

**Lombard-Byzantine Relations from the Beginning of 6th Century to the Fall of the
Exarchate of Ravenna (751)**

Summary

Characteristics of Lombard-Byzantine relations during the residence of Lombards in Pannonia are not especially complicated because they are possible to place in general paradigm of treatment applied to barbarian peoples by the Empire. It is more difficult to outline general tendencies in relations between them in the period after the Lombards invaded Italy. This is the result of cooperation of several factors. The Empire saw peripheral Italy as the less important region than the Balkans or the East where it fought against the enemies directly endangering its existence as Avars, Sasanids or Arabs. Due this fact Byzantium was quite passive towards the events in Italy. This attitude was reflected in byzantine sources in which issues of Italy are present sporadically and in very laconic way from the beginning of Lombard invasion. The another obstacle for attempts of analysis of policies which the Lombards and Byzantium conduct towards each other is the fact that western Latin sources, which are the basis for research on this topic, are mainly focused on activity of the Lombards, the papacy and the Byzantine administration of Italy. These sources often omit general Byzantine context efficiently making harder the indication what policy towards the Lombards was created in Constantinople and what was the attitude of Lombard rulers regarding the Empire. Although existing materials allow to reconstruct some general and temporal tendencies in mutual relations, their evolution and the image of some distinct episodes.

The moment when the Byzantine Empire made contact with the Lombards is hard to determine. It is possible that the Empire supported king Taton during the war that he waged against Herules c.a. 508. However this theory is not directly proven by the sources. How the settlement of the Lombards in the northern Pannonia (in '20s of 6th century) influenced relationship with Byzantium is hard to determine as well. The alliance (maybe in form of *foedus*) was concluded certainly not later than in some moment before 539, probably in 535/536. Its cause was the beginning of the war against the Ostrogoths waged by the empire, what required to preserve the situation in the Balkans and the good relations with the Lombards and the Gepids were the measure to achieve it. Besides the Ostrogoth issue another factors which shaped the policy of the Empire towards the Lombards in this period were Byzantine striving to regain stronghold Sirmium, being under Gepidic control, and to create the

counterpoise to the Gepids. In '40s the Lombards took over the territory between the rivers Sava and Drava (*Noricum Mediterraneum, Savia*), possibly with imperial consent. In this period Lombard elites temporarily accepted Catholicism although the large part of the people remained pagans and arians. During Lombard-Gepidic conflict in 548/549-552 the empire supported the Lombards however this decision initially did not bring it expected positive results. The two tribes concluded truce without imperial intermediation what diminished Byzantine prestige. After the resuming of the war the Empire stood by the Lombards once again, but the imperial reinforcements were more limited than the ally expected and then Byzantium participated in agreement concluded after the Gepids had been defeated. The Lombard reinforcements took part in battle of Busta Gallorum in 552 on byzantine side during the war against Ostrogoths as well.

Without doubts during the reign of Justinian the Great the Empire capably conducted traditional policy *divide et impera* trying to maintain equilibrium between peoples living in the Danube region like the Lombards and the Gepids. Byzantium bound them with agreements, taking care so that any of them did not become too dangerous and preserving its dominant position. In '50s this quite good relations between the Empire and the Lombards began to worsen. Lombard elites rejected Catholicism and rulers began to support Arianism. Emperor Justin II (565-578) abandoned his predecessor's policy and initially supported the Gepids during the Lombard-Gepidic conflict of 565-568. The Byzantine ruler counted on regaining Sirmium in exchange for his support. However when the Gepids decided not to return the town, Justin left their side, allowing to create Lombard-Avar alliance and letting it to destroy the Gepidic state. Although the Empire regained Sirmium regional equilibrium ceased to exist marking the beginning of Avar domination in the Danube area.

