

2021-22 / LESSON 3 / 2021-10-07

Early Middle Ages -- 476-~1000 ce/2

541-542

A pestilence devastates the Byzantine Empire: it is the first pandemic caused by *Yersinia pestis*. That particular strain is now extinct, while others survive endemically in Central Asia and North America.

554

In order to try and restore an effective law system in Italy after the devastation of the Gothic war, Justinian enacts a ***Pragmatica sanctio pro petitione Vigilii*** = an edict addressed at the other part of the Empire (the recovered territories) as requested by Vigilius, the pope in office, on behalf of the Italian population.

Thus the emperor in Byzantium sends a **hexarch** (military governor) seated in Ravenna; the hexarch commands a number of ***magistri militum*** (generals) seated in the major cities; these in turn command ***tribuni*** in the lesser localities; the deliberations of *magistri militum* and *tribuni* are acclaimed by the assembly of the men able to take arms.

http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX_byzantine_offices.pdf

The province *Venetia et Histria* is governed by the *magister militum* seated in Opitergium = Oderzo.

https://archeologiavocidalpassato.files.wordpress.com/2019/11/opitergium_via-postumia_strade-romane_mappa_da-www.magicoveneto.it_.jpg

The *pragmatica sanctio* also extends to the recovered territories of the former Western Empire the application of Justinian's compilation; however the aftermath of the Gothic war and the instability of the political situation preclude actual enforcement of such complex and foreign rules of law, all the more so as many are now written in Greek.

The oldest document of Justinian's compilation in Western Europe is *littera Florentina*, a mutilated copy of the *Digestum* likely drawn by Italian scribes of the VI century from the original attached to the *Pragmatica*.

565

Death of Justinian.

568, april

The **Langobards** or Lombards, led from Pannonia by king Alboin, enter Italy from the Black Mountain pass in the North-eastern Alps.

They are not coming to raid but to settle, and they quickly establish a loosely feudal kingdom north of the Po, with capital in Pavia.

The history of the Langobards is written in the VIII century by Paul Warnefried = Paulus Diaconus

http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX_paulus_diaconus.pdf

The ancient Roman cities are largely depopulated and remain the seat of bishoprics (performing also judicial and administrative functions whenever an effective secular government is missing) and of periodical fairs and markets. Abandoned buildings are pillaged for building materials; Roman roads and aqueducts are left in ruins; the harbour of Ravenna, in the lack of maintenance, begins to be clogged by sediments brought by the river Po. The people of the mainland once again take refuge in the lagoons, but cannot return to their homes because the Langobards are there to stay. The *Veneti* are finally incorporated with the *Venetici*.

572

Death of Alboin. Various vicissitudes of the reigning dynasties.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_kings_of_the_Lombards

572-584

The Langobard territories extend to Central and Southern Italy, divided into duchies.

The Byzantines are restricted to a large area around Ravenna, across the Appennines to Rome, and to Liguria, Apulia, Calabria and the major islands.

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Italy/The-Lombard-kingdom-584-774>

580-590

Catastrophic weather and repeated floods extensively remodel the landscape and water courses of the eastern Po plain; the river Adige finds a new direct route to the sea and does not flow into the Po anymore, its mouth blocked by silt deposited in violent floods.

https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rotta_della_Cucca

601-602

The Langobards, led by their king Agilulph, defeat the Byzantines on the Veneto mainland and take hold of Padua, Monselice and Altino.

The bishop of Altino is now in Langobard territory.

http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX_migrations.pdf

605

The refugees choose a bishop of their own, with his seat in Grado.

Early infrastructures built in the lagoons. See:

-- GUIDO PEROCCO - ANTONIO SALVADORI, *Civiltà di Venezia, 1, Le origini e il medio evo*, Venezia: La Stamperia di Venezia, 1973

-- WLADIMIRO DORIGO, *Venezia origini*, Milano: Electa 1983 (2 voll.).

http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX_consolidation_of_soil.pdf

622

Egira, the move of Mohammad from Mecca, seat of the pagan cult of the Kaaba, to Yathrib = Medina

http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX_islam.pdf

634

The successor of Mohammad, the caliph Omar, establishes an expanding teocratic Empire in the Middle East and North Africa.

