

(re)Claiming the West

Carabia, Alessandro

DOI:

[10.21001/itma.2024.18.05](https://doi.org/10.21001/itma.2024.18.05)

License:

Creative Commons: Attribution (CC BY)

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Carabia, A 2024, '(re)Claiming the West: Justinian's Expedition in Italy', *Imago Temporis: Medium Aevum*, no. 18, pp. 107-139. <https://doi.org/10.21001/itma.2024.18.05>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

(RE)CLAIMING THE WEST: JUSTINIAN'S EXPEDITION IN ITALY

ALESSANDRO CARABIA
UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM
UNITED KINGDOM

Date of receipt: 15th of September, 2021

Date of acceptance: 9th of May, 2022

ABSTRACT

The year 533 marked the beginning of a series of military expeditions undertaken by Constantinople aimed at reconquering the “lost west”. After North Africa, Italy, with its powerful symbolism, became the main target of Justinian’s generals. According to Procopius’s history, the wars started as a series of almost unplanned events, while modern scholars tend to emphasize its military nature. This paper analyses the complexity of the reasons which led to the war and how they were used to support it from different ideological and practical points. We will see how these points reflected a crucial aspect of Justinian policy and how this was portrayed by the propaganda and perceived by contemporaries. In the end, the paper will discuss if we can consider Justinian’s operations in the West as a restauratio of the Empire or a war of expansion that created new provinces without changing the eastern-focused trends of Constantinopolitan policies.

KEYWORDS

Ostrogoths, Byzantines, Late Antiquity, Italy, Justinian. Byzantine-Gothic War.

CAPITALIA VERBA

Ostrogothi, Byzantini, Antiquitas posterior, Italia, Iustinianus, Bellum Bizantinorum et Gothorum.

Around the 21st of June 533 a Byzantine fleet transporting an army of 12-18,000 soldiers set sail, after an official ceremony, from Constantinople to reach and conquer the Vandal Kingdom of North Africa.¹ This was the first of a series of military enterprises entrusted by Emperor Justinian to his generals to reconquer the lost west, with these offensives spanning from Africa to Western Europe and ending in 555 with the invasion of a portion of southern Spain (see Map 1).²

While Belisarius's soldiers quickly won the campaign in North Africa, despite the region being subverted by unrest and local tribes' raids until at least 548, the Italian venture, initiated in 535 with an apparently modest contingent of 7,000 soldiers, entangled the imperial troops in an exhausting war for the next 20 years. North Africa was of great importance to Byzantium's rich economy, constituting one of the Mediterranean's main breadbaskets. Italy, meanwhile, was of crucial symbolic value as the seat of Rome and motherland of the Empire, where a still wealthy and active Roman aristocracy lived and maintained ancient institutions like the Senate.³

These events occurred on the broader context of Late Antiquity, the historical period identified by modern scholars as a transitional phase from the Classical world to the Middle Ages.⁴ The chronological and geographical boundaries of Late Antiquity have changed over time but it is now commonly accepted that they comprehend the years between Constantine's reign (324-337) to the conquests of the Rashidun Caliphate (661), encompassing the Mediterranean area and the Middle East.⁵ From a conceptual point of view Late Antiquity has been reinterpreted from a period of decline and decadence, to one of metamorphosis, transformation, change or transition; all words that have come to represent this phase.⁶ This has refocused

1. Procopius, *Historiae*, III.xxii.1: Procopius. *Buildings, History of the Wars, and Secret History*, trans. Henry Bronson Dewing, Glanville Downey. Cambridge (Mass): Harvard University Press, 1914-1940: II, 111 (III.xi.1).

2. For a contextualisation of the events: Christie, Neil. *From Constantine to Charlemagne: an Archaeology of Italy*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006: 32-50; Ravegnani, Giorgio. *I Bizantini in Italia*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 2004: 11-68; Morrisson, Cécile. *Le monde byzantine, I. L'Empire romain d'Orient (330-641)*. Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2004: 24-33; Moorhead, John. *Justinian*. London: Longman, 1994: 63-88; Cameron, Averil. *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity AD 395-600*. London: Routledge, 1993: 104-127; as a general overview of the historical period: Wickham, Chris. *The Inheritance of Rome: a history of Europe from 400 to 1000*. London: Penguin, 2009; Maas, Michael, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

3. On the Roman senate under the Ostrogoths: Adolfo La Rocca, Fabrizio Oppedisano. *Il senato romano nell'Italia ostrogota*. Rome: "L'Erma" di Breteshneider, 2016.

4. While the debate around the end of antiquity can be traced down to the scholars of Italian Renaissance the term Late Antiquity was popularised by Peter Brown influential work in the early 1970s: Brown, Peter. *The World of Late Antiquity*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1971.

5. This can still be a contested matter on both chronologies and approaches: Cameron, Averil. "The 'long' late antiquity: a late twentieth-century model", *Classics in Progress: Essays on Ancient Greece and Rome*, Timothy Peter Wiesman, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002: 165-191; Inglebert, Hervé. "Concluding Remarks: the Birth of a New Short Late Antiquity", *Late Antiquity in Contemporary Debate*, Rita Lizzi Testa, ed. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2017: 215-227.

6. For a history of the concept of Late Antiquity: Liebeschutz, Wolf. "The Birth of Late Antiquity". *Antiquité Tardive*, 12 (2004): 253-261; Rebenich, Stefan. "Late Antiquity in Modern Eyes", *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, Philippe Rousseau, ed. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009: 77-92.



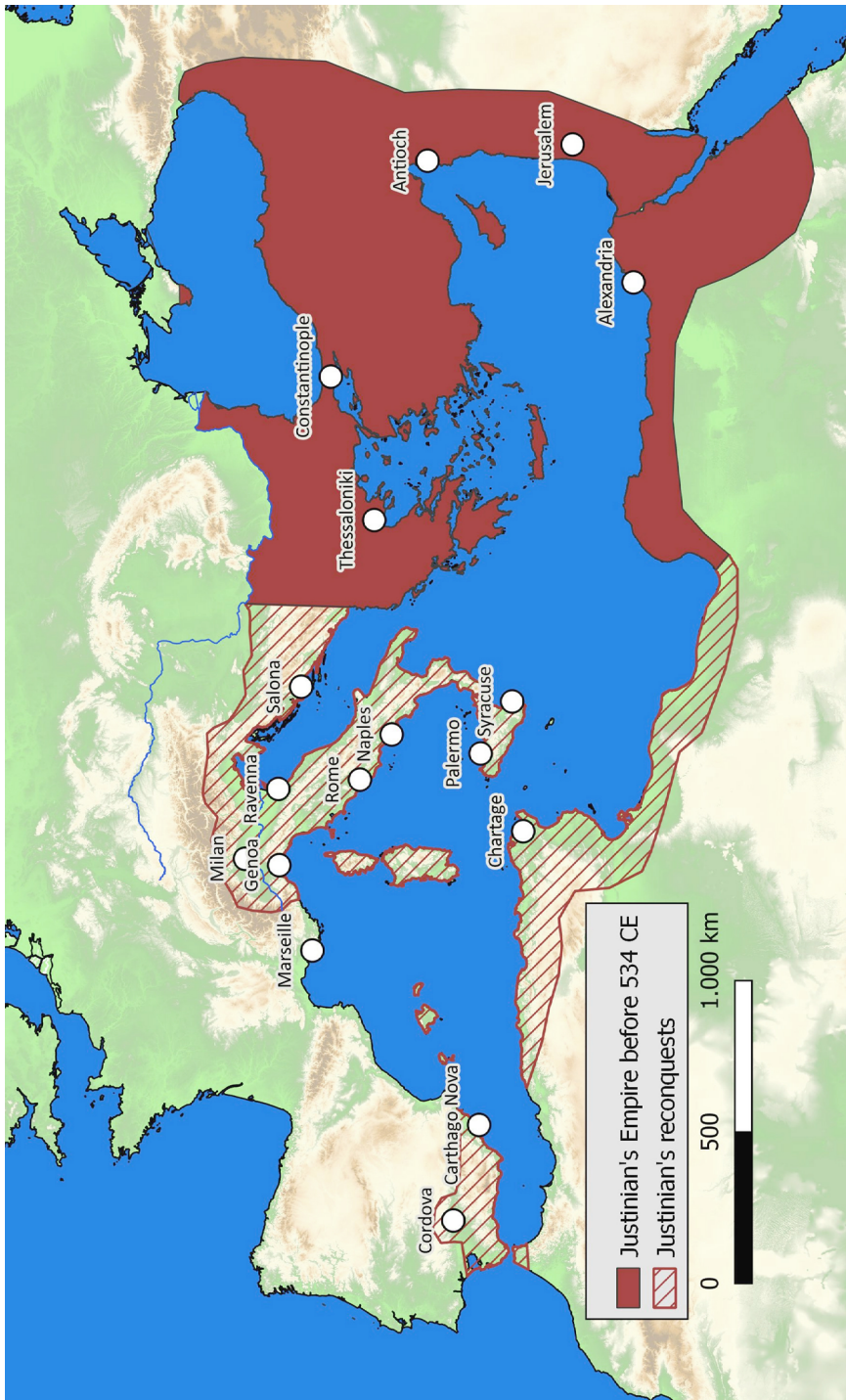


FIGURE 1. JUSTINIAN'S EMPIRE AT THE END OF THE RECONQUEST. MAP PROVIDED BY THE AUTHOR.



scholars' interest from political and economic history towards cultural, social, and religious history, all subjects for which Late Antiquity represented a phase of "revolution" which gained the right to be considered as "a distinct and self-contained period of history worth studying for its own sake".⁷ Despite a general agreement from the English speaking academic world on this new historical framework, others have suggested a more balanced approach, working against the demise of the more traditional political and economic history.⁸ In this reinterpretation, the figure of Justinian has escaped from the Gibbonian narrative of decline picturing him as "the last Roman emperor"⁹ or the first "Greek" (in a derogatory way) ruler. Justinian has been refocused as the great emperor who recovered the west, built Hagia Sofia, reorganised the Roman law, and tried to put an end to the religious conflicts withing the Christian fate.¹⁰ This picture emerged after a necessary downsizing of the *Anecdota* of Procopius of Caesarea,¹¹ in favour of a more balanced and comprehensive reading of his contemporary sources, mixed with the stunning results of archaeological research which has changed our understanding of the Mediterranean economy and society of the time.¹² In this new picture, Justinian's Eastern Roman Empire was still a rich and populous entity which preserved the basics characteristics of the imperial structure and allowed an ambitious emperor to use its vast resources to restructure the state and to attempt a policy of expansion.

In this context, the concept of the *restauratio* or *renovatio* of the Empire has been applied by modern scholars to Justinian's reconquest, playing a central role in the imperial narrative of the events and in proposing a new picture of Justinian.¹³ Justinian mostly sustained its claims on the west, accusing the rulers of the post-Roman kingdoms of being illegitimate kings and usurpers. However, the reasons behind the reconquest of the lost west were far more complex than ownership, legitimisation, and military reconquest. In this sense, the plea of Roger Scott for a more balanced assessment of Justinian's reign towards a more complex analysis

7. Liebeschuetz, Wolf. "The Birth of...": 254.

8. Giardina, Andrea. "Esplosione di tardoantico". *Studi Storici*, 40/1 (1999): 157-180.

9. As he was defined by Baker in 1931: Baker, George Philip. *Justinian: the last Roman emperor*. New York: Cooper Square Press, 2002.

10. On the Gibbonian interpretation of Justinian see for example: Cameron, Averil. "Gibbon and Justinian", *Edward Gibbon and Empire*, Rosamond McKitterick, Roland Quinault, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997: 34-52; for some general works on the new Justinian: Moorhead, John. *Justinian...;* Meir, Mischa. *Justinian. Herrschaft, Reich und Religion*. München: Bech, 2004; Maas, Michael. *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005; Ravegnani, Giorgio. *L'età di Giustiniano*. Rome: Carocci, 2019.

11. Which started with the revolutionary work of Averil Cemeron: Cameron, Averil. *Procopius and the sixth century*. London: Duckworth, 1985: 49-66.