In 568/569 Lombards under king Alboin invaded Italy. Amongst the factors which prompted them to do it we can mention reluctance of being the neighbours of Avars, potential ease of conquest of Italy and awareness of its wealth. Although the issue of alleged invitation sent to the Lombards by Byzantine commander Narses was often denied narration about it is present in many trustworthy sources and should not be dismissed. The hypothesis that source material reflects real activity of Narses in distorted way and the commander tended to bring invasion under byzantine control but failed, seems to be quite justified. The theory by Konstantinos Christou, according to which after the conquest of Italy Lombard kings showed tendency to reconciliation with Byzantium and recognition of their formal dependence from the Empire in the frame of *amicitia* in return for recognition of their right to rule Italy by Byzantium, seems to be rather not convincing. It contradicts the fact that the Lombards had

noticeable military superiority over the Empire in Italy and in this situation they rather were not willing to any concessions.

Initially Byzantium was not able to oppose to the invasion and the Lombards conquered northern part of the Apennine Peninsula and some other territories. Only central and some coastal parts of Italy remained under imperial control. Byzantine administration is engaged in some limited attempts of intervention in Lombard affairs for instance providing asylum in Ravenna for plotters who murdered king Alboin. More deliberate framework of policy towards Italy appeared only during the reign of emperor Tiberius. Byzantines took advantage of the Lombard interregnum (574-584) and tried to win over and suppress Lombard warlords with paying them tributes and hiring them in imperial service. Efficiency of this policy is difficult to estimate. Some Lombard commanders were enrolled by roman army but the problem of disastrous uncontrolled incursions still existed at least in '90s of 6th century. Although members of roman elites counted on military intervention of Constantinople, emperors were not willing to do it, focusing on fight against Sasanids, Avars and Slavs. The only expedition sent to Italy by central government in the capital of the Empire was the one commanded by Baduarius in '70s of 6th century.

Byzantium changed its policy in '80s of 6th century when it began to look for Frankish help delivering funds for organisation of antilombard expeditions (four in total). However Frankish incursions did not cause the regaining of lost territories and their only result was consolidation of the Lombard monarchy with elevation of king Authari to the throne in 584. At the same time Byzantine administration of Italy was reorganized. The post of exarch of Ravenna was created and the structure of the Exarchate and depending duchies gradually gained its shape. Important issue connected with this period is the question of genesis of the Lombard southern duchies of Spoleto and Benevento. Although we cannot exclude that Byzantines had some connections with the first dukes Zotto and Faroald this assumption does not find sufficient support in the sources. Due to this fact the theory proposed by Gian Piero Bognetti, according to which the duchies were created in the result of the rebellion of the commanders earlier allied to the Empire, is quite doubtful. Similar doubts concern the claim that the Byzantines installed in Spoleto and Benevento the second generation of dukes (Ariulf and Arechis).

The most successful Byzantine project was the expedition of exarch Romanus which led to temporal regaining of influence on the Duchy of Friuli and subduing some other Lombard dukes. However Lombard pressure did not decreased in 90' of 6th century and the Byzantine administration struggled with Spoleto and Benevento and new Lombard king Agilulf. Amongst the most important clashes of this period we can mention the campaign of Ariulf against Rome

(591=592), the campaign of Romanus which led to regaining of Perugia and the siege of Rome by Agilulf (593). Although pope Gregory the Great tried to come to reconcile with the Lombards and wanted to prompt the emperor and the exarch to conclude peace treaty, Constantinople and Ravenna were not willing to do it. Emperor Maurice probably believed that reconquest of Italy might be possible in close future and did not want to conclude serious treaties in Italy, however simultaneously he focused on fight against Avars. Finally the Byzantine administration probably realized that lack of military action against the Lombards and simultaneous unwillingness of concluding treaties with them had brought to much losses to the Empire. In 598, with crucial participation of the pope, first of the series of truces was concluded. Despite it in 601-603 Byzantium waged subsequent war against the Lombards but was defeated. During the reign of emperor Fokas, who got the throne in the result of usurpation and had to fight against internal opposition and Sasanid aggression, the Empire concluded subsequent truces with Lombards and the next emperor Heraclius continued this policy. Concluding of the treaty of 609 was supported with official exchange of embassies and due to this fact we can attribute to it significant meaning for recognition (at least *de facto*) of political independence of Lombard monarchy by the Empire. During his reign king Agilulf developed the monarch ideology drawing from Roman patterns and trying to give better legitimization to his kingdom in this way. Although in the beginning of Agilulf's reign Lombards were focused on chaotic acts of aggression towards the Exarchate in the course of time stabilizing tendencies began to dominate leading to creation of quite peaceful *status quo* in Italy. In this period the Lombards were able to skilfully use the quarrels triggered by the Schism of the Three Chapters. Probably thanks to the Lombard help patriarchate centre was recreated in Aquileia as a rival to Byzantine centre in Grado.

