

# 2021-22 / LESSON 4 / 2021-10-08

## Early Middle Ages -- 476-~1000 ce/3

**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](http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX_fameli_byzantium.pdf)

### **Independent Ducatus -- 742-1143: a direct democracy**

**742**

The *Venetici*, left to their own devices, elect as their doge Teodatus Ipatus and institute an unprecedented form of government called **diarchy** (government by two): the two agents of government are the *dux* and the *placitum*, and neither can act without the other.

The **dux** = doge is the leader of the army, which elects him by acclamation. The office is lifelong, but not hereditary.

The **placitum** (also called *cunctus populus* or *concio*) is the assembly of the men at arms, that is all men of 14 years of age and older, including the clergy; they have a duty to defend their homeland in case of war and are the only holders of political rights. Women enjoy full civil rights, but are not expected to fight and do not have political rights, so they are not part of the *placitum*.

The three functions of government are performed with no distinction of procedure or outcome. The doge gathers the assembly. declares the agenda

and proposes deliberations, which are discussed, possibly amended and voted by majority by the *placitum*.

The capital city, where the general *placitum* is held, is moved from Byzantine Cittanova, which is being slowly flooded, to **Metamauco**, just offshore from the southernmost lidi.

The new capital not only testifies of the clean break with Byzantine rule, but moreover it is easy to reach by sea routes from every part of the territory. It is also safe, given that the most likely attackers, the Langobards, are not used to sailing and do not have a navy.

**[http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX\\_metamauco.pdf](http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX_metamauco.pdf)**

Local assemblies are held in the *vici* = minor villages, to discuss and deliberate about matter of local interest. They are presided over by elected magistrates called *tribuni* (nothing to do with the former Byzantine military officials).

**[http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX\\_vici.pdf](http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX_vici.pdf)**

Formally, the territory of the *Venetici* is still counted as part of the Byzantine Empire (until the IV crusade in 1204, about which later), but in fact it is an independent entity, keeping diplomatic relations with the Byzantines and slowly gaining equal international status.

The claim to be a part of the Byzantine Empire is in fact a potentially useful element of prestige in diplomatic relation with the Western neighbours.

NOTE: According to contemporary political thought, this new entity, called **Ducatus**, is properly a **State**. It is made of people, territory and government, and the government is **independent**. This means that the State can freely choose with no limitations which interests to pursue.

An institution which enjoys only limited freedom in choosing which interests to pursue, being subordinated to a superior institution, is not defined as independent, but autonomous. Instances of autonomy in later times are the fiefs, subordinated to the overlord, and the late medieval Comuni, subordinated to the Western medieval Empire of which later. Nowadays the Italian Regions, which are subordinated to the State, are instances of autonomy.

The **legal system** of the Ducatus is rooted in Theodosian customs, but it is open to influences from the customs and laws of all other peoples with which the *Venetici* come into contact for trade: Langobards, Byzantines, Muslim, Jews...

The same influences show in the language.

The situation of the *Venetici*, refugees on a territory deprived of most essential resources and rich only in salterns, compels them to count for independent survival not so much on military or economic power, as rather on keeping good relationships with their neighbours and trading partners.

Diplomacy is in the beginning and would remain until the end of the Republic the major talent and the favoured way of the Venetians in dealing with international conflict. Keeping communication open also implies flexibility in both international and private agreements with foreigners, beginning with being amenable to adopting useful legal institutes, language and concepts not necessarily based on the Roman or local tradition.

**[http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX\\_foreign\\_words.pdf](http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX_foreign_words.pdf)**

**751**

*Largitio Astolfina*: formally an unilateral act, in fact an international agreement by which the *Venetici* obtain from the Langobard king Astulf confirmation of the boundaries set with *Terminatio Liutprandina*.

**774**

A new bishopric is instituted in Olivolo (San Pietro di Castello)  
The king of the Franks, Charles, defeats Desiderius and Adelchis and conquers the Langobard kingdom of Italy; reorganisation of the territory in Frankish fiefs.

**[http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX\\_feudal\\_system.pdf](http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX_feudal_system.pdf)**

**Overview of the geographical history of the territory of the Ducatus:**

**[http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX\\_migrations.pdf](http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX_migrations.pdf)**

**[http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX\\_cittanova.pdf](http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX_cittanova.pdf)**

**[http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX\\_torcello.pdf](http://www.arielcaliban.org/PX_torcello.pdf)**

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