12. See bibliography in Note 60.

13. Not to be confused with the form *renovatio Romanorum imperii* or *renovatio imperii Romanorum* firstly used by Charlemagne and later in the context of the Holy Roman Empire. On the vast bibliography on this subject see for example: West-Harling, Veronica. "The Roman past in the consciousness of the Roman elites in the ninth and tenth centuries", *Transformations of the Romanness: Early Medieval Regions and Identities*, Walter Polh, Clemens Gantner, Cinzia Grifoni, Marianne Pollheimer-Mohaupt, eds. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018: 173-194.



of his rule, while reducing our dependence on Procopius as the sole source of interpretation, is entirely valid.¹⁴ However, I do not see the reason of altogether rejecting the importance of the western military enterprises in Justinian's policy, bearing also in mind the consequences they had for the future of the Empire and the regions involved. In this article, I want to reflect on the complexity of Justinian's politics in dealing with the reconquest, showing how the military part was important as part of a larger picture which displayed Justinian's different souls: ruler, conqueror, legislator, and theologian. Factors such as political opportunism, the protection and the spreading of the orthodox faith in the form of Chalcedonian creed, the liberation of fellow Romans from "barbarian" usurpers, and economic reasons all played a crucial role in the process of *restauratio*. Despite the vast bibliography on Justinian and the reconquest process, this combination of elements has rarely been taken into consideration in all its complexity.¹⁵ This article aims to offer a reflection on this issue. I will analyse the different reasons that eventually prompted Justinian to embark on a series of risky campaigns in the west that ultimately exposed the Empire to several attacks on other fronts, and how these campaigns were portrayed in imperial and Gothic propaganda. Finally, I will discuss the reactions that the war induced in the local population and the consequences for the regions involved. The brevity of the North African conflict did not allow the formation of parties or groups of people in support of or against the imperial cause. In contrast, the protracted war in Italy, with many cities and regions conquered and lost multiple times on both sides, gave rise to many different reactions by groups and individuals that are difficult to categorise. The prolonged Italian conflict was also crucial in shaping the future picture of the peninsula, with many authors focused on the destructions that the war caused to the region, which, combined Longobard arrival (568/9), changed it forever. This will be the focus of the last section of the article, considering mainly the perspective of the Italics, who had to come to terms with the effect of the reconquest.

1. The base of Justinian's power and the complexity of the *casus belli*

Justinian and, before him, his uncle Justin inaugurated their reigns saddled by problems of legitimacy. Many felt that Anastasius's nephews, or even Vitalian's descendants, would have been better candidates to the throne.¹⁶ When Justinian ascended to the imperial seat after Justin's death in 527, he quickly commenced

14. Scott, Roger. "Writing the Reign of Justinian: Malalas versus Theophanes", *The Sixth Century: End or Beginning?*, Pauline Allen, Elizabeth Jeffreys, eds. Leiden: Brill, 2012: 21-34.

15. Scholars have usually underlined the desire of reconquest and restoration, and on the religious reasons: Cameron, Averil. *The Mediterranean World...*: 108.

16. Justin I had to face two threats to his rule, Amantius and Vitalian: Greatreux, Geoffrey. "The Early Years of Justin I's Reign in the Sources". *Electrum*, 12 (2007): 99-113.



a series of internal reforms aimed at shoring up his position and reorganising the state.¹⁷ His actions encompassed a series of different elements, from sweeping legal reform, to the repression of opposition (political and religious), to an ambitious programme for the restoration and construction of fortifications, churches, and infrastructure across the Empire.¹⁸ All this formed part of an effort to centralise power in the emperor's hands while, at the same time, projecting an image of a traditional Late Antiquity ruler deeply involved in his duties as a builder, a lavish benefactor of the people, but also a military conqueror.¹⁹

His efforts at reasserting imperial authority upon his subjects using the law, directly emanating from the emperor's mouth,²⁰ and religion, can be projected into the plane of international relationships between the Empire and its neighbours.²¹ Justinian portrayed himself as a defender of Roman law, orthodoxy, and tradition, despite often revolutionising it, across the Mediterranean, reaffirming the central role of Constantinople. This placed him on a potential collision course with the western post-Roman kingdoms, especially the Vandal Kingdom of Africa and the Ostrogothic Kingdom of Italy, ruled by two Arian (and, as such, heretical) dynasties. Whether this was a long-planned manoeuvre, or the actions of the emperor were dictated by clever opportunism is still a matter of debate.²² From the ancient sources, mainly Procopius, the origins of both wars can be attributed to a series of diplomatic crises, but there was much more at stake. Scholars have listed a number of different reasons for Justinian's actions, these including religious conflicts, political opportunism, the need for a military victory as a distraction from a period of deep uncertainty (the Nika riot), but also economic reasons, usually the most

17. On the construction of legitimacy by Justinian: Bell, Peter. *Social Conflict in the Age of Justinian: its Nature, Management, and Mediation*. Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2013: 267-317.

18. For the Latin version of the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*: Mommsen, Theodor; Krueger, Paul. *Corpus Iuris Civilis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 3 vols.; for the *Novellae*: Miller, David J.D.; Sarris, Peter. *The Novels of Justinian: a Complete Annotated English Translation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 2 vols.; On Justinian's construction activities: Cameron, Averil. *Procopius and the sixth century*. London: Duckworth, 1985: 84-114; Roques, Denis. "Les Constructions de Justinien de Procope de Césarée". *Antiquité Tardive*, 8 (2000): 31-43; for a comparative approach: Jeffreys, Elizabeth. Malalas, "Procopius and Justinian's Buildings". *Antiquité Tardive*, 8 (2000): 73-79. For an overview of Justinian reforms: Sarris, Peter. *Economy and Society in the Age of Justinian*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006: 204-17.

19. Pazdernik, Charles. "Justinianic Ideology and the Power of the Past", *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, Michael Maas, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005: 185-212.

20. Justinian was not letting the *Quaestor* read the new laws out loud, as was customary. Rather, he had to deliver the words himself (Proc., *Anecdota*, 14.3); Procopius. *Buildings, History...*: 166-167. For this and other cases, also: Sarris, Peter. *Economy and Society in the Age of Justinian*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006: 208-09.

21. On diplomatic relations with western kingdoms: Sarantis, Alexandre. "Diplomatic relations between the eastern Roman empire and the "barbarian" successor states, 527-565". *History Compass*, 16 (2018): 1-14.

22. Cameron, Averil. *The Mediterranean World...*: 108; Moorhead, John. *Justinian...*: 63-64.



overlooked. In this section we will explore, one by one, the different elements that directly and indirectly led to the military campaign in Italy.²³

1.1 A series of diplomatic crises as official *casus belli*

Many scholars in the past limited themselves to follow the main narrative description of the events, that of Procopius of Caesarea. If we do so, we might be inclined to think that the causes of the wars, especially in Africa, were prompted by reasons of relatively scarce importance, such as a diplomatic setback that triggered a disproportionate response by the emperor. Justinian, the explanation went, had reacted to an act of disrespect and disobedience by Gelimer, King of the Vandals, which prompted the emperor's drastic reaction. Gelimer had usurped the legitimate King Hilderic in 533 exploiting discontent over the latter's tolerance of Chalcedonianism, promoted by Justinian, and over his military defeats against the local tribes.²⁴ The emperor ordered Hilderic's reinstatement, but was, firstly, ignored, and later firmly refused, with Gelimer daring to address the emperor as his equal.²⁵ This final act of defiance against imperial authority, according to Procopius, led to Belisarius's sudden recall from the east and the prompt organisation of an expeditionary force that brought the Vandal Kingdom to an end in a matter of months.²⁶ The unexpected success of the African enterprise galvanised Justinian, who sought to repeat the feat in Italy, where another crisis between the two powers had emerged during the last years of Theoderic's reign, and escalated dramatically after his death in 526.²⁷

Here, the mostly peaceful coexistence between Goths and Italics, after almost four decades from the foundation of the Ostrogothic Kingdom, started to show some signs of wearing, even if the seeds of discord were there from the beginning.²⁸ Despite the propagandistic depictions of Theoderic's Kingdom as a realm of peace, prosperity, and renewed grandeur, looking back at the ancient glories, the settlement

23. We must consider North Africa too, without which the Italian campaign would not have been possible.

24. Hilderic visited Constantinople, where he established a good relationship with the emperor: Moorhead, John. *Justinian...: 66*; Merrills, Andrew H.; Miles, Richard. *The Vandals*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010: 228-55; Courtois, Christian. *Les Vandales et l'Afrique*. Paris: Arts et métiers graphiques, 1955: 347-59.

25. "from basileus to basileus" as in: Procopius, *History of the...: III*, 89 (III.ix.20).. See also: Pazdernik, Charles F. "'The Great Emperor': A Motif in Procopius of Caesarea's Wars". *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 51 (2017): 219-21.

26. Procopius, *History of the...: III*, 85-91 (III.ix.6-26) Procopius. *Buildings, History...: 85-91*.

27. On the crisis between the Ostrogothic Kingdom and the Empire: Heather, Peter. *The Goths*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996: 248-76; Moorhead, John. *Theoderic in Italy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992: 212-51; Burns, Thomas. *A History of the Ostrogoths*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984: 202-15.

28. I am using the term Italics for convenience to identify the autochthonous inhabitants of the Italian peninsula. On the problems of definition and identity in late antique Italy: Giardina, Andrea. "Italy and Italics during late Antiquity", *Le trasformazioni del V secolo. L'Italia, I barbari e l'Occidente romano, atti del seminario di Poggibonsi, 12-20 ottobre 2007*, Paolo Delogu, Stefano Gasparri, eds. Turnhout: Brepols, 2010: 101-120.



of about 100,000-200,000 Goths (I use the term here to comprise the whole group of people of different ethnicities who followed Theoderic in Italy) across the Peninsula was not painless.²⁹ When they arrived in Italy following Theoderic and wrested it from Odoacer, the Gothic warriors were rewarded with the *tertia*. Whether this term meant an expropriation of a third of the land, or a third of the taxes, with which the new arrivals bought new land, it brought an influx of newcomers across the Peninsula, especially in the northern and central areas.³⁰ Naturally, despite the tolerant attitude of the Gothic government towards the locals, issues between newcomers and the Italics appear to have been frequent.³¹ We not seek to deny here that an integration process was clearly taking place, as documented by other episodes in Cassiodorus' letters, and by archaeological finds. Rather, we simply wish to underline that this integration also generated tensions, which were, generally, kept under control while the authoritative figure of Theoderic was still alive.³²

The terms issued by Zeno according to which the Goths were allowed to settle in Italy are still debated, and a series of minor crises, military and diplomatic, occurred over the first two decades of Ostrogothic rule. These were primarily due to the policy of expansion adopted by Theoderic, not just in the west, but also in a section of the Byzantine Balkans. However, a number of diplomatic interventions and the imperial court's support of Theoderic's first heir, Eutharic, seemed to have solved the issue between the end of Anastasius's rule (518) and the beginning of that of Justin I.³³ However, the sudden death of Eutharic (533) generated a series of internal and external problems. The patricians Symmachus and Boethius, probably involved in supporting other candidates to the succession, were accused of treason, and executed by Theoderic. This event was immortalised by Procopius and described as the only misdeed under Theoderic's reign and the first case of (supposedly indiscriminate)

29. For a general overview of Gothic history and their arrival in Italy: Heather, Peter. *The Goths...* especially 216-258; Azzara, Claudio. *L'Italia dei barbari*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002: especially 43-91.

30. With different views on the interpretation of the *tertia*: Heather, Peter. *The Goths...*; Amory, Patrick. *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489-554*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; as a response to Amory also: Heather, Peter. "Merely an Ideology? Gothic Identity in Ostrogothic Italy", *The Ostrogoths. From the Migration Period to the Sixth Century. An Ethnographic Perspective*, Samuel Barnish, Federico Marazzi, eds. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007: 31-60. For a general overview: Porena, Pierfrancesco. *Insiadimento degli Ostrogoti in Italia*. Rome: "L'Erma di Breteschneider, 2012.

31. Cassiodorus downplayed the impact of such problems, even though they emerged commonly in his letters: Cassiodorus. *The Variae: The Complete Translation*. Trans. Bjornlie, Shane. Oakland: University of California Press, 2019: 189 (4.36) (damage in the Cottian Alps by the Gothic army transiting to Gaul); Cass. *The Variae...*: 213 (5.12) (Theodahad, not yet king, stealing Roman properties); Cass. *The Variae...*: 214 (5.13) (ordering Gothic soldiers not to seize supplies from the locals); Cass. *The Variae...*: 214-16 (5.14) (issues in the administration of Savia); Cass. *The Variae...*: 225-26 (5.26) (Goths assembling in Picenum and Samnium raiding local landowners during the march); Cass. *The Variae...*: 370-72 (9.14) (comes of Sicily Gildila abusing his powers), Cass. *The Variae...*: 470-72 (12.5) (Gothic army moving south, probably in preparation of Belisarius accused of plundering the locals).

32. For an archaeological perspective on the integration process: Aimone, Marco. "Romani e Ostrogoti fra integrazione e separazione. Il contributo dell'archeologia a un dibattito storiografico". *Reti Medievali*, 13/ 1 (2012): 31-96.

33. Heather, Peter. *The Goths...*: 235-258.



violence against the Roman aristocracy perpetrated by the Gothic government.³⁴ The patricians, according to Procopius, had been unjustly accused by Cyprianus, another Roman aristocrat who served in the Gothic court, and others. Another senator, Albinus, was also accused and imprisoned, but we do not know his fate. This was seen as a barbaric act of injustice and, supposedly, strongly condemned by many at the time. According to Procopius, shortly thereafter, on his deathbed, Theoderic confessed his regret for the decision.³⁵ Aside from the political motives for the executions, the deaths of Symmachus and Boethius also point to a crisis between the local aristocracy and the Gothic newcomers, and might have dissuaded other senators from collaborating closely with the court,³⁶ though several of them, such as Cassiodorus, remained in the Goths' service during the first phases of the war, and some even did so until the end (see below).

