

Dardania Under the Reign of Justinian I Emperor (527-565)

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Abstract:

The period of reign of the Emperor Justinian I (527-565) is one of the most important epochs, in terms of the political, economic, cultural and religious aspects of the history of Dardania. Dardania was the birthplace of Justinian I Emperor, therefore he paid particular attention to development of Dardania, which during his reign reached great developments in all fields of life. Antique authors have written about a large number of buildings constructed and reconstructed which took place at the time of the reign of the Emperor Justinian I. Dardania was hit by a powerful earthquake in 518, which caused severe damage. This earthquake destroyed many cities in Dardania, among which the capital of Dardania, Scupi (Shkup-Skopje) was included. When Justinian I (Iustinianus Primus) became the emperor of Byzantium, he paid particular attention to his homeland, Dardania. Justinian I began reconstructing many castles which were destroyed by the earthquake of year 518, as well as construction of some new fortresses. The Emperor Justinian I built a great city in Dardania, near the village of his birth, which he named Justiniana Prima. With the support of the Emperor Justinian I, the antique city of Ulpiana was rebuilt, which he named as: Justiniana Secunda. Justinian I Emperor was a big supporter of Christianity, therefore he paid special attention to construction of churches. Archaeological remains show a

great number of churches throughout the territory of Dardania, which belong to the period of reign of the Emperor Justinian I. The large number of archaeological remains, castles, churches, etc., which belong to the period of reign of the Emperor Justinian I, as well as denomination of cities in Dardania, with his name, shows in the best way for the great care and feelings that Emperor Justinian I had for his homeland Dardania. Therefore, in every sense of the word we can say that the epoch of reign of the Emperor Justinian I was a "Golden Age" for the province of Dardania.

Key words: Justinian I, Dardania, the Byzantine Empire, Justiniana Prima, Castle, Church.

Justinian I Emperor (527-565) was one of Byzantine emperors, originating from Dardania, who paid special attention to Dardania. This special care for Dardania (his homeland) is proven by some special imperial novels which discuss about ecclesiastical, society, administrative and military topics (Frashëri 2008, 163). Flavius Petrus Sabbatius Justinianus, born in *Tauresium*, near Skopje - Scupi, emperor who ruled in the Byzantine Empire, in the period 527-565, was one of the most prominent emperors of Byzantine Empire. Short time of Justin's governance (518-527) is righteously considered as a pre-accession to the era of reign of his nephew Justinian (Schreiner 1986, 9, Shchevill 2006, 53). Petrus Sabbatius was born in 482, in a rural family living in Tauris (*Taurisium*), a small village near Skopje, in the province of Dardania (Struss 2008, 1; Bridge 1980, 50). Justinian was not his birth name, his birth name was Petrus Sabbatius (Myftiu, Minga and Lloshi 2006, 566; Bridge 1980, 50; Struss 2008, 1). Later in Constantinople, in memory of the early Roman Emperors he took the additional name Flavius (Struss 2008, 1). Petrus Sabatius, at age of eight, was adopted by his uncle Justin, who called him Justinian (Bridge 1980, 50). The uncle, the emperor Justin, was born in the village of *Bederiana* (Bridge, 1980, 50),

in the vicinity of the city of Skopje, in the province of Dardania. During his reign, the emperor Justin brought his nephew Justinian under his care. In the Imperial Palace, Justinian mounted quickly the stairs of career and played a very important role during the time that Justin I governed (518-527). His Uncle Justin, took him to Constantinople and provided him with good and general education (*Lexikon der alten welt H-Q* 1990, 1452). Justin favored Justinian, raising him to the position of Patriarch and commander of the Royal Military Force, while on 01. 04. 527 Justin made Justinian a co-governor (*Lexikon der alten welt H-Q* 1990, 1452). After the death of Justin in 527 AD, reign was transferred without any problems to the hands of Justinian (Schrejner 1986, 9).

Nowadays historians call Emperor Justinian I as one of the most prominent emperors of Byzantine Empire, as well as one of the most important personalities of European history. Schreiner and Shcevill say that: Justinian I (527-565) was not only a prominent Byzantine ruler but also one of the most important personalities of European history (Schreiner 1986, 9), and one of the cleverest out of the list of Byzantine emperors (Shchevill 2006, 53). Justinian I was a man of a medium size with a developed body, with a round face and curly hair. He had a particular view of his face which could not be considered a very beautiful one (Bridge 1980, 50).

Emperor Justinian I, is one of the most educated emperors, be it in the aspect of theology or in the literary aspect as well, who supported with the entire knowledge and strength of action the cultural goods which marked not only his era but they also present values until nowadays, while political measures (Schreiner 1986, 9) of the Emperor Justinian I, unfortunately fell victim to the storms of the time.