In the period from the Agilulf's death (616) to ascending the throne by Liutprand (712) intensity of Lombard-Byzantine relations significantly decreased. This conclusion may be partially the result of scarcity of the source basis. On the other hand it actually seems that both political entities were focused on other problems what led to de-escalation of the conflict. In this time Lombard kings were mainly concerned about consolidation of their rule and the monarchy struggled with usurpations and civil wars. On the other hand Byzantium waged disastrous war against Sasanids (602-628) and then struggled with Muslim expansion. Due to this fact the Empire had not enough resources to be military involved in Italy. However despite it Byzantium launched a few projects. In the beginning of the reign of young king Adaloald exarch Eleutherius provoked the war against the Lombards but was defeated. It is possible that he organised this operation without emperor's consent and later even obtained Lombard support

organizing unsuccessful rebellion against Constantinople. During the reign of Arioald (626–636) mutual relations were so good that Pavia and Ravenna probably cooperated against the Lombard duke Tason, conflicted with the king. In exchange for it Byzantium gained the reduction of the tribute which it paid to the Lombard Kingdom.

Lombard aggression towards the Exarchate was resumed in '40s of 7th century, during the reign of king Rothari. The aided factors were growing Arabian pressure on Byzantine territories in the East and unrest concerning succession after Heraclius' death. Hypothetical sequence of events during Rotahri's campaign against the exarchate is quite difficult to reconstruct. Probably the king considered the exarch Issac's death as favourable circumstance to attack. One of king's projects was aggression against central territory of the Exarchate and Ravenna. In the result of battle of Panaro byzantine army suffered heavy losses and Lombards broaden their territory but if their aim was to conquer Ravenna this attempt failed. However Rothari conquered Byzantine Liguria. In 663 the only Byzantine campaign in Italy led by the emperor in the period which is subject of this dissertation was launched. The main goal of the expedition of Constans II to southern Italy and Sicily was to solidify Byzantine control over central part of the Mediterranean Sea and to enable in this way more efficient defence from Muslim expansion which was implemented by sea as well. The expedition against Benevento and the siege of the town was one of the crucial aspects of this project. Byzantine forces failed to take the town. Although it is possible that the emperor was focused mainly on intimidating the Lombards and discouraging them from attacking Byzantine possessions it is more logical to claim that if he wanted to enduringly strengthen imperial influence in maritime area he had to aim in conquest of the Duchy. From this perspective the result of the expedition may be considered as disappointing.

Although in later period the Duchy of Benevento conquered Byzantine Taranto along with surroundings and showed some other acts of aggression general relations between the Kingdom and the Empire was rather correct. The importance of Byzantine-Lombard treaty allegedly concluded c. a. 680 should not be overestimated. Although it cannot be excluded that the treaty existed, source premises on which this thesis is based are quite insufficient. They are limited only to the presence of Lombard bishops during Constantinopolitan council and to vague narration of Theophanes the Confessor according to which after concluding of peace with Arabs embassies of many western peoples came to the capital of the Empire. If treaty with Lombards had been actually concluded the Empire would have had to be the begging side because it had not the resources to engage in Italy and the new danger in the shape of Bulgarians appeared. Treaties were concluded on the level of imperial and royal reign already in the beginning of the

7th century and very they should be considered as more important from formal point of view for recognition of Lombard settlement in Italy by Constantinople than alleged treaty of 680. At the turn of 7th and 8th century Constantinople was affected by the series of usurpations and imperial rule was very unstable. At the same time Byzantine Italy was the area of conflict between civil administration and the papacy. Lombard monarchy was unstable as well and the best instance of it was civil war which broke out after king Cunicpert's death. Due to this fact it is understandable that both sides were not interested in waging war against each other. Besides it cultural and religious differences between the Roman and the Lombard populaces still decreased. In 7th century Arianism disappeared and the Schism of the Three Chapters was ended during the synod in Pavia in 698.