The Ostrogothic king's death in 526 opened another front of internal conflict, this time within the Ostrogothic royal court itself. The power and authority of Theoderic had, apparently, kept a lid on things, but after his departure a conflict between two factions – one that endorsed Theoderic's policy of rapprochement and integration with the Italics and their "Roman culture", and another that upheld more traditional Gothic values – emerged. The key figure in this conflict was Theoderic's daughter Amalasuintha, whom he educated as a Roman, and who had to step forward as regent of her ten-year-old son Athalaric. Regardless of how we view her – weak and manipulated by others, or strong and independent – she had to fight immediately for this position.³⁷ First she faced a conflict, which she lost, about how her child was to be educated: as a Roman, which was her preference, or as a Goth. Sensing the weakness of her position, she entered in contact with Justinian and Theodora, seeking and obtaining their protection. At one point she seemed almost ready to flee to Constantinople, but in the end, she abandoned the idea and instead remained to fight her opponents, even managing to execute three important Gothic nobles who were hostile towards her government. Athalaric's sudden death in October of 534 complicated the situation. Amalasuintha had to share the throne with her cousin, Theodahad, the only surviving adult male of the Amal Dynasty. In doing so she was looking for an ally to control the opposition and a means to obtain the title of Queen. Unfortunately for her, this choice proved fatal, as Theodahad was persuaded to exile the queen to an island, where she was

34. Proc., *History of the...* III, 12-15 (V.i.32-39).

35. Proc., *History of the...* III, 12-15 (V.i.38-39).

36. Heather, meanwhile, argued that the event had little effect on the relationships between the Gothic and Italian aristocracies: Heather, Peter. *The Goths...*: 252.

37. Heather, following Procopius's account, presents a more traditional view of a weak and vulnerable ruler, while others recently have re-evaluated her as a historical figure who had to manage a difficult crisis and was probably murdered by a consensus reached by Justinian and Theodora: Heather, Peter. *The Goths...*: 261-62; Vitiello Massimiliano. *Amalasuintha: The Transformation of Queenship in the post-Roman World*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017: 162-68; Cooper, Kate. "The heroine and the historian: Procopius of Caesarea on the troubled reign of Queen Amalasuientha", *A Companion to Ostrogothic Italy*, Jonathan Arnold, Shane Bjornlie, Kristina Sessa, eds. Leiden: Brill, 2016: 296-315.



assassinated.³⁸ The death of Justinian's protégé provided the perfect *casus belli* for the imperial forces to intervene in Italy. Theodahad too, however, tried to obtain a rich exile in Constantinople, while handing power to Justinian. While the negotiation was still ongoing Belisarius had already landed in Sicily in the south while other troops were invading Dalmatia from the north. Theodahad's indecisive handling of the first phases of the war led to his assassination by other Gothic leaders who replaced him with the more bellicose Witiges.³⁹

In North Africa and Italy, Justinian is portrayed as having seized the moment through acts of political opportunism, striking two potential enemies by taking advantage of their weakness. Justinian himself, however, had been through a series of turbulent years marked by the repression of religious dissent and the tragic event of the Nika riot, which occurred only a few months before the African expedition.⁴⁰ If this was political opportunism, it certainly came at the right moment for him. The military intervention can be seen as a counterbalance to the instability of the internal situation generated by Justinian's policies. Military conquest was, after all, a traditional way to display authority and legitimise imperial power. The expedition in North Africa, according to Procopius, was highly criticised by most of Justinian's advisors, even if only John the Cappadocian had the courage to publicly express his misgivings.⁴¹ The costs and risks were great, and the last such attempts – by Majoran in 461 and of Leo I in 468 – ended in military and financial disaster still remembered by contemporaries. However, even if we consider the first campaign against the Vandals a calculated gamble, clearly there was a renewed imperial interest in the west, a region neglected by previous rulers.⁴² Embracing the ideal of an ecumenical and universal Empire, Justinian resumed his uncle's policy of involvement in the affairs of the western kingdoms, adding military interventions to it. He observed the consequences of the turbulent successions in both Africa, Italy, and later Spain, looking to exploit the moment. Even if Procopius presents the beginning of the western wars almost as a series of coincidental events, Justinian's policies and actions before the war demonstrate that he was committed to the west and to reclaiming as much of it as possible. With this stance Justinian's rule was in contrast to the attitude of his predecessors, such as Anastasius, who allowed the barbarians to take over the Empire:

...per quae dedit nobis deus et apud Persas agere pacem Uuandalosque et Alanos et Maurusios religare et Africam universam, insuper et Siciliam possidere, et spes haber bonas

38. Proc., *History of the...* III, 40-41 (V.iv.28).

39. On Theodahad: Vitiello, Massimiliano. *Theodahad: A Platonic King at the Collapse of Ostrogothic Italy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014: especially 94-173; Vitiello, Massimiliano. *Momenti di Roma ostrogota: aduentus, feste, politica*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005: 127-30.

40. On the Nika riot and its context: Greatrex, Geoffrey. "The Nika Riot: a Reappraisal". *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 117 (1997): 60-86; also: Cameron, Alan. *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976: esp. 271-296.

41. Proc., *History of the...* II, 92-97 (III.x.7-17).

42. Sarantis, Alexandre. "Diplomatic relations between"....: 6.



*quia etiam reliquorum nobis detentionem annuet deus, quam prisci Romani usque ad utriusque oceani fines tenentes sequentibus negligentis amiserun.*⁴³

1.2 Justinian the protector of Chalcedon

Other signs of Justinian's ambitions in reaffirming imperial authority across the Mediterranean can be found in the religious policies that preceded and then formed part of the military expeditions in the west, that were not inconsequential in the series of events eventually leading to the expeditions of reconquest. Justinian started with his own internal issues in order to present himself as an Orthodox emperor and to use religion to unify his subjects. As a fervid supporter of Chalcedonianism, he promulgated laws against heretics of various forms, such as Arians, and Manicheans, but also against Samaritans, Jews, pagans, and homosexuals.⁴⁴ Emblematic events of these policies were the violent repressions in 529 of the Manicheans in the capital, and Samaritans in the Syrian-Palestinian region (with a second rebellion of Samaritans in 556 again ended in bloodshed). Pagans, astrologists, and homosexuals also served as a way to purge political adversaries, or potential ones.⁴⁵ Justinian's programme was not limited to the borders of his Empire, and had roots in the actions of his predecessor and uncle, Justin I. As early as 519, he enforced a reconciliation with the Western Church, recomposing the Acacian schism. He invited a delegation from Pope Hormisdas to Constantinople and forced the patriarch John II to accept the pope's terms. A few years later he also introduced some anti-Arian laws within the Empire, provoking a strong reaction by Theoderic, as the former act was seen as an attempt to undermine Ostrogothic power in Italy.⁴⁶ The laws were soon softened due to the significant number of Arians still serving in the imperial army.⁴⁷ Both these actions can be interpreted, first, as a step towards rebuilding the relationship with the western church, formally under the protection of an Arian king; and, secondly,

43. "...by which God has granted to us to be at peace with Persia, to defeat the Vandals, the Alani, and the Moors, to add all Africa, and Sicily as well, to our possessions, and to have good hopes that God will assent to our re-conquest of the rest of the lands that ancient Rome had conquered, from the bounds of one ocean to the other, but then lost through inertia": Miller, David J.; Sarris, Peter. *The Novels of...* 319-332 (November 30; 17 March 536).

44. On the measures against the Jews and Pagans: Mommsen, Theodor; Krueger, Paul. *Corpus Iuris Civilis...* 2, 61-64 (CJC 1.9, 1.10, 1.11); Miller, David J.; Sarris, Peter. *The Novels of...* 949-952 (Nov. 146, 8 February 553); Proc., *Secret History...* 332-35 (xxviii.16-19); For the Manicheans and Donatists: Mommsen, Theodor; Krueger, Paul. *Corpus Iuris Civilis...* 2, 50-60 (CJC 1.5).

45. Bell, Peter. *Social Conflict...* 306-307. Others argued of the need of keeping a manageable level of fear: Scott, Roger. "Malalas, The Secret History, and Justinian's Propaganda". *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 39 (1985): 103-104.

46. Cosentino, Salvatore. *Storia dell'Italia Bizantina (VI-XI): da Giustiniano ai Normanni*. Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2008: 259. Noble argued that the event had little impact on the good relationship between papacy and Theoderic: Noble, Thomas. "Theoderic and the Papacy", *Teoderico il Grande e i Goti d'Italia*. Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1993: 395-423, especially 416-23.

47. Greatrex, Geoffrey. "Justin I and the Arians", *Historica, Biblica, Theologica et Philosophica, Papers presented at the Thirteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1999*, Maurice Wiles, Edward Yarnold, eds. Leuven: Peeters, 2001: 72-81.



as a way to expand and reaffirm the imperial influence on religious matters outside of its borders.⁴⁸

These conciliatory diplomatic efforts towards the Vandals seem to evidence this reality, negotiating better conditions for those of the Orthodox faith in a country notorious for its persecutions of Chalcedonians. When progress in this regard was halted by Gelimer's usurpation of the throne, this generated even more reasons for military intervention to protect Christianity. The same can be said with regards to Italy. Theoderic carefully developed his reputation as a tolerant ruler and, indeed, respected Orthodox Christians and even the Jews within his kingdom.⁴⁹ Towards the end of his rule the religious problem became more pressing, however, and a series of issues and unrest emerged, including the execution of two senators. The anti-Arian policies of Justin I, mostly aimed at property confiscation rather than religious suppression, as has been pointed out,⁵⁰ prompted threats and retaliations on Orthodox churches in Italy.⁵¹ Theoderic sent pope John I to Constantinople to negotiate the rescinding of the anti-Arian laws, and imprisoned the pope until his death after his return, allegedly for treason, or for not having completed his mission. John, however, died in prison soon after.⁵² The event was ignored by Procopius, who did not delve into ecclesiastical history – and, consequently, by many contemporary historians too. The account is, nevertheless, recorded in both the *Liber Pontificalis*, where Theoderic is called the “heretical king”, and in Pope Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, in which John is depicted, together with Symmachus, dragging the condemned soul of the Ostrogothic king into a volcano.⁵³ Clearly, the Italian clergy was fuming at the imprisonment of their bishop and his consequent death, to the point that John was considered a martyr, while Theoderic's actions were deemed a threat to the Orthodox faith, whose autonomy had previously been respected. From Constantinople there was no immediate response, but the religious aspect was exploited as a part of imperial propaganda, underpinning its rhetoric of reconquest. Justinian could present himself as a protector of orthodoxy against perilous heresies and a restorer of order, a vision quickly taken up by the western popes, and quickly disregarded, as we will see shortly.

48. Justinian was actively implementing similar policies in the east. For a general overview of Justinian's religious policy: Capizzi, Carmelo. *Giustiniano I tra politica e religione*. Messina: Rubbettino, 1994.

49. Cassiodorus, *Variae* 2.27 (allowing the Jews of Genoa to restore their synagogue), 4.33, and 5.37 (re-affirming the rights of the Roman imperial law for the Jews of Genoa and Milan): Cassiodorus. *The Variae: The Complete Translation*, trans. Shane Bjornlie. Oakland: University of California Press, 2019: 102, 187, 233.

50. Greatrex, Geoffrey. “Justin I and...”: 78-9.

51. Excerpta Valesiana 16.94: *Excerpta Valesiana*, trans. John Rolfe. Cambridge (Mass): Harvard University Press, 1939: 3, 566-69.

52. *Liber Pontificalis. The Book of Pontiffs (Liber Pontificalis): The Ancient Biographies of First Ninety Roman Bishops to AD 715*. Trans. Davis Raymond. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989: 48-9 (55.1-6). A similar account is also present in: Excerpta Valesiana...: 562-67 (15.88-92).

53. Gregory the Great.: *Dialogues*, trans. Zimmerman, Odo John. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1959: 228 (IV.31).



1.3 Reclaiming the Mediterranean's economy

The economic significance of the Justinianic reconquest is an element often neglected or seen as secondary by many scholars focusing mostly on political events and the ideological issues. The ancient sources are often silent on this question too, except for the recovery of treasures and the collection and distribution of war spoils and complaints about the rapacity of tax collectors. After the fall of the Vandal Kingdom, Procopius's attention is mostly devoted to the recovery of the looted treasures from Rome brought to the capital by Belisarius, for example.⁵⁴ Instead, in Italy, is famous the case of the *loghotete* Alexander "Scissors", who, according to Procopius, oppressed both Italics and imperial soldiers pushing many of them towards the Gothic side.⁵⁵ Some extra insights, however, can be found in Justinian's laws. One of the first aims of the *Pragmatica Sanctio* (554), the legal text that enacted the new Justinian's *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, in Italy, was to reinstall a working fiscal system and to reinstate the *Annona* tax, suspended during the war but not under Theoderic's Kingdom, taking advantage of the merchant routes.⁵⁶ Sicily in particular, like Egypt, was under the jurisdiction of a *praetor*, reporting directly to the emperor, and more than a century after its reconquest it was still a rich and prosperous land. During the time of the archbishop of Ravenna Maurus (642-671) the Ravennese church's estates on the island produced 50,000 modii of wheat and 31,000 gold solidi every year, plus other products.⁵⁷

War was also an economic endeavour, and the first targets of Justinian's army were not insignificant in this regard. For to the Vandal Kingdom, Procopius's attention is mostly devoted to the recovery of the treasures looted from Rome and Belisarius's distribution of part of it in the capital.⁵⁸ However, North Africa, along with Egypt, was one of the breadbaskets of the Roman Empire, where most of the food for the main cities, the army, and emergencies was produced and redistributed across the Mediterranean.⁵⁹ This is clearly demonstrated by the widespread distribution of North African pottery (African red slip ware and amphorae) across the Western Mediterranean, and even in the Atlantic regions until the mid-7th century.⁶⁰ The North African "economic machine" was a catastrophic loss for the

54. Proc., *History of the...: II*, 278-83 (IV.ix.1-16).

55. Proc., *History of the...: IV*, 158-61 (VII.i.28-33).

56. Especially two articles of the *Pragmatica Sanctio*): Mommsen, Theodor; Krueger, Paul. *Corpus Iuris Civilis...: 3*, 799-802 (CJC App. VII.9 and 19); for an analysis of the text: Pilara, Gianluca. "Aspetti di politica legislativa giustiniana in Italia: proposta di riesame della *Pragmatica Sanctio pro petitione Vigilii*", *Romanobarbarica*, 19 (2006-2009): 137-56.