636

Edict of Rotari: the Langobard king enacts a body of fundamental laws which legitimize and update Langobard customs. Introduction of wergild (damages due to the family of the victim of an illicit act, instead of revenge); private criminal law.

637-639

The Langobards expand into the Byzantine territories and take Oderzo. The *magister militum* moves from Oderzo to a new city called Cittanova or Eracliana, after the Eastern emperor Eraclius.

The Byzantine territory in the north-east of Italy is now reduced to *Venetia maritima*, that is the lagoons between Grado and Cavarzere with their islands and lidi, and a narrow coastal strip of no interest to the Langobards but essential for supply of water, wood for fuel and meagre pasture for the Venetici.

http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX_cittanova.pdf

http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX_torcello.pdf

697

Legendary election of the alleged first doge, Paulicius Anafestus; in fact, a celebratory myth introduced by chronicler Johannes Diaconus in the XI century through a misreading of *Terminatio Liutprandina* (see below).

711

The Muslim army led by Tariq crosses the Gibraltar strait and conquers most of the Iberian peninsula.

712

The Langobard king Liutprand updates the Langobard legal system and introduces deeds and witness as preferred evidence in trials, although the ritual evidence given through the judicial duel and the purgatory oath is maintained.

Terminatio Liutprandina = setting of stones along the boundaries of the *Venetia maritima*, to mark them against the Langobard territories on the mainland.

The act was mythologised since the Middle Ages as an international pact between the first doge Paulus (called Anafestus) and the Langobard king Liutprand. Roberto Cessi (1885-1969) found instead that the setting of boundaries was unilaterally ordered by the hexarch in office, Paulus, to the

magister militum of Cittanova, Marcellus. The mention of Liutprand sets the chronological date and reflects the immediate reason for the *terminatio*, but does not imply more than a mere knowledge of the act by the Langobard government.

727

The Byzantine emperor Leo III Isauricus promotes the **iconoclastic heresy**; the Latin people in Byzantine Italy take the parts of the popes Gregory II and III and rise against the Byzantines.

Ursus Ipatius may be a doge elected in the lagoons by the rebel *Venetici*.

http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX_iconoclasm.pdf

732

Battle of Poitiers: the *Europeenses* (an ephemeral coalition of Christian kings), led by the Merovingian Frank chamberlain Charles Martel, defeats the Muslim army and stops their expansion on the Continent.

Beginning of the Reconquista: during seven centuries, the Christian kings in Iberia push the Muslim back south, with no further help by other European kings, until Granada, the last Muslim fragment of territory, was recovered after a long siege in 1492.

737

The Byzantines quash the rebellions in Italy and recover their hold on the *Venetia maritima*, depose the doge Ursus and re-establish government by *magistri militum*.

740

Eklogè = a reform of judicial trials in Byzantine tribunals is enacted, reforming Justinian's compilation which has become obsolete in the Byzantine Empire. However, Byzantine legislation is resisted application in Italy, because it comes from heretical emperors.

The anticonoclast rebel army takes Ravenna; the hexarch escapes to the seat of the *magister militum* for the *Venetia* in Cittanova.

741

The Byzantines are unwelcome by the *Venetici* and either are expelled, and/or receive orders from the Emperor to abandon the *Venetia maritima* as untenable and not worth the effort and expense of defending it.

The Byzantine territories in Italy are now reduced to a narrow strip in the Northern Balkans, the area around Rome, Sardinia, Sicily, and the Southern tips of Calabria and Apulia. They will be further compressed in the following centuries, as a result of the general, progressive crisis of the Byzantine Empire.

http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX_fameli_byzantium.pdf