Lombard expansion towards Byzantine territory in Italy was resumed during the reign of king Liutprand. This ruler, how suggested Paolo Delogu, was not going to conquer all peninsula directly but rather wanted to impose his hegemony in looser form. However this framework should be rather limited only to territories under papal control and to the southern Lombard Duchies. The area of the Exarchate in narrow sense should be excluded from this paradigm because the king evidently strived to conquer Ravenna and incorporate territories under direct control of the exarch into the Lombard Kingdom.

Already at the beginning of Liutprand's reign Lombard activity towards the exarchate intensified. However it was launched by Spoleto and Benevento and the king focusing on consolidation of his position still behaved in moderate way. He besieged Ravenna for the first time probably in '20s of 8th century. The real stimulus for king's activity towards Byzantine Italy was severe conflict which broke out between already political independent papacy and the Byzantine administration of Ravenna alongside with emperor Leo III. Financial issues were the cause of the quarrel initially but another reason in the shape of iconoclastic heresy imposed by Constantinople appeared very fast. During these events Liutprand and the Duchy of Spoleto sided with the papacy and the king took advantage of the situation and gained new territorial acquisitions. Despite it Liutprand finally decided to apply sophisticated strategical manoeuvre concluding the alliance with exarch Eutychius and with his help imposed his control on the southern Duchies. However he did not deliver on his promise of helping the exarch to subdue Rome. The king began to negotiate with the pope and was successful in concluding three-sided treaty which made the reconciliation between Rome and Ravenna possible. The price of for it was Liutprand's hegemony in the peninsula because the king was the architect of this system.

After the failure of attempt to impose iconoclasm in Italy policy of Leo III towards the peninsula became very passive and the emperor paid real attention only to reorganization of its

southern part. During his reign Arabian danger was treated as much more significant problem. His successor Constantine V after ascending the throne was focused on this issue as well. Both rulers did not take activities to oppose to Lombard aggression and relied on the administration of the Exarchate. However Ravenna began to lose its position to practically politically independent papacy which became responsible for main part of negotiations with Lombards.

The attack of Agathon, the Byzantine duke of Perugia, on Lombard Bologna should be estimated as attempt of upsetting of Liutprand's hegemony by Eutychius. The consequence of this act was Lombard expedition against the exarchate and temporal (it was regained by Byzantines probably before 735) conquest of Ravenna. Regaining of the capital was the result of effective papal help because pope Gregory III prompt the military intervention of duke of Venice. Papal-Lombard relations in a few subsequent years were not good too and the example of it was papal engagement on side of Transamund, the Duke of Spoleto, during his conflict with Pavia.

Papacy and Liutprand reached agreement in 742, during the pontificate of pope Zacharias, concluding treaty in Terni. Politically weak exarch became regular papal client. Liutprand, probably having reasonable grounds to think that the treaty giving him permission to annex Ravenna, invaded the Exarchate. In this situation Eutychius asked the pope for help. In the result the king and the pope concluded agreement in Pavia under which Liutprand ceded majority of the lands taken in the last campaign. It is possible that the price for king's agreeable attitude was papal intercession with usurper Artabasdos who was fighting for imperial throne against Constantine V. Maybe Liutprand thought that the usurper, seeking papal support, would give his consent for recognition of Liutprand's former territorial acquisitions. Some Lombard embassy was sent to imperial capital in this time but its instructions are unknown and theory concerning negotiations with Artabasdos is highly speculative.

After Liutprand's and his relative Hildeprand's death Lombard pressure on Byzantine territories temporarily decreased and king Ratchis (744–749) concluded 20-years peace with the papacy which probably referred to territory of the Exarchate as well. At the end of his reign Ratchis, pressured by the Lombard elites decided to launch the expedition against the Exarchate but thanks to papal intercession decided to step aside. His lack of decisiveness was probably the cause of his removal by unsatisfied members of the elites. The next king – Aistulf conducted aggressive policy already from the beginning and in 751 he conquered the Exarchate in narrow sense and eliminated the core of the Byzantine administration in the peninsula.

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