57. Martin, Jean-Marie. "Rural Economy: Organization, Exploitation and Resources", *A Companion to Byzantine Italy*, Cosentino Salvatore, ed. Leiden: Brill, 2020: 284.

58. Proc., *History of the...: II*, 278-83 (IV.ix.1-16).

59. On the role and economy of Egypt: Sarris, Peter. *Economy and Society...: 71-95*. On North Africa and the economic effect of the Vandal conquest: Wickham, Chris. *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800*. Oxford. Oxford University Press, 2005: 87-93.

60. On the production and distribution of North African products: Pieri, Dominique. *Le commerce du vin Oriental à l'époque Byzantine (v^e-vii^e siècles): Le témoignage des amphores en Gaule*. Beyrouth: Institut Française



Western Roman Empire, and its importance is further underlined by the three attempts made to reconquer it between 461 and Justinian's accession. It is also significant that, following the capitulation of the Vandals Kingdom, all the main Mediterranean islands (Sardinia, Corsica and the Balearic), except Sicily reverted into imperial hands, stretching again the network of ports and trade routes from the Pillars of Hercules, in the far west, to the ports of the Syrian and Lebanese coast in the east (see Map 2).⁶¹ This restored, at least on paper, the Roman economic system of production and redistribution returning most of its main production centres into imperial hands.

Viewed from this perspective, Italy was not of secondary importance. Sicily and the south were the last pieces of the puzzle, being well-known centres of large and wealthy estates still controlled by the senatorial aristocracy of Rome and the Roman Church. These were among the territories firstly conquered by Rome during the era of the Republic, and that constituted its granary until the conquest of the rich lands held by Carthage. Sicily was also central to maritime traffic, with the imperial army itself stopping at Syracuse on its way to Africa. Before the actual Italian invasion, Justinian had sought to establish a foothold on the island by taking the port of Lilybaeum (modern-day Marsala).⁶² The city was donated to the Vandal Kingdom as part of the dowry of Theoderic's sister, who married a Vandal king.⁶³ This episode, combined with the army's stop-over in Syracuse, underline the dire need to have a safe port in Sicily in order to travel towards Africa, the West, and vice-versa. Sicily was also the first region that Belisarius invaded when he inaugurated the Italian campaign, and one of the easiest to conquer due to the limited presence of Gothic garrisons.

Archaeology has more recently played a great role in emphasizing the importance and richness of the western Mediterranean islands and the role they played once back

du Proche-Orient, 2005: 143-160; Bonifay, Michel. *Etudes sur la céramique romaine tardive d'Afrique*. Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 2004: especially 477-489; Reynolds, Paul. *Trade in the Western Mediterranean, 400-700: the ceramic evidence*. Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1996: especially 106-125; Keay, Simon. *Late Roman amphorae in the Western Mediterranean: a typology and economic study*. Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1984; Hayes, John. *Late Roman Pottery*. London: British School at Rome, 1980. On the Atlantic trade: Duggan, Maria. *Links to late antiquity: ceramic exchange and contacts on Atlantic Seaboard in the 5th to 7th centuries AD*. Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 2018.

61. On the connecting role of the island in the Mediterranean: Zavagno, Luca. "Islands in the stream: toward a new history of the large islands of the Byzantine Mediterranean in the early Middle Ages ca.600-ca. 800". *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 33/2 (2018): 149-177; Volpe Giuliano, Leone Danilo; Spanu, Pier Giorgio; Turchiano, Maria. "Produzioni, merci e scambi tra isole e terraferma nel Mediterraneo occidentale tardoantico", *Isole e terraferma nel primo cristianesimo: identità locale ed interscambi culturali, religiosi e produttivi*, Rossana Martorelli, Antonio Piras, Pier Giorgio Spanu, eds. Cagliari: La Pontificia Facoltà Teologica della Sardegna University Press, 2015: 417-440.

62. The possession of the port was contested by the Goths. The issue was passed to the emperor and discussed with Amalasantha but remained unresolved until the beginning of the war: Proc., *History of the...: II*, 250-55 (IV.v.11-25); III, 28-31 (V.iii.19-28).

63. The occupation was contested by the Goths, passed to the emperor, and discussed with Amalasantha, but remained unresolved until the beginning of the war: Proc., *History of the...: II*, 250-55 (IV.v.11-25) and III, 28-31 (V.iii.19-28).



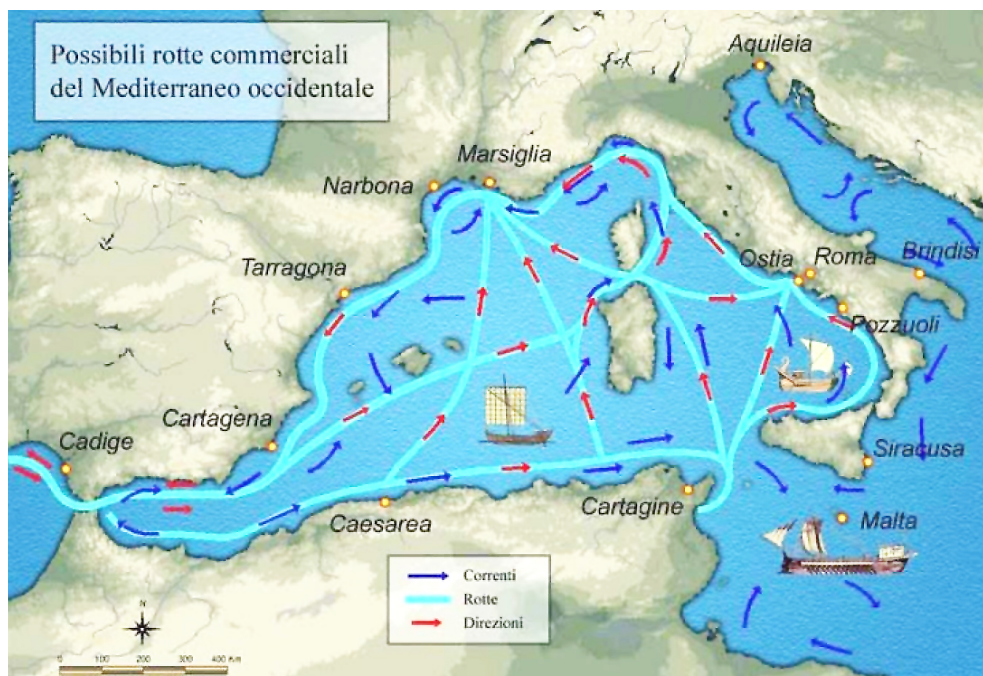


FIGURE 2. POSSIBLE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN ROUTES IN LATE ANTIQUITY (SOURCE: VOLPE GIULIANO, LEONE DANILO, SPANU PIER GIORGIO, TURCHIANO MARIA. "PRODUZIONE, MERCÌ E SCAMBI TRA ISOLE E TERRAFERMA NEL MEDITERRANEO OCCIDENTALE TARDOANTICO", *ISOLE E TERRAFERMA NEL PRIMO CRISTIANESIMO: IDENTITÀ LOCALE ED INTERSCAMBI CULTURALI, RELIGIOSI E PRODUTTIVI*. ROSSANA MARTORELLI, ANTONIO PIRAS, PIER GIORGIO SPANU, EDS. CAGLIARI: PFTS UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2015: 434, FIG. 1, 434)

in Byzantine control.⁶⁴ Sardinia especially, suffered from the bias of being a marginal isolated region,⁶⁵ while it has now been fully demonstrated how important it was in its central role of connection point and military base and how the Byzantines mostly maintained its Roman-inherited fiscal system.⁶⁶ The island was used as a

64. See for example the contributions of the two volumes: Michaelides, Demetrios; Pergola, Philippe; Zanini, Enrico. *The Insular System of the Early Byzantine Mediterranean: Archaeology and History*. Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 2013; eds. Cau Ontiveros, Miguel Ángel; Mas Florit, Catalina. *Change & Resilience: the Occupation of the Mediterranean Islands in Late Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxbow, 2019.

65. This picture has been definitively overturned: Cosentino, Salvatore. "Byzantine Sardinia between West and East: features of a Regional Culture". *Millennium-Jahrbuch*, 1 (2004): 329-368. This has been more recently reaffirmed in Hobart's work which also discuss the historical and historiographical issues: Hobart, Michelle. "Sardinia as a Crossroads in the Mediterranean", *A Companion to Sardinian History, 500-1500*, Hobart Michelle, ed. Leiden: Brill, 2017: 1-48.

66. A first comprehensive study on the impact of the Byzantine presence in the island was conducted by: Spanu, Pier Giorgio. *La Sardegna bizantina tra VI e VII secolo*. Oristano: Editrice S'Alvure, 1998. For a more update picture: Spanu, Pier Giorgio. "La Sardegna nella prima età bizantina: alcune note



refuge by North African elites after the fall of the province to the Islamic forces (698), while the Byzantine navy used it as a base of operation well into the 10th century.⁶⁷ Sicily, can offer even a better example. Here the great estates of the Roman aristocracy were still active even if they gradually started to move into the hands of the Church and, from now, the emperor.⁶⁸ Late antique Sicily displayed a rich and active countryside with villas transforming into villages, sometimes of significance dimensions, while data from urban centres are finally starting to contribute to the picture as well.⁶⁹ The recovery of North Africa restored a good level of imports,⁷⁰ combined with goods coming from the eastern parts of the Empire, found especially in eastern Sicily.⁷¹ The island became so crucial that Syracuse was briefly considered as an alternative capital during the Italian expedition of Constants II (641-668). Archaeological sources are fundamental to underline the economic impact of the reconquest, which, for a relatively brief period of time, restored to an extent the Roman Mediterranean commercial system.⁷² The effects of which were visible even outside the imperial borders, as demonstrated by the archaeological finds in Frankish Provence for example, where a Romanised aristocracy was well active and

d'aggiornamento", *Forme e caratteri della presenza bizantina nel Mediterraneo occidentale: la Sardegna (secoli VI-XI)*, Paolo Corrias, ed. Cagliari: Condaghes, 2013: 57-71 or the volume: Simonetta, Angiolillo; Martorelli, Rossana; Giuman, Marco; Corda, Antonio Maria; Artizzu, Danila. *La Sardegna Romana e altomedievale. Storia e materiali*. Florence: Carlo Delfino Editore, 2017: 263-321, 385-454; Milanese, Marco. "Contribution to Archaeology to Medieval and Modern Sardinia". *A Companion to Byzantine Italy*, Salvatore Cosentino, ed. Leiden: Brill, 2021: 271-313; Spanu, Pier Giorgio. "Byzantine Sardinia", *A Companion to Byzantine Italy*, Salvatore Cosentino, ed. Leiden: Brill, 2021: 496-521.

67. Cosentino, Salvatore. "Byzantine Sardinia between...": 350.

68. Arcifa, Lucia. "Dinamiche insediative e grande proprietà nella Sicilia bizantina: uno sguardo archeologico", *L'heritage byzantine en Italie (VIIIe-XIIe siècle). 4 Habitat et structure agraire*, Jean-Marie Martin, Annick Peters-Custot, Vivian Prigent, eds. Rome: École française de Rome, 2017: 237-267.

69. For a general picture: Molinari, Alessandra. "Sicily between the 5th and the 10th century: villae, villages, towns and beyond. Stability, expansion or recession?", *The Insular System of the Early Byzantine Mediterranean: Archaeology and History*, Demetrios Michaelides, Philippe Pergola, Enrico Zanini. Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 2013: 97-114; Molinari, Alessandra. "Sicily from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages: Resilience and Disruption", *Change & Resilience: the Occupation of the Mediterranean Islands in Late Antiquity*, Miguel Ángel Cau Ontiveros; Catalina Mas Florit, eds. Oxford: Oxbow, 2019: 87-110. For a general picture on the cities: Arcifa, Lucia. "Trasformazioni urbane nell'altomedioevo siciliano. Uno status quaestionis", *Paesaggi urbani tardoantichi: casi a confronto*, Maria Concetta Parello, Maria Serena Rizzo, eds. Bari: Edipuglia, 2016: 31-40.

