February 7, 590.²²

This disease produced a very high mortality rate, so that three quarters of those who contracted the disease died. According to some opinions, more than two hundred and thirty thousand people died in Constantinople alone, possibly more than half of the capital's inhabitants. Since the epidemic spread most in the cities, according to some opinions about a quarter of the population would have died, a proportion similar to the plague of the thirteenth century.²³

The plague of the time of Emperor Justinian, called in time writings *pestis inguinaria* or *pestis glandularia*, was the first scientifically confirmed plague pandemic.

During his reign, Emperor Justinian was particularly interested in encouraging the construction of monuments of civil and religious architecture throughout the territory of his vast Empire. In this sense, his activity as a builder was not limited to the construction of fortifications and churches, but he also built many monasteries, palaces, bridges, cisterns, aqueducts, public baths, and hospitals.

²¹ KAPLAN, *Bizanț*, 20.

²² A. BUZALIC, *Anatomia unei crize: 2019-2020. De la mutațiile unei culturi în criză spre Biserica de mâine*, Editura Galaxia Gutenberg Târgu-Lăpuș, 2020, 31-36.

²³ TREADGOLD, *O scurtă istorie a Bizanțului*, 79-80.

Also, his name is related to the construction of St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai.

Emperor Justinian left his name in the field of law. With the help of Trebonian, who was the quaestor of the Sacred Palace, he codified the law in 529. Thus, he will regroup the laws that were still in force in the *Codex Justinianus* - the Code of Justinian, reunite the jurisprudence in *Digesta* - Digeste, and endow law students with a textbook *Institutiones* - Institutes. All the laws that were promulgated after the Codex will be published in a collection called *Novellae* - Novele, which were written mostly in Greek, because during the reign of Justinian this language was spoken by most of the inhabitants of the Empire. Byzantine will also become the official language.²⁴

Many of the wars that Justinian fought were for the recapture of lost territories, but also for defense. Building a powerful army that would be led by skilled generals such as Belizarie and Narses, he managed to reclaim the lost territories of the West. For Justinian, the main enemies of the Byzantine Empire were the Germans. Thus, he managed to recover from the vandals in 534 the territories of North Africa; from the Ostrogoths in 553 the territories of Italy, and from the Visigoths in 554 those from Spain.

Through these victories, Emperor Justinian managed to achieve for the last time and for a short time the Mediterranean unity of the Roman Empire, and the Mediterranean Sea was almost transformed into a Byzantine lake. Unfortunately, these wars brought great human, financial and military sacrifices to the Empire, which reduced the strength and resources of Byzantium. Over time, Justinian's foreign policy caused the Byzantine Empire a very severe domestic economic crisis. Due to the lack of means, followed by the reduction of the army, it made impossible the long-term occupation of the newly conquered provinces, and these consequences were seen under the reigns of the future emperors.

However, two great achievements during the reign of Justinian left a huge mark on the history of world civilization and rightly justifies its nickname of "the Great", and these are his *Codex* of Civil Law and St. Sophia Cathedral in Constantinople,²⁵ one of the most famous and visited monuments of universal heritage.²⁶

²⁴ KAPLAN, *Bizanț*, 19.

²⁵ VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 213-214.

²⁶ KAPLAN, *Bizanț*, 8.

After the brilliant reign of Emperor Justinian, a period of regression will follow, because starting with the year 568 followed the gradual loss of the western regions that were recently conquered. Emperor Justin II (565-578) did nothing to defend the western provinces, which his uncle, Emperor Justinian, endeavored to conquer.²⁷

Thus, the Lombards invaded and conquered most of Italy, succeeding in 640 in conquering Liguria, but also most of the Exarchate of Ravenna, and the northern part of Italy would be called Lombardy from then on. The Visigoths will also invade Byzantine Spain, and the Moors will attack the Byzantine provinces of Africa and thus, from 751, Byzantine rule will include only the southern regions of the Italian peninsula.