The time of Dardania Emperor's reign, Justinian I (527-565), by many scientist, is considered as the highest point of the development of Byzantine Empire (Lilie 1999, 42), from the above stated and from many works that have been written

about Justinian I, we come to conclusion that Dardania gave Byzantium, Justinian I, in the fourth century, the most recognized emperor for values of whom many works have been written, that stand on the shelves of the most known libraries in Europe. In the framework of the history of relations between the state and the church, the era of Justinian constitutes the moment with the impact of imperial power in the ecclesiastical life, and no other emperor before or after him, had so limitless power on the Church (Ostrogorski 1998, 47). He is known as the most educated Byzantine emperor, in terms of literary and theological aspects, who with his knowledge, and by his acting power, left traces especially in the cultural achievements of his era (Schreiner 1986, 9).

Justinian I emperor paid special attention to construction of churches throughout the Illyrian territory, especially in his homeland in Dardania. Although the number of Paleochristian churches in Dardania at the time of Justinian seems to have been high, still because of lack of archaeological excavations we cannot talk about a specified number of Paleochristian churches of that period, but it is known that new discoveries, every day more and more lead to an increase in the number of Dardanian churches of the era of Emperor Justinian I. Justinian I preferred successive constructions. Expansion of construction caused raise in taxes. A large number of churches were built in Dardania, in the homeland of Emperor Justinian. Justinian I Emperor reorganized the Illyrian church and thus founded the city *Justiniana Prima* (in Dardania) as an independent ecclesiastical center, which had an important role in this part of the Empire.

In 535, with a special decree (Novel XI) he created a new Archbishopric in the city that he built in his homeland, in the town of *Justiniana Prima*. Justinian I Emperor separated this Archbishopric from Thessaloniki Archbishopric, which was linked to Constantinople and it was not under direct subordination of Rome, but rather as an Autocephalous

Archbishopric under the umbrella of Rome, led by an Archbishop who would not be appointed by Pope, but by the Emperor Justinian I. (Frashëri 2013, 217-218).

In an increasing number of Paleochristian churches being discovered in Dardania and beyond, in the efforts to give appropriate dates, we have found that the majority of them belong to the sixth century, the era of Justinian I, and we are dealing here with a unitary culture (Skender Anamali 1997, 8). Determination of a unitary material culture, the composition of which has ancient elements indicates that in the southern Illyrian provinces such as Praevalitana, Dardania Old Epirus and New Epirus there is preservation of domestic culture from the impacts of Roman and later from Byzantine culture (Anamali 1979-1980, 6). So archaeologists ensure us that all the findings of the centuries V and VI, in Praevalitana, Dardania, Old Epirus and New Epirus witness a uniform material culture (Jacques 1995, 174), in the works of ceramic, handicrafts etc., as well as in the models of construction in architecture. Construction had a significant importance, at the epoch of reign of the Emperor Justinian I. Dardania in 518 was hit by a powerful earthquake, which caused severe damages.

A description of this powerful earthquake was made by Marcellin Komes, in his Chronicle, where inter alia he says: "Year 518...from continuous earthquakes in the province of Dardania, twenty-four castles were immediately destroyed. Two of them drowned together with the inhabitants, four were destroyed thus losing about half of shelters and residents, in thirteen of the disasters there lost one third of houses and an equal proportion of population; seven were destroyed, losing a quarter of houses and equally population, while neighboring fortresses were abandoned by the fear of destruction. The main city, Scupi was completely destroyed...". Based on the description that was given by Marcellin Komes, we can understand that the earthquake of year 518 caused Dardania to suffer huge damages, in population as well as material

damages. Many dwellings that were destroyed by the earthquake of year 518, were rebuilt at the epoch of reign of the Emperor Justinian I, and emperor that was born in Dardania, and it seems that he could not even think his homeland destroyed. Therefore he paid particular attention to construction in his homeland, Dardania.

Construction that took place following the earthquake of year 518, by Emperor Justinian is best described by Procopius of Caesarea, Palestine, [born c.490/507- died c.560s] is the most important source for information about the reign of the Emperor Justinian I), in the work of *De aedificis*, where it reads: "...If it is a risk to sail in an angry sea on a badly supplied boat, it is not less bold to want to express with my own low style the magnificence of construction of the Emperor Justinian. He showed in all of his works and in the first place in the construction, such a high cleverness as no words can compare.... (Prendi, et al. 1979, 437).

According to Procopius, Justinian I Emperor, only in Dardania built