70. The increased archaeological evidence has been summarised in two fundamental volumes: eds. Malfitana, Daniele; Poblome, Jeroen; Lund, John. *Old Pottery in a New Century. Innovating perspectives on Roman Pottery Studies*. Catania: Istituto per i Beni Archeologici e Monumentali, 2006; Malfitana, Daniele; Bonifay, Michel. *La Ceramica Africana nella Sicilia Romana*. Catania: Istituto per i Beni Archeologici e Monumentali, 2016.

71. For the differences in imports between western and eastern Sicily: Malfitana, Daniele; Bonifay, Michel. *La Ceramica Africana...*: 41-55; Moncada, Salvatore. "Le anfore orientali in Sicilia tra il V ed il VII secolo d.C.: alcune considerazioni sul commercio Mediterraneo". *Pyrenae*, 42/2 (2018): 61-85.

72. How much of this recovery was the result of a stasis or marked drive economy is still a matter of much debate, however: Whittow, Mark. "How much trade was local, regional and inter-regional? A comparative perspective on the late antique economy", *Local Economies? Production and Exchange of Inland Regions in Late Antiquity*, Luce Lavan, ed. Leiden: Brill, 2013: 133-165.



where goods from North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean continued to arrive well into the late 6th-early 7th century.⁷³

Justinian's need to expand his tax base and regain control of the main Mediterranean routes and production centres should not be underestimated in his overall policy of strengthening imperial authority. The role of Italy in this scenario, at least regarding its southern areas and the islands, was of considerable importance. The economic potential was, in the end, hindered by the long and unexpected Byzantine-Gothic war and by the Frankish raids that concluded it. However, its immediate organisation in a province once the war was over, shows the desire of Justinian to financially exploit its new conquest and to try to recover the losses caused by conflict. Nevertheless, the sudden Longobard invasion undermined his plan. On the *longue durée*, at the beginning of the 7th century, only some areas like Sicily were significantly contributing to the Empire economy, while others were either lost to the newcomers or incapacitated by the war. We will see how Justinian's interest was probably focused on the richer southern and central parts of the Peninsula, with Rome most likely included principally for its prestige. Nonetheless, even apparently marginal areas, such as coastal Liguria, for example, if sheltered by the conflict, were able to display some signs of continuity if not modest growth under the imperial rule until new military defeats indefinitely separated those regions from the Empire.⁷⁴

2. Justinian's propaganda: local and Byzantine perceptions

A fundamental point to understand the concept and the effects of Justinian's reconquest is to analyse the contrast between the official depiction of the military enterprise advanced by the imperial propaganda, and the points of view of the Ostrogoths and other contemporaries. While the Gothic propaganda in the conflict is quite well documented, thanks to the historical narratives of Procopius and Agathias, the letters of Cassiodorus, and the *panegyric* of Ennodius, when we try to ascertain the perceptions of the Italics, things are more complicated, especially with reference to the lower classes, rarely considered in ancient historical narratives. In this section we will examine and compare imperial vs. Ostrogothic propaganda and how Justinian aimed to refute the Goths' arguments and to advance his cause. In the end we will attempt to paint a picture of the complexity of the local reactions to the

73. Bonifay, Michel ; Pelletier, Jean-Pierre. "Éléments d'évolution des céramiques de l'Antiquité tardive à Marseille d'après les fouilles de la Bourse (1980-1981)". *Revue archéologique de Narbonnaise*, 16 (1983): 258-346; Bonifay, Michel ; Dominique, Piéri. "Amphores du Ve au VIIe s. À Marseille: nouvelles données sur la typologie et le contenu ". *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 8 (1995): 94-120.

74. Carabia, Alessandro. *Space, Population, and Economy in a Frontier Region: Byzantine Liguria in the Context of the Western Byzantine Provinces (500-700 CE)*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham (PhD Dissertation), 2022.



reconquest campaign, which were strongly shaped by the unexpected prolongation of the war, going far beyond the expectations of everybody involved.

2.1 Imperial vs Ostrogothic propaganda

A first problem that the official propaganda and the imperial panegyrist had to address was to justify the war in both moral and legal terms. This issue was particularly important in Italy, where the Goths had established a kingdom in accordance with the wishes of a Byzantine emperor, Zeno, even if the precise terms of the Ostrogothic invasion are disputed.⁷⁵ In the case of the Vandals the situation was less problematic because their kingdom was born of military conquest. Only an old peace treaty with Zeno and the improved diplomatic relationship with Hilderic stood in Justinian's way.⁷⁶ The Vandals, in their kingdom, were also seen as guilty of persecuting Christians, piracy, and the sacking of Rome in 455, whose spoils remained in Carthage. Justinian had only to choose his *casus belli*. However, the Emperor had chosen a diplomatic policy which was only put aside after the demise and later assassination of Hilderic, renowned for having improved the relationship with the Empire, and after the firm refusal of any compromise from Gelimer. To do the same with the Ostrogoths was not as easily done, even if, in the end, the pattern was somehow similar. Theoderic's Kingdom claimed legitimisation based on the concession of Zeno, while being widely praised for its tolerance of Chalcedonian Christians and respect for Roman institutions and laws.⁷⁷ A major role here was played by Theoderic's propaganda, but the disparity between the two barbarian kingdoms was still evident, even if we consider the issues that emerged during the last year of the Ostrogothic king.⁷⁸ Also in this case Justinian tried a diplomatic

75. Heydemann, Gerda. "The Ostrogothic Kingdom: Ideologies and Transitions", *A Companion to Ostrogothic Italy*, Jonathan Arnold, Shane Bjornlie, Kristina Sessa, eds. Leiden: Brill, 2016: 17-46; Arnold, Jonathan. *Theoderic and the Roman Imperial Restoration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014: 63-71; Moorhead, John. "Theoderic, Zeno and Odoacer". *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 77 (1984): 261-266; Thompson, Edward Arthur. *Roman & Barbarians: The Decline of the Western Empire*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982: 73; Jones, Arnold Hugh Martin. "The Constitutional Position of Odoacer and Theoderic". *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 52 (1962): 126-30.

76. In Byzantine culture rightful conduct called for respecting treaties and avoiding new wars: Cesa, Maria. "La politica di Giustiniano verso l'Occidente nel giudizio di Procopio". *Athenaeum*, 59 (1981): 389-409.

77. All these traits are summarised in Ennodius' Panegyric: Rota, Simona. *Panegirico del clementissimo re Teodorico*. Rome: Herder, 2002. For Theoderic and the Roman law: Lafferty, Sean. "The Law", *A Companion to Ostrogothic Italy*, Jonathan Arnold, Shane Bjornlie, Kristina Sessa, eds. Leiden: Brill, 2016: 147-172; Lafferty, Sean. "Law and Society in Ostrogothic Italy: Evidence from the *Edictum Theoderici*". *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 3/2 (2010): 337-364; Vismara, Giulio. "Il diritto nel regno dei Goti", *Teodorico il Grande e i Goti d'Italia*. Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1993: 275-315. More in general on Theoderic as legislator: Lafferty, Sean. *Law and Society in the Age of Theoderic the Great*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

78. On Theoderic's propaganda, especially Ennodius: Rota, Simona. "Teodorico il Grande fra graecia e ausonia: la rappresentazione del re ostrogoto nel *Panegyricus* di Ennodio". *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Moyen-Âge*, 113/1, 2001: 203-43; for a reevaluation of his "classical" façade in, for example,



approach first and only when it failed he went to war with the claim that Theoderic abused his mission and, instead of returning Italy to the Empire, to which it had always belonged, forged his own tyranny.

In addition to the “barbarian” kingdoms’ alleged lack of legitimacy, Justinian made use of a series of *topoi*, including the liberation of fellow Romans from the tyranny of the barbarians, the reaffirmation of true Christian doctrine against Arianism and other heresies, and the military rhetoric of victorious Romans recovering the long-lost west – one that Justinian specified was caused by the sloth of his predecessors, using this element to uphold both the legitimacy and competence of his rule as emperor.⁷⁹ The first component of the Empire’s rhetoric of liberation was based on the illegitimacy of Theoderic’s Kingdom. According to Procopius, Belisarius’s opinion was that Theoderic did well to eliminate the tyrant Odoacer, but failed to return Italy to the Empire, thereby simply exchanging one tyrant for another.⁸⁰ Witiges and his successor, Totila, argued that they had rightfully obtained their dominion over Italy, by arms and with the authorisation and support of Emperor Zeno. They also claimed to have always respected Roman laws and the Orthodox church, preventing any need for a military intervention by the emperor.⁸¹ These became the dialectical lines of both parties until the very end of the conflict. We can see the same arguments put forward in the Goths’ final, desperate, attempt at resistance after the death of their last king, Teia (553), when they sent an embassy to the Frankish king Theudebald begging for help.⁸² It was probably difficult for Justinian to completely disregard the Goths’ arguments, and some scholars hypothesise that the reason for the original hostility at Justinian’s court towards the expeditions in the west was, in fact, the lack of a solid *casus belli* for their undertaking and, consequently, their illegality.⁸³ To make the reconquest palatable on the legal side, Justinian found a scapegoat: Totila, who, for his tactics aimed at subverting the established social order, was officially presented as a tyrant.⁸⁴ Therefore, his concessions and deliberation as the king of the Goths were disregarded and nullified in the *Pragmatica Sanctio*.⁸⁵ Justinian’s plan,

his building programme: La Rocca, Cristina. “Una prudente maschera ‘Antiqua’. La politica edilizia di Teoderico”, *Teoderico il Grande e i Goti d’Italia*. Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo, 1993: 451-516.

79. See note 43.

80. Proc., *History of the...: III*, 342-43 (VI.vi.23).

81. All these points are well exemplified in the dialogue between Belisarius and Witiges’ ambassadors during the first siege of Rome: Proc., *History of the...: III*, 336-47 (VI.vi.4-34).

82. Agathias. *Histoires Guerres et Malheurs du Temps sous Justinien*. Trans. Maraval Pierre. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2018: 44-47 (I, 5.1-10).

83. Cesa, Maria. “La politica...”: 389-409.

84. On Totila’s actions and tactics: Stewart, Michael. *Masculinity, Identity, and Power Politics in the Age of Justinian: A Study of Procopius*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020; Amory, Patrick. *People and Identity...: 175-94*; Moorhead, John. “Totila the Revolutionary”. *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 49/3 (2000): 382-86; Wolfram Herwig. *History of the Goths*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1988: 353-61.

85. The *Pragmatica Sanctio*: Mommsen, Theodor; Krueger, Paul. *Corpus Iuris Civilis...: 3*, 799-802 (CJC App. VII).



in this case, was to recognise as legitimate rulers only the direct heirs of Theoderic: Amalasuintha, Athalaric, and Theodahad, despite that Theoderic too had been accused of tyranny at the beginning of the war. Theoderic and the Amal dynasty, which acted in favour of Justinian and wanted to hand over the kingdom to Justinian, presenting the resisting Goths as rebels. The blame was shifted on Witiges and, especially Totila, who was considered a true illegitimate ruler for rebelling to the wishes of their real leaders and acting as tyrant. This was a small and little-appreciated detail, probably designed to depict the Gothic warriors opposing the imperial armies as, *de facto*, fighters for kings who were usurpers, ignoring the will of their legitimate rulers, the Amals whom they murdered, to leave the kingdom to Justinian. This claim of illegitimacy also served the practical need to restore the properties (lands and men) that Totila had seized from Italian landowners. This view clearly circulated also outside the official documents and was actively presented to the Italics and the Goths who survived the war, as demonstrated by the famous inscription of Narses on the Salarian bridge. The inscription, *per se*, is a perfect synthesis of the essence of the imperial propaganda, celebrating the freedom of Rome and Italy under Justinian's Empire (*libertate urbis Romae ac totius Italiae restituta*) in contrast to the actions of "*nefandissimo Totila tyranno*".⁸⁶ In this way, at least on paper, the war became somehow legitimate, or at least presentable, from the imperial side.

The second component of this liberation rhetoric involved the restoration of Roman law. According to the war's apologists, the campaign meant freeing the Italics by restoring the law, which, according to imperial ideology, was the only guarantor of freedom. However, according to Cassiodorus and the Roman Senate, this intervention was not needed. Cassiodorus wrote to Justinian shortly before the beginning of the conflict, under Theodahad's orders in 535, begging the emperor not to intervene in Italy since if "Libia deserved to receive liberty...it is cruel that I (Rome) lose what I have always been known to possess".⁸⁷ Cassiodorus's plea was clearly ignored, and the rhetoric of liberation became particularly evident in Justinian's legal texts, culminating in the imposition of the *Pragmatica Sanctio*, which extended the new imperial legislation to Italy, *de facto* cancelling the old system, based on Roman law prior to Justinianic reform. Libya, or Africa, is usually the main subject of Justinian's legislation in this case, often referred to as a country which regained freedom through the help and will of God. This is stated in the law concerned with the reorganisation of the province, and in a series of *Novellae* between 534 and 535.⁸⁸ Italy appears only in 536, after the recovery of Sicily, where it is listed with Africa among the reconquered territories.⁸⁹ In John the Lydian's *De Magistratibus* the recovery of Libya is praised as well, but the capture of Rome, is regarded as far more important due to its role as the birthplace of the Roman

86. CIL, VI, 1199.

87. Cass., *The Variae*...: 444-45 (11.13).

88. Mommsen, Theodor; Krueger, Paul. *Corpus Iuris Civilis*...: 2, 77 (CJC 1.27.1-2); Sarris, Peter. *The Novels of*...: 53-64 (Nov. 1), 127-56 (Nov. 8), and 353-59 (Nov. 37).