In addition, there was a long conflict with the Persians between 572-591, and the Avar-Slavs formed a coalition in the fight against Byzantium between 586-587. Numerous border wars also took place between 592-602, followed by the establishment of the Slavs south of the Danube in 602. Also, the Byzantine Empire will face a new invasion by the Avars, a warrior people, who in 586 will besiege Thessalonica, where they will return several times. From July 27 to August 10, 626 ruins would besiege Constantinople, looting the church of the Blessed Virgin (Theotokos) in Vlaherne, which was then outside the walls of the capital, but believers had time to save the most important relics.

Other invasions by the Persians between 605-609 followed. They will invade and conquer Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Armenia. In 611-612, Caesarea Capadocia, the city of St. Basil the Great (330-379) will be on fire, along with other cities on the peninsula, panic reigns everywhere, and residents flee the streets with their icons and relics. The Persians will conquer Antioch in 613, after which in 614 they will conquer Jerusalem from which they will steal the Holy Cross that their king will give as a gift to one of his wives, who was a Christian. Egypt will also be conquered by the Persians in 619.²⁸

Unfortunately, the regime of terror imposed by Phocas between 602 and 610 led to the weakening of the Byzantine Empire, which was to face an internal and external crisis as serious as that of the nearby third century.²⁹

²⁷ TREADGOLD, *O scurtă istorie a Bizanțului*, 86-87.

²⁸ KAPLAN, *Bizanț*, 21.

²⁹ TREADGOLD, *O scurtă istorie a Bizanțului*, 106.

During this period of transition, religious and cultural life was marked by events that will give a new image to Byzantine culture and civilization.³⁰

Christianity has a very special development, because in 381 it was proclaimed by imperial edict as the official religion by Emperor Theodosius I (379-395), and in ten years all pagan cults in the Byzantine Empire will be banned. The great church of St. Sophia is now being built in Constantinople between 330-360, which will be destroyed during the great popular Nika uprising of 532. It will be rebuilt by Emperor Justinian between 532-537.

The cultural life of the Byzantine Empire will shine again with the founding of the University of Constantinople, which will be superior to the Latin one.

In the legislative field the Roman emperors of Constantinople and Ravenna will promulgate and publish the *Theodosian Code*, and in terms of construction now will be built the mausoleum of Galle Placidia (about 450), and in the next century - Neonian and Arian Baptistery, the basilicas of San Apolinarie Nuovo and San Apolinaire in Classe, followed by the church of San Vitale, which was decorated by Byzantine craftsmen with splendid mosaics.

In the legal field, the monumental *corpus juris civilis* now appears in Constantinople, including the Code of Justinian, the Institutes, the Pandects, and the Novels (529-565).

The classical period of Byzantine history was formed by the five centuries that separated the reign of Heraclius (Herakleios) from the coming to power of the Commen dynasty.

Asia Minor will be the center around which the entire Byzantine state will revolve, even though important provinces of the Empire have now been lost, such as Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and North Africa. Although it lost its eastern populations of Semitic origin, which were never fully Hellenized, but also the Thracian-Romans in the Balkans, Byzantium will gain great ethnic uniformity, as most of its population will consist of Greeks, or from peoples who will be in an advanced stage of Hellenization. From its splendor to the Byzantine Empire will remain three major elements, its faith, which was now only affected by the Monophysites of Syria and Egypt, its grandiose capital, which was considerably depopulated

³⁰ O. DRIMBA, *Istoria culturii și civilizației*, vol. II, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică București, 1987, 142-144.

and the gold coin, *nomisma*,³¹ created by Emperor Constantine the Great and which will have precedence in trade until the twelfth century.³²

Byzantine unity will also crystallize at the religious level, because now Christianity will become the only cult professed in the Byzantine Empire, especially after the loss of the eastern provinces that were inhabited mostly by Monophysites.³³

Within the Byzantine Empire, numerous transformations will now take place in all fields, and these transformations will lay the foundations on which the Byzantine state developed. During this period, the small property of a free peasantry was promoted, but from the ninth century it will be progressively enslaved to the large landowners. Also, now will appear the new structure of the theme, which will last until the end of the Empire.