89. Sarris, Peter. *The Novels of*...: 319-332 (Nov. 30) and 541-546 (Nov. 78).



Empire. John depicts the city as finally freed from the chains of barbarian authority.⁹⁰ However, this distinction between the relative importance of the provinces is not found in imperial legislation. Once again, we need to turn to Procopius' narrative. He rarely talks openly about imperial ideology, but sometimes it can be foreseen from the actions and words of Belisarius and other figures. During the expedition against the Vandals the general is found on at least two occasions reprimanding his troops and urging them to act according to their mission of liberating fellow Romans from the Vandals and refraining from damaging or sacking the properties of local civilians.⁹¹ In Italy we find the same situation and concerns harboured by the general, at least in the first stages of the war. When Belisarius disembarked in Sicily he encountered little resistance, and no city was plundered until he reached Naples. This is where the dream of an almost peaceful reconquest and good relationship with the local population vanished. Still, Belisarius, and Narses after him, always (according to Constantinopolitan authors) made an effort to avoid shedding the blood of Italics, and often Goths too.⁹² The protraction of the war effort, naturally, brought an increase in harshness on both sides, making it even more difficult for the imperial troops to be seen as liberators, while the Goths, who initially respected the Italian population and often reminded them of the fair treaty that they had received under their rule, started to take occasional revenge on cities that betrayed them. Emblematic was the destruction of Milan in 539, where, according to the sources, all its male occupants were slain and the rest of the population enslaved.⁹³ However, even if in this case the Burgundians, sent by the Franks to assist the Goths, might have played a role in perpetrating the massacre.⁹⁴ Even so, dramatic events of this scale remained relatively rare, even when the conflict became more violent. Under Witiges and Totila most of the violence was aimed at Roman aristocrats, who were accused of betraying the Goths, despite their merciful rule.⁹⁵ Portraying the imperial troops as liberators in the end was only possible during the first stages of the campaign. With the prolonging of the war and shifting loyalties, by people, entire communities, and cities the situation became much more complex, with the population seeking security rather than freedom. Regular imperial troops, despite making an effort to respect the civilians, were not always restrained by their

90. Jean le Lydien. *Des Magistratures de l'état Romain*. Trans. Jacques Schamp. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2, 2006: 42 (III.1.2).

91. Proc., *History of the...*: II, 142-43 (III.xvi.1-4) (imperial soldiers taking food without paying the landowners); Proc., *History of the...*: II, 174-77 (III.xx.19-20) (Belisarius not allowing the sack of Carthage since that was a mission of liberation of fellow Romans).

92. Agathias. *Histoires Guerres et...*: 54-55 (I.12-13).

93. Proc., *History of the...*: IV, 54-55 (VI.xxi.39-42).

94. Proc., *History of the...*: IV, 54-55 (VI.xxi.39-42).

95. When Witiges abandoned Rome at the beginning of the war he took several senators as hostages to Ravenna, who were later executed: Proc., *History of the...*: III, 246-49 (V.xxvi.1-2). Totila used the senators as hostages too, having several following him, and others were sent to Campania, after his death at the battle of Taginae (552); other Goth commanders in Italy killed many senators who were trying to reach Rome, then under imperial control, and murdered 300 of their children, previously captured as hostages by Totila: Proc., *History of the...*: IV, 398-401 (VIII.xxxiv.1-8).



officers, who were often responsible for crimes and abuses; according to Procopius, Bessas, for example, the commander of the imperial garrison in Rome, financially benefitted by starving the population and triggering inflated food prices.⁹⁶

The propaganda also involved the *topos* depicting the emperor as a military conqueror. Justinian, however, was never a soldier. Despite having served as *magister militum praesentalis* in Constantinople before becoming emperor, there is no evidence of him being directly involved in any military activity. Thus, he had to rely on competent and loyal generals, such as Belisarius, to fulfil this role. This created a potential contrast and mistrust, which may have been behind Belisarius's abrupt recall from both North Africa and Italy; and a reliance on a small number of officers if we interpret Belisarius's recalls, especially the first one from Italy, as based on military needs, as he was immediately sent to fight on the eastern frontier where a new war with Persia unexpectedly broke out. Justinian, however, was still able to gain from the military victories of his generals, even when they were allowed a "triumph", a ceremony long reserved to emperors. Justinian only conceded this honour to Belisarius after his victory in Africa. The general was allowed to march into the capital twice parading the spoils of the war, along with its prisoners, which included the Vandals' King Gelimer. Still, upon arriving in front of the imperial box at the Hippodrome, Belisarius, along with Gelimer, "had to fall prone to the ground and do obeisance to the Emperor Justinian", acknowledging the emperor as the true victor.⁹⁷ This was the same place that only two years before had seen the brutal quashing of the Nika riot. According to Procopius, the general also performed a sort of small triumphal ceremony in Syracuse, after the complete pacification of the island. This corresponded with the last day of his consulship, another institution on the verge of extinction.⁹⁸ Belisarius paraded through the middle of the town to a cheering crowd of civilians and soldiers, distributing gold coins.⁹⁹ In this passage Procopius felt the need to underline the spontaneity of the event, generating some suspicions that this small, unauthorised triumph was not endorsed by the imperial seat. Indeed, this would be the last. Whether out of distrust towards Belisarius and his behaviour towards the end of the first phase of the Italian war, or the urgent need to send him to the East, Justinian forbade more triumphs. The enterprise was, nevertheless, still considered worthy of being immortalised in the mosaics of the Chalke, along with the African campaign. Moreover, the future course of the Italian, Eastern, and Balkan fronts transformed the military ventures from instruments to fuel imperial propaganda to sources of embarrassment for the emperor, not worthy of future celebrations. For Italy, the abandonment of triumphant tones after the 540s,

96. Proc., *History of the...* IV, 314-317 (VII.xix.13-14).

97. On the significance of the act of submission accompanied by the words of Gelimer "Vanity of vanities, all his vanity": Kaldellis, Anthony. *Procopius of Caesarean: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004: 128-141, esp. 14-42.

98. On the end of the consulship under Justinian: Kruse, Marion. "Justinian's Laws and Procopius' Wars". *Procopius of Caesarea: Literary and Historical Interpretations*, Christopher Lillington-Martin, Eloise Turquois, eds. London: Routledge, 2018: 182-95.

99. Proc., *History of the...* III, 46-49 (V.v.17-19).



regularly expressed in relation to Africa in 534, were exemplified in the *Pragmatica Sanctio*, whose 27 articles still addressed religious issues and the restoration of properties, but completely shed the exultant tenor of its African equivalent from 534,¹⁰⁰ where arguments of liberation and military success were clearly asserted from the beginning. The emperor realised that the war effort in Italy would not be as successful as the one in North Africa, and probably lost his initial optimism and triumphalism. The central and last phases of the Italian wars, compounded by similar disasters in the Balkans and in the East, ended the imperial emphasis on military propaganda.¹⁰¹ This led to believe that Justinian soon lost his initial interest for the reconquest enterprise, especially when things became more complex in Italy.¹⁰² However, he carefully built his image as conqueror and even if it is harder to track in his legislation, it was immortalised by the work of Procopius's, despite his later criticism, in the mosaics of the Chalke (at the entrance of the imperial palace) and his funerary pall. Later Byzantine historians and intellectuals mostly focused their attention on Justinian's religious activities,¹⁰³ but this does not seem to reflect the contemporary perceptions. It is true that the western wars are barely mentioned by Malalas; however, the Syrian chronicle is mostly eastern focused and if the wars in the west are merely acknowledged, those in the east are described at length. Scott has tried to demise the importance of the western campaigns, pointing out how the forces employed were much smaller if compared with the ones used in the east.¹⁰⁴ This argument, however, does not take into consideration the general difference between western and eastern armies nor strategies. In general, the east was notoriously richer and more populous, the economic core of the Empire, and this is reflected in the number of soldiers deployable locally. Moreover, in Roman military thinking, Persians have always been valued as far more dangerous enemies than any other group of barbaric tribes and so the need to confront them with stronger armies.¹⁰⁵ The North African expedition was carried out by an army composed by a standard number of soldiers for the western fronts: 12 -18,000 men, about half the average size of a large eastern army. Instead, for the Italian expedition, Belisarius arrived in the almost undefended Sicily with about 7,000 soldiers, but it has been rarely emphasized that another army attacked from the Balkans. The *magister militum per Illyricum* Mundus led this army, but Procopius

100. Mommsen, Theodor; Krueger, Paul. *Corpus Iuris Civilis...*: 2, 77-81 (CJC 1.27.1-37).

101. On the last phases of the kingdom and the abandonment of triumphant tones: Cameron, Averil. "Justin I and Justinian", *The Cambridge Ancient History 14*, Averil Cameron, Bryan Ward-Perkins, Michael Whitby, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001: 82-85.

102. Cameron, Averil. *The Mediterranean World...*: 124.

103. Scott, Roger. "Narrating Justinian: from Malalas to Manasses", *Byzantine narrative. Papers in Honours of Roger Scott*, John Burke, ed. Melbourne: Australian Association of Byzantine Studies, 2006: 29-46.

104. Especially when he takes into account only the 7,000 men that landed in Sicily with Belisarius: Scott, Roger. *Narrating Justinian...*: 32; Scott, Roger. "Writing the reign...": 27.

105. On how to deal with different enemies on the battlefield, see, for example, the 11th book of the *Strategikon* attributed to Maurice: Maurice. *Strategikon*, trans. George T. Dennis. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984: 113-126.



does not specify its size.¹⁰⁶ However, we can easily imagine that it comprised a vast number of the Balkan forces, anything between other 8,000 and 15,000 men, bringing the combined expedition to a total 15-22,000 soldiers.¹⁰⁷ The problem with the Illyrian expedition force is that Procopius barely acknowledge its existence compared with Belisarius's army.¹⁰⁸ This was probably due to at least two factors: the substantial failure of Mundus's army in breaking the Ostrogoth's resistance in the area, where the Goths had concentrated most of their defences from the beginning; and the fact that it was not led by Belisarius, Procopius's hero. This can easily be one of those episodes where Procopius turns the events into his agenda. Despite the collaboration with Belisarius during the Nika riot,¹⁰⁹ Mundus was a potential rival.¹¹⁰ He was briefly sent to take the place of Belisarius as *magister militum per Orientem* (531).¹¹¹ This event is recorded very differently between Procopius, who claims that Belisarius was recalled to command the African expedition and named Sittas as his replacement, and Malalas who claims that Belisarius was recalled for his failures and substituted by Mundus.¹¹² In the end, the military effort in the western wars was not marginal, but proportional, if not over the average in the case of Italy, to the forces usually deployed in the west, while the demise of the Illyrian forces and Mundus in Procopius can be explained by the general failure of the attack and his personal agenda. I think that it is possible to sustain how Mundus's forces, in this case, could have represented the main expedition force in Italy since they had to face the bulk of the Gothic army stationed in northern Italy, while Belisarius's army, due to its size and objective, might have been used to distract as many Gothic forces as possible from that front and to secure the unprotected, but richest regions of southern Italy. The fact that Mundus failed and was eventually killed in battle with insufficient forces to push forward put Belisarius and his secondary army, which aimed to distract and strike at easy targets, in the unexpected position of becoming the actual invading force of the peninsula, a role for which it was numerically inadequate.

106. Proc., *History of the...*: III, 42-43 (V.v.2), III, 46-47 (V.v.11), and III, 56-61 (V.vii.1-10).

107. In general, on the consistence of Byzantine armies: Haldon John. *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World 565-1204*. London: Routledge, 1999: 99-101. On Procopius use of numbers instead: Whately, Conor. "Some Observations on Procopius' Use of Numbers in Descriptions of Combat in Wars Books 1-7". *Phoenix*, 69/3-4 (2015): 394-411.

108. See note 106.

109. Confirmed by both Procopius and Malalas: Proc., *History of the...*: I, 232-233 (I.xxiv.40); John Malalas, *The Chronicle of John Malalas*, trans. Elizabeth Jeffreys, Michael Jeffreys, Roger Scott. Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1986: 279-280 (specially 476).

110. On the rivalries between Byzantine generals under Justinian: Parnell, David Alan. *Justinian's Men: Careers and Relationship of Byzantine Army Officers*, 518-610. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017: esp. 103-129. On the figure of Mundus: Croke, Brian. "Mundo the Gepid: From Freebooter to Roman General", *Chiron*, 12 (1982): 125-135.

111. Proc., *History of the...*: I, 194-195 (I.xxi.2-4); Mal., *The Chronicle of...*: 272 (466).

112. This is a well-known issue with Procopius and Malalas, especially evident in the different depictions of Belisarius's role in the battle of Callinicum: Whately, Conor. *Battles and Generals: Combat, Culture, and Didacticism in Procopius' War*. Leiden: Brill, 2017: especially IX-XI.