Also, the army will be organized on new bases, the place of the mercenaries will be taken over by the peasants in the *theme*. With the loss of the territories in the western part of the Empire, its center will be taken over by Asia Minor, where all the impulses that have troubled the life of the Byzantine Empire for more than a century (726-843) came.

Emperor Heraclius (610-641) was the one who managed to defeat the powerful Persian armies between 622 and 628 and to regain for the Byzantine Empire the Monophysite provinces of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt and to recover from the Persians the Holy Cross, which will be erected in Jerusalem on the Passover Day of 630.³⁴

The recapture of the Monophysite provinces will bring back to the forefront the old problem of the state's attitude towards the Monophysites. Even during his campaigns, Emperor Heraclius began negotiations with the Monophysite bishops to achieve a way of church union through certain dogmatic concessions. This unity would have been possible in the context in which it would have been recognized that in the person of the Savior Jesus Christ, there would have been two natures, but one work / energy (ἐνέργεια) or one will (θέλημα). From these words will derive monoenergism and monothelitism, a new heresy. The Patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch, who were Monophysites and were appointed

³¹ Nomisma was an almost pure gold model weighing 4.5 grams.

³² KAPLAN, *Bizanț*, 22-23.

³³ S. BREZEANU, *O istorie a Imperiului Bizantin*, Editura Albatros București, 1981, 41.

³⁴ KAPLAN, *Bizanț*, 22.

by Emperor Heraclius, showed their willingness to work on an agreement, as did Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople (610-638).

The Palestinian monk Sofronie, who lived in Alexandria, protested this heresy. After becoming patriarch of Jerusalem, in late 633 or early 634, Sophronius sent a synodal letter, known as the *Synodicon*, to Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople (610-638), to Pope Honorius of Rome (625-638). and other bishops in whom he theologically argued the unfoundedness of monothelitism. Sophronius of Jerusalem (550-638) made a synthesis between the Christology of Pope Leo I the Great (440-461) and that of St. Cyril of Alexandria (370-444) and stated that the work is related to nature and not to the person or the hypostasis. Therefore, in the person of the Savior Jesus Christ, there are two natures and two natural works. They are united because one and the same is the worker or the operating subject. Thus, the Logos works the divine as God, and the human as a perfect man, since His humanity does not have its own hypostasis but is hypostasized by the Logos, that is, it is hypostasized. Accepting a divine-human (theandric) work, St. Sophronius of Jerusalem teaches that this is not a single work, but it relates to different genres. It is constituted at the same time and what belongs to divinity and humanity is perfectly manifested in the work of one's own nature or essence in a simultaneous action. St. Sophronius of Jerusalem seems to be the first to introduce the concept of synergism.

Patriarch Sergius was to compose the Christological part of this document, and so he drafted the text of *Ektesis*. He held a synod in Constantinople, after which he published a synodal decree in November 638, which provided for the deposition of bishops, priests, deacons, and the excommunication of monks and laity in case of non-compliance with this dogmatic document. Patriarch Cyrus of Alexandria and Emperor Heraclius signed *Ektesis*, and Pope Honorius I (625-638), who died on October 12, 638, did not know of its existence.³⁵ The new Pope John IV (640-642) did not approve the *Ektesis* and tried to show the teaching of the existence of the two wills and works, in the person of the Savior Jesus Christ, and denounced the monothelite teaching as heresy, and this will it produces a great enmity between the emperor and the pope.

Seeing this situation, Emperor Heraclius, who anticipated the outbreak of great ecclesiastical disputes, will promulgate this *Ektesis* ἔκθεσις, that is, an exposition of faith, by which two natures and one will be recognized in the person

³⁵ CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului*, I, 226-228.

of the Savior Jesus Christ. Although the emperor hoped that this *Ektesis* would lead to the reconciliation of the two camps, his hopes were not fulfilled, because the Arabs would conquer Syria in 636, Palestine and Jerusalem in 638, and Egypt in 642.³⁶

After Heraclius' death, Emperor Constantius II (641-668) came to rule the Byzantine Empire. He remained attached to monotheism, although it lost its political importance since the eastern provinces were conquered by the Arabs, but especially because monothelism was an obstacle to the friendship between the emperor and the pope. Emperor Constantius II made a series of reconciliations with the pope and in this regard, he offered to make some changes in the monothelite teaching.

Thus, in 648, he promulgated the *Typos* (τύπος) or *Rule of Faith*, which annulled Heraclius' *Ektesis* of 638. It forbids all Orthodox subjects who are in the spotless Christian faith and belong to the Catholic / Universal Church, and apostolic to fight or quarrel with one another over a will or a work / energy, or two works / energies and two wills.³⁷ The *Typos* also forbade written debates on Heraclius' *Ektesis* in 638, which was displayed in the narthex of St. Sophia Cathedral in Constantinople. The publication of the *Typos* will produce an even greater division within the two Churches, and Pope Theodore (642-649) excommunicated Patriarch Paul II of Constantinople (641-653). Thus, after the apocryphal (representatives) of the pope in Constantinople were arrested, beaten, and exiled for refusing the *Typos*, Pope Martin I (649-655) will convene a council in Rome between October 5-31, 649. In the presence of representatives of the Greek clergy, Pope Martin I condemned the pre-elected *Ektesis* (the most impious *Ektesis*), and the villain *Typos* (scelerosus *Typos*). Through its twenty anathematizations, the Lateran Council condemned monoenergism and monothelism by rejecting *Ektesis* and *Typos*. Bishop Teodor de Faran and the Patriarchs Sergius and Pir of Constantinople were also anticipated and declared that in the person of the Savior Jesus Christ there are two natures that are unmistakably united, two natural wills, divine and human, and two natural works, divine and human, which they are in perfect harmony.

Emperor Constantius II became angry with Pope Martin I and ordered the exarch of Ravenna to be arrested and send to Constantinople. Thus, on June 17,

³⁶ VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 238-239.

³⁷ K. J. HEFELE, *A History of the Church*, Edinburgh, 1896, vol. 5, 95-96.

653, the exarch Calliopa, will enter Rome with the army and arrested Pope Martin I, and after keeping him in captivity for a year and three months, he sent him to Constantinople. Here he was subjected to terrible humiliations and was imprisoned and sentenced to death. A little later he will be sent into exile to the Tauric Kherson³⁸ where he will die on September 16, 655.³⁹ Also, here Saint Clement the Roman received martyrdom and in 101.⁴⁰ Against *Typos*, but also from the monothelite teaching, the great theologian Saint Maximus the Confessor (580-662), whose tongue and right hand were cut off so that he could not speak and write against Montelism.⁴¹

The emperor and Patriarch of Constantinople will continue negotiations with Pope Eugene I (657) and eventually succeed in making peace with Pope Vitalian (657-672), and thus the schism in the Church ceased. This reconciliation of the emperor with the Church of Rome was very important for the Byzantine Empire, since it strengthened the emperor's position in Italy.⁴²

Three years after the death of Muhammad (570-632), the founder of Islam, the Arabs attacked the borders of the Byzantine Empire, succeeding in conquering Damascus in 635, and in 636 on the Yarmuk River, a tributary on the left bank of the Jordan, they inflicts a categorical defeat on the Byzantines. The conquests will continue and thus, Jerusalem will fall into their hands in 638, so that in 643 they will conquer Alexandria, and in 649 Carthage, followed by Cyprus in 670.⁴³

After these conquests Constantinople was assaulted between 674-678, and 717-718 by Arab expeditions. In 718 they began the siege of the capital on the land side, but also on the sea. Emperor Leo III Isaurus (717-740) attacked the Arab fleet with Greek fire and frightened the Arabs so much that the ships returned to the shelter and remained there. After this devastating failure in which

³⁸ Tauric Kherson was a Greek colony founded in the 7th century BC, located on the Crimean Peninsula in southern Ukraine. From the middle of the 1st century BC. it will enter Roman rule.