The other strong argument was religion, which was particularly pertinent in North Africa due to the Vandal persecutions of non-Arian Christians,¹¹³ but this was much harder to assert in Italy, where the Arian Goths had applied a policy of religious tolerance not just towards other Christians, but even towards those of other faiths, such as the Jews.¹¹⁴ The Goths always reminded Justinian and his representatives of this, and it was an argument that was difficult to refute. The episode of Pope John I and the threat of retaliations after Justin's anti-Arian laws marked a setback in Theoderic's policies, but there was never anything on the scale of the North African persecutions. Instead, Justinian, in his struggle to unify the Christian world, and his policy of intolerance towards other faiths, immediately extended the same harsh measures in Africa, forbidding Arian, Donatist, Jewish, and pagan rites, and converting synagogues into churches.¹¹⁵ Similar measures might have been applied in Italy too after the *Pragmatica Sanctio*.¹¹⁶ This should have pleased the Chalcedonian community, allowing the emperor to portray himself as a defender of the true faith. However, Justinian's further interference in religious matters certainly ended up alienating part of the Italian population and clergy. Particularly, the promulgation of the edict of the Three Chapters, in 553, aimed at resolving issues with the eastern Monophysites, failed and created a further schism within the western church, including the Italian one, that was not resolved until 698. Relations with the popes and the western clergy in general were also complicated by the pressures imposed on Pope Vigilius, summoned to Constantinople in 547 and basically imprisoned, combined with similar measures adopted against many North African bishops.¹¹⁷ In synthesis, it is easy to see how, especially in Italy where a tolerant government was in power, Justinian's religious policies might have done more harm than good to the imperial cause. Paradoxically, a sense of unity was only partially recovered with the Longobards' (Lombards) arrival on the Italian Peninsula in 568/9, another Germanic people of Arian and pagan beliefs, which helped to reinforce ties in terms of faith between Rome and Constantinople, at least for a time.

Finally, we must briefly mention the hesitation shown by both Justinian and Belisarius towards the Italian reconquest. The emperor's wariness was evident from the beginning, when he ordered his general to probe the Sicilian defences and, if too strong, simply pretend that he was sailing for Africa.¹¹⁸ His doubts were briefly dispelled after the success in Sicily but re-emerged as the situation became more difficult than anticipated and the Goths did not succumb as easily as the Vandals did. The joint attack planned by Justinian, with Belisarius invading southern Italy and Mundus, the *magister militum per Illyricum*, attacking from Dalmatia, had only

113. Mommsen, Theodor; Krueger, Paul. *Corpus Iuris Civilis*...: 2, 77 (CJC 1.27.1).

114. Example of tolerance in note 49.

115. Sarris, Peter. *The Novels of...*: 353-358 (November, 37, August 535).

116. In 594 Gregory the Great was still involved in anti-Jewish practices, contrasting them the right of owning Christian slaves: Gregory the Great. *The Letters of Gregory the Great*. Trans. John Martyn. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2004: 303 (4.21). Cameron, Averil. "Justin I and...": 80.

117. Cameron, Averil. "Justin I and...": 80.

118. Proc., *History of the...*, III, 44-45 (V.v.6-7).



partially worked. The first, suffering from too few men, languished in Rome, while the second succeeded in capturing Salona and Dalmatia, but shortly thereafter was killed in a fierce battle outside Salona, incapacitating the Illyrian forces to move forward. Fresh troops under the command of Constantianus were able to keep Salona under imperial control for the rest of the war, but the double invasion plan had failed miserably, and the fate of the venture was far from certain. In this context Belisarius is seen engaging twice in diplomatic negotiations with the Goths. The first time Witiges' envoys offered him Sicily, Campania, and a regular tribute. Belisarius replied that he did not have the authority to surrender imperial territory, so the question was sent to Justinian, but the breaking of a truce established to permit the embassy to reach Constantinople nullified the negotiations. It is highly possible that this was just a ploy by Belisarius to gain time to receive reinforcements, which landed shortly thereafter, and to wear down the Goths, who started to lack provisions. The second attempt, however, was much more serious and apparently had full imperial support. Belisarius, aided by the fresh troops sent by the emperor, had Ravenna under siege, starving, and almost ready to fall. Witiges attempted a second negotiation, offering the emperor all the land south to the Po River; with the Goths becoming a vassal state sending troops to Constantinople when needed.¹¹⁹ According to Procopius, Justinian was more than willing to accept, and it was only the obstinacy of Belisarius that led to a second diplomatic failure, brought attention to the fall of Ravenna, and the general's sudden recall to Constantinople.¹²⁰ Despite the rhetoric of victory and touted determination to recover all Roman territory, whatever the costs, both episodes reveal a willingness to negotiate under uncertain circumstances, belying the emperor's claims that he was committed to nothing less than a total *restauratio* of the Empire.¹²¹ It is clear that after having taken Sicily, Rome, and probably Ravenna, Justinian was more than satisfied and willing to leave other important centres, like Milan, in foreign hands. This policy was probably adopted years later with the Longobards, with a possible accommodation of these new people in the lands north of the Po River, which, if it was ever considered, failed.¹²²

In the end, the core argument wielded to justify Justinian's "reconquest" of Italy was that the Peninsula was rightfully an imperial possession, and its inhabitants were Roman citizens in need of liberation from governments that oppressed them and lacked any legitimisation. The Goths, on their side, emphasised the "Roman" nature of their rule over the Italics, always underlining their respect for Roman culture and laws. This might seem puzzling, but in a Mediterranean that was still half dominated

119. On the meaning of this treaty and its practical consequences: Cristini, Marco. "Justinian, Vitiges and the peace treaty of 540 (Proc. Bell. Goth. 2.29.2)". *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 1141/3 (2021): 1000-1012.

120. Proc., *History of the...: IV*, 138-39 (VI.xxx.1-2).

121. A determination that was strongly conveyed in texts such as the Novella 8 (April 535) where "we do not choose to allow Roman territory to be diminished.": Sarris, Peter. *The Novels of...: 138* (November 8, April 535).

122. Christie, Neil. "Invasion or invitation? The Longobard occupation of northern Italy, A.D. 568-569". *Romanobarbarica*, 11 (1991): 79-108.



by the Roman Empire, the Goths, probably more than the Vandals, appreciated the benefits of acting, at least nominally, in accordance with the dominant culture of the time and of their own subjects: the Italics. In this context, Theoderic's tolerant policies, compared to Justinian's "totalitarian" approach, can be seen as reflective of the Roman Empire's old values of assimilation, tolerance, and inclusivity – values subverted (ironically) by Justinian's policies. This contradiction, however, was not enough to defuse Justinian's ambitions which, despite some hesitations, ultimately resulted in the destruction of the Gothic Kingdom.

2.2 Outside the propaganda: perceptions of reconquest

It is not easy to say what the average Italian, Gothic, or Byzantine man would have thought of Justinian's enterprise, or to attempt to reconstruct a perception of it outside of the official propaganda. This is because the ancient sources tend to focus mostly on political and military events, and when they report personal opinions, these are usually those of the upper classes. Indeed, few have ventured into this field, with one of the most recent works being that by Kouroumalis.¹²³ Examining mostly the literary evidence, she painted a blurred picture according to which clear expressions of support towards Justinian's plan were rare, and became rarer as the war dragged on, with most of the people, including aristocrats, more worried about protecting themselves and their properties rather than showing a blind form of loyalty to one of the two parties. Previous works, in contrast, underlined how the Roman aristocracy tended to be at least moderately pro-Justinian.¹²⁴ Clearly, the Italian population, after a moment of excitement when it seemed that Justinian just might repeat his striking success in Africa, found itself in a bind. This was a situation in which it was impossible to predict the future outcomes of the war, so any choice could prove fatal. Seen from this perspective, Kouroumalis's position is perfectly legitimate, as the Italics, in the end, were little more than pawns to be used or abused by either party, and ended up mostly siding with whomever would grant them safety.¹²⁵ Italian-Ostrogothic society was a complex entity, and the two aristocracies, Goths and Italo-Roman, were probably more interwoven than Procopius's narrative was willing to admit.¹²⁶ Cases such as that of Cyprianus, a Roman aristocrat who served at Theoderic's court in both civil and military functions, and later sent

123. Kouroumalis, Maria. "The Justinianic Reconquest of Italy: Imperial Campaigns and Local Responses", *War and Warfare in Late Antiquity*, Sarantis Alexander, Christie Neil, eds. Leiden: Brill, 2013: 969-999.

124. Moorhead, John. "Italian Loyalties During Justinian's Gothic War". *Byzantion*, 53/ 2 (1983): 575-596.

125. Kouroumalis, Maria. "The Justinianic Reconquest...": 994; Thompson, Edward Arthur. *Roman & Barbarians...*: 92-109.

126. Aimone, Marco. "Romani e Ostrogoti...": 78-80; also, John Moorhead, speaking of a sort of interrupted integration: Moorhead, John. *Theoderic in Italy...*: 86-88.



his children there to be educated as Goths, even if rare, are emblematic.¹²⁷ More evidence of the aristocracies' intermixing is offered by the archaeological discovery of the treasure of Desana, which contained a golden wedding ring bearing the name of a Roman man and a Gothic woman. The treasure is comprised of a mixture of objects from both the Roman and Danubian traditions, mostly women's accessories, and was probably the dowry of a Gothic noblewoman.¹²⁸ An interesting statement of Theoderic, according to the Anonymus Valesianus, read: "a poor Roman plays the Goth, a rich Goth the Roman".¹²⁹ Even if the examples above only partially fit into this picture, it is possible to see that forms of intermingling and acculturation from both parties were frequent.

Despite these examples, it was still clearly possible for contemporaries to distinguish between Romans and Goths. The sons of Cyprianus, even if educated according to Gothic standards, were still clearly recognisable as *pueri stirpis Romanae*. When the war broke out the Roman portion of the population was most supportive of the imperial cause, especially in the areas where the presence of Gothic settlers was minimal, such as Sicily and southern Italy. Many, however, exhibited a more neutral stance, either out of self-interest, indifference, fear, or conviction. Naples is the first example, where the Italian population was strongly divided, beginning with the aristocrats. There the Jewish community was unequivocally pro-Goth, probably due to Theoderic's tolerant policies towards them, while Justinian had clearly expressed his intolerance of their religion.¹³⁰ The senators of Rome and the pope were, generally, more inclined to support the Roman army, so many decided to find refuge in Constantinople, from whence they would not always return. Even Cassiodorus, who was loyal to the Goths for so many years, in the end fled to the imperial capital, only to return when the war was over. Others, such as Fidelius, Archbishop Datus of Milan, and Tullianus, were more explicit in their disdain for the Goths than others, actively placing themselves and their resources at the service of the reconquest. The first two helped Belisarius conquer Milan, while the second gathered a group of *rustici* (farmers) to ambush Gothic troops in Lucania.¹³¹ Some, such as Rusticana, the daughter of Symmachus and wife of Boethius, the two patricians executed by Theoderic, openly showed their sympathies by ordering the destruction of the statues of the Ostrogoth king in Rome.¹³² Conversely, some Roman

127. Cass., *The Variae*...: 399-341 (8.21). On his figure also: Cosentino, Salvatore. *Prosopografia dell'Italia Bizantina* (493-804). I A-F. Bologna: Lo scarabeo, 1996: 333-34.

128. For an analysis of both cases in the context of the Ostrogothic occupation: Aimone, Marco. "Romani e Ostrogoti...": 31-96; for a detailed analyses of the treasure: Aimone, Marco. *Il tesoro di Desana: una fonte per lo studio della società romano-ostrogota in Italia*. Oxford: Archeopress, 2010.

129. *Excerpta Valesiana*...: 544-47 (12.61).

130. Proc., *History of the...*: III, 80-81 (V.viii.41).

131. Fidelius was sent by Pope Silverius to invite Belisarius to Rome and later, with Datus, encouraged Belisarius to take Milan, where he was an influential man: Proc., *History of the...*: III, 142-43 (V.xiv.4-6) and III, 356-57 (VI.vii.35-37). For his loyalty he was made praefectus praetorio: Proc., *History of the...*: III, 198-201 (V.xx.19-20); Cosentino, Salvatore. *Prosopografia dell'Italia*...: 461. For Tullianus: Proc., *History of the...*: IV, 308-09 (VII.xviii.20-21) and IV, 324-45 (VII.xxii.1-6).

132. Despite her action, she was spared by Totila: Proc., *History of the...*: IV, 332-33 (VII.xx.29-31).



patricians, like Stephanus, used by Totila as an ambassador to Constantinople, remained faithful to the Goths.¹³³ Loyalty to one faction did not always pay off. Fidelius died in war, while Clementinus, who handed a fortress near Naples to the Goths, was still confined by Totila at Capua with other senators and their families. When the imperial general was sent to free them, Clementinus refused to leave, fearing punishment by the Romans, and probably the Goths too, if he was caught again supporting the imperial side.¹³⁴ In the end the vast majority assumed a more pragmatic neutrality, trying to get along with whichever side was prevailing; or fled to Constantinople, waiting for the conflict to end. Judging by our sources, only a minority actively sided with one party or the other. Still, the cultural and social bonds of the Roman senatorial aristocracy were always perceived as a threat by the Goths, especially in the long term. During the first siege of Rome, the Goths expected loyalty from the senators, given their government's tolerance towards them. When it was clear that their support was weak, at best, the Goths left the city to Belisarius, and thereafter grew more and more suspicious of the Italian aristocracy, considering the senators unreliable allies. Witiges, but mostly Totila, actively sought to overcome their influence and power in Italy, having several of them killed, imprisoned, or taken hostage, and apparently trying to turn farmers and enslaved people against them or at least trying to forbid them to turn the population against the Goths.¹³⁵ Gothic noblemen were sometimes ambivalent in their allegiances too. During the first stages of the war Ebremud, son-in-law of Theodatus, charged with blocking the landing of Belisarius from Sicily, surrendered with his men to the general, delivering him the whole of the south up until Naples.¹³⁶ Ebremud and his followers were sent to Constantinople, where he was rewarded, probably with land and gold, and granted the rank of patrician.¹³⁷ Later on, when Belisarius was besieging Ravenna, Sisigis, the Gothic commander of a series of fortresses in the Alpes Cottiae, surrendered to Belisarius, forcing another 4,000 soldiers, who had just left with another Gothic commander, Uraias, to leave the fight and go back to retrieve their families, which were guarded by Sisigis.¹³⁸ This general in particular seems to have remained mostly loyal to the imperial cause, and was probably still active during the earliest phases of the Longobard invasion in 568/9.¹³⁹ The armies

133. Proc., *History of the...: V*, 14-15 (VII.xxxvii.6).

134. Proc., *History of the...: IV*, 381-83 (VII.xxvi.13). The fortress was probably the Castle of Lucullus, where later Clementina, daughter of Clementinus, was mentioned in a letter by Pope Gregory the Great: Greg., Reg. Epist...: 235-36 (3.1).

135. For a downsizing of the "revolutionary" role of Totila's policies: Moorhead, John. "Totila the ...": 382-86; further supported by Cristini: Cristini, Marco. "Totila and the Lucanina Peasants: Procopius Goth. 3.22.20". *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 61 (2021): 73-84.

136. It is possible that there was some form of agreement with Justinian, since Theodatus was supposed to surrender the kingdom to him: Lillington-Martin Christopher, Stewart Michael Edward. "Turning Traitor: Shifting Loyalties in Procopius' Gothic Wars". *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 31 (2021): 287-88.

137. Proc., *History of the...: III*, 68-71 (V.viii.3-4).

138. Proc., *History of the...: IV*, 120-25 (VI.xxviii.28-35).

139. Sisinnius, magister militum, is mentioned still holding the city of Susa for the emperor: Paul the Deacon. *History of the Longobards*. Trans. William Dudley Foulke. Philadelphia: University of



themselves, both the Gothic and the imperial ones, were not immune to episodes of desertions and changings of sides during the long Italian campaign.¹⁴⁰

Beside Rusticana's case, clearly motivated by a desire for revenge, it is difficult to assess the reasons behind the actions of many other participants in these events. The Roman aristocracy and the Italian population could claim cultural bonds with their eastern counterparts, while reinsertion within the imperial system might have seemed advantageous to many aristocrats. This was a class that in the past had held estates and properties across the Mediterranean, and prestigious and lucrative positions in several capitals and provinces, so they might have looked favourably on the possibility of expanding their horizons again. Many of those who survived the war were, indeed, successfully reintegrated into the imperial system.¹⁴¹ This does not mean that most of them supported Justinian's policies or wanted to risk their lives to achieve this reintegration. At the same time, growing divisions were emerging between the western and eastern aristocracies, both cultural and religious, planting seeds of future episodes of discord. The same thing would happen with the clergy. The Goths, on their side, were fighting for their very existence as a political and cultural entity. Nonetheless, some of them disregarded their common goals as a people and pursued more personal and immediate gains by joining the Roman side. Sometimes they did this just as way to fight against the imperials when the next advantageous occasion arose, but in many other cases, such as that of Sisigis, they remained loyal to their new masters; or, as in the case of Ebremud, went to seek their fortunes in the East. The long Italian war gave rise to many different reactions by groups and individuals, such that they cannot be easily categorised. Rather, the different personal choices of the persons involved must be analysed, which most of the time were shaped by a struggle to survive. In this situation, only a few of the Italics possessed such strong convictions that they were firmly committed to and placed their lives at risk for one of the two sides.

3. Coming to terms with the (re)conquest

At the very end of the conflict, whether we consider it a legitimate reclamation of land or a conquest of a rightfully independent kingdom, Italy was again under imperial control. As for the North African one, the military intervention was used only when any diplomatic effort to annex the peninsula peacefully had failed. However, once it was decided, it was carefully planned, involving the deployment of two combined forces attacking from the exposed south and the well-defended

Pennsylvania, 1907: 101 (III.viii)

140. For some examples: Lillington-Martin, Christopher; Stewart, Michael Edward. "Turning Traitor...": 281-305.

141. One of the best cases is probably Liberius, who passed to the imperial side in 534 and secured important roles, such as command of the Spanish invasion: Cosentino, Salvatore. *Prosopografia dell'Italia Bizantina (493-804). II G-O*. Bologna: Lo scarabeo, 2000: 291-94.



north. In this regard, the troops and resources deployed by Justinian were more than proportionate to the standards of western Roman armies. In Italy, they possibly involved even more men than the North African expedition: a smaller army, the 7,000 soldiers of Belisarius, and a larger contingent, most probably the real attacking force of Mundus, *magister militum per Illyricum* (8,000-15,000 men). The army attacking from Dalmatia was *de facto* incapacitated by the Goths. However, the sorts of the war were rebalanced by the relative ease with which Rome and the southern half of Italy fell into imperial hands. This easy conquest, combined with Belisarius's obstinacy to refuse peace while besieging Ravenna, dragged the Empire into a long and wearing war. On the one side, the unexpected recovery of the Goths made them believe in the possibility of victory leading to the refusal of further agreement; on the other side, once Rome, Sicily, and Ravenna fell into his hands, Justinian was forced by his narrative of *renovatio imperii* into pressing for a definitive solution to the Italian problem.¹⁴² However, the imperial momentum faded quickly. The 540s marked a demise of the western theatre, suddenly becoming of marginal importance, when core areas of the Empire such as the east and the Balkans were stormed by a series of raids and attacks, which culminated in the sack of Antioch, one of the main cities of the Empire, by the Persians in 540.¹⁴³ This series of events, combined with the military embarrassment of the imperial army resulted in an abandonment of the original triumphal tones under which the African and Italian campaigns had started. The wars in the west and the same project of reconquest, if there was ever one, started to backfire and became a reason for embarrassment and critiques. Procopius was a critical voice, but even more aligned writers, such as John the Lydian, criticised the general conduct of Justinian. Nonetheless, the narrative of the great conqueror was never entirely abandoned and found its final momentum when Justinian was buried wrapped in a pall which depicted the defeated Vandals, and the liberated Libya and Rome.¹⁴⁴

The military narrative of the events occupied most of the contemporary discussion on Justinian's intervention in the west, and it is at the centre of our primary source: Procopius. However, as we saw, this was just one part of the picture. The premises of the western campaigns involved a much deeper level of complexity, very partially appreciated by the ancient historian, which reflects the overall policies adopted by the emperor. Justinian was playing a battle on many levels to affirm his power and to promote his idea of Empire. In his reform of the state, he promoted himself as a restorer of the old laws, which instead he deeply reformed and immediately applied to both Italy and North Africa, and as a religious leader keen to affirm the Chalcedonian creed and diffuse or suppress the disagreement within the Christian

142. The last attempt was made by Totila, but Justinian did not even receive his envoy: Proc., *History of the...: V*, 14-15 (VII.xxxvii.6.).

143. The Persian attack could have been encouraged by some Gothic ambassadors, trying to engage Justinian on multiple fronts: Proc., *History of the...: IV*, 60-63 (VI.xxii.17-20); also: Mal., *The Chronicle of...: 284-85* (479-480).

144. Corippus, *In laudem Iustini Augusti Minoris*, 1.276-90; Flavius Cresconius Corippus. *In Laudem Iustini Augusti minoris*. Trans. Averil Cameron. Londond: Athlone Press, 1976: 92-3.



fate. Its religious activity was the one that attracted the attention of later Byzantine historians.¹⁴⁵ However, contemporary sources underlined all three of these aspects. Finally, the recovery of the west was also entangled with controlling its main productive areas (North Africa and Sicily) and to regain the ports along the still surviving western commercial routes, which included the Mediterranean islands of Sardinia and the Balearic. This is the less explicit aim of the reconquest if we follow the sources but was nonetheless significant, even if underlined mainly by the legislation. This was a way to expand the tax base and take back control of the western Mediterranean commerce which revived in this period, as shown by archaeological sources. Justinian was not just conquering to recompose a broken Empire; he was assuring the control of new rich provinces to sustain his political agenda while imposing his views in terms of law and religion. This more comprehensive view of Justinian's reconquest helps us to contextualise better his figure and his multiple overlapping faces: the conqueror, the legislator, the administrator, and the religious leader.

The process of *restauratio*, which never considered regions once at the core of the Empire, such as Frankish Gaul, recovered to the emperor two new provinces: North Africa and Italy, plus a series of islands. From a territorial point of view, the Empire was still far away from the recomposition of its original domains. However, it gained two of its most productive regions (North Africa and Sicily), three of its former capitals (Rome, Ravenna, and Milan), while two Arian kingdoms were removed. In this sense, the reconquest was a success. Nonetheless, Rome and especially Ravenna lost their role as autonomous political centres, as they had been during Late Antiquity, and became the regional capitals of a province, Italy, that was now at the westernmost edges of the Roman domain, which remained wholly focused on Constantinople and the east. If with *restauratio* we intended a reformed late antique Roman Empire, this was never truly fulfilled. After the damage and devastation caused by war, famine, and plague, the extent of which has been judged variously by different scholars,¹⁴⁶ the peninsula was not allowed enough time to recover, as for North Africa, and was invaded by the Longobards in 568/9. This invasion resulted in a permanent territorial and cultural fragmentation that endured until the country's modern reunification. The Roman aristocracy and the senate were forever broken, even though many of them who survived kept living in the peninsula after the war.¹⁴⁷ The Gothic element in Italy became de facto irrelevant, and they ceased to

145. Scott, Roger. "Writing the Reign...".

146. In favour of a dramatic picture of destruction: Wickham, Chris. *The Inheritance of...*: 140; "...the long war in Italy destroyed the very structures it had sought to rescue" Cameron, Averil. "Justin I and...": 76. More cautions position in: Christie, Neil. From Constantine to...:37-38; For a downsizing of the effects of the plague: Mordecai Lee, Eisenberg Merle: "Rejecting Catastrophe: The Case of the Justinianic Plague", *Past & Present*, 244, 1, 2019: 3-50; of opposite view: Sarris, Peter. "The Justinianic plague: origins and effects", *Continuity and Change*, 17, 2, 2002: 169-182.

147. Many remained in Constantinople, where they formed a Latin speaking community, even if most of them later fell under the usurpation of Phocas: Cameron, Averil. *The Mediterranean World...*: 122; on the fates of the Italian aristocracies: Brown, Thomas. *Gentlemen and officers. Imperial Administration and Aristocratic Power in Byzantine Italy A.D. 554-800*. Hertford: British School at Rome, 1984: especially 21-60.



exist as a political and cultural entity.¹⁴⁸ In their place imperial soldiers, civil, and military officers from the east started to flow into the Italian peninsula, contesting the space to local aristocracies and bringing a revival of the Greek language.¹⁴⁹ In the Longobard occupied areas, what was left of the local elites was mostly substituted by the newcomers instead. The imposition of the Chalcedonian creed created a new schism with part of the western clergy in northern Italy, laying the foundations for a more severe and long-lasting crisis between the popes in Rome and the patriarchs and emperors in Constantinople. Despite the propaganda, the *restauratio*, was never really implemented and possibly was never intended as a restoration of the Late Antique order. Instead, the Longobard invasion and the growing cultural and religious differences became the base of further divisions and incomprehension between the Italics and the Eastern Romans. Justinian's reconquest process resulted in a false hope of continuity of the late antique socio-economic structure but, in truth, accompanied Italy into the Early Middle Ages, marked by the sudden Longobard conquest of half of the peninsula, which represented the true braking point from the old system perpetuated by the Ostrogoth Kingdom. Only a few areas, such as Sicily and southern Italy, were truly reintegrated within the Empire and were dragged into the "long Late Antiquity" which ended with the Islamic conquest of North Africa a century later.

148. Goths are still well attested in the Ravenna Papyri but their possibility of influencing local culture and politics was lost forever.

149. They will later form the new aristocracy of the peninsula after the Longobard invasion: Cosentino, Salvatore. *Prosopografia dell'Italia...*; Brown, Thomas. *Gentlement and officers...*: especially 61-81. On the revival of Greek and his relationship with Latin in Italy: von Falkenhausen, Vera. "Greek and Latin in Byzantine Italy (6th-11th Century)", *A Companion to Byzantine Italy*, Salvatore Cosentino, ed. Leiden: Brill, 2020: 541-581.