³⁹ CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului*, I, 229-230.

⁴⁰ C. I. DUȘE, *Imperiul Roman și creștinismul în timpul Sfântului Clement Romanul*, Cluj-Napoca, 2020, 402-405.

⁴¹ C. VOICU, *Patrologie*, III, București, 2010, 35-53.

⁴² VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 239-240.

⁴³ KAPLAN, *Bizanț*, 22.

the Arabs suffered numerous losses, they will never again seriously attempt to attack Constantinople.⁴⁴

The northern borders of the Byzantine Empire will be constantly attacked by the Slav-Avars, Russians and especially by the Bulgarians, who since 679 occupied Byzantine Dobrogea. In the seventh and eighth centuries, the Byzantine Empire changed profoundly, because now it will hold only a third of the territories it had in 602. After the loss of Syria, Egypt, Africa, Armenia, but also most of Italy and the Balkans, the Byzantine Empire will become a predominantly Anatolian power, where Greek was now spoken and where most of the inhabitants were Chalcedonian Christians. Now, in addition to Thrace and Anatolia, the Byzantines had only islands and parts of the coast in Greece, Dalmatia, Italy, and Crimea.

As the Byzantine Empire shrank, it became poorer, but much more vigorous and united. Although the Byzantine Empire became less centralized and more militarized than it was before, it remained a bureaucratic state, as was the Roman Empire. Thus, the central bureaucracy in Constantinople will continue to function even though its staff has decreased from about two thousand five hundred officials to about six hundred.⁴⁵

Although the Arab domination of the Mediterranean caused for the time being an economic decline of the Byzantine cities, they managed to recover during the ninth and tenth centuries. Politically and militarily during this period, Byzantium will move to an expansionist policy that will head for the Balkans, after which the territories of Syria, Mesopotamia and Armenia will be recaptured. After these significant political and military successes and especially with the end of the Macedonian dynasty between 1025-1081, the Byzantine Empire will go through a great crisis, as the many battles for the throne will lead to Byzantine emperors who did not have what was at the height of the forerunners being very weak in relation to them, and the usurpations were numerous. Now the free peasantry will be ruined, and the Byzantine state has lost the world power it once had.

Culturally, several great personalities have now appeared, such as the great profane poet Georgios Pisides (580-634) whose poetic genius was appreciated in

⁴⁴ TREADGOLD, *O scurtă istorie a Bizanțului*, 126-127.

⁴⁵ TREADGOLD, 133-135.

the following centuries, and modern scholars consider him the best profane poet of the Byzantine period.⁴⁶

Georgios Pisides was followed by the personality of Patriarch Photius (820-891), who was considered the most enlightened man of the century, and there are many important encyclopedic works from him remained.

At the legislative and legal level will appear in March 726 *Ecloga*, the Code of Laws of Emperor Leo III Isaurus (717-740), who was a capable legislator,⁴⁷ but also the Basilicas (887-893), the most representative Byzantine legal moment. Also, during this period there is a strong artistic renaissance in architecture, mosaic, but especially in monumental painting.

Byzantine literature had a special brilliance between the tenth and twelfth centuries, with the appearance of the novel in verse, *Digenis Akritas*, the masterpiece of Byzantine literature, and intellectual life will develop even more reaching its climax by reorganizing the University of Constantinople, which led by the strong personality of the historian and scientist Michael Psellos (1018-1078).

Unfortunately for the Byzantine Empire there will be a period of about four centuries (1081-1453), in which the decline will be progressive and will acquire a general character,⁴⁸ followed by the painful defeat of Muhammad II on May 29, 1453 and which will mean the end of the brilliant Byzantine Empire.

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⁴⁶ K. KRUMBACHER, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur von Justinian bis zum Ende des oströmischen Reiches, 527-1453*, München, 1897, 709.

⁴⁷ VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 234-237.

⁴⁸ DRIMBA, *Istoria culturii și civilizației*, 144 -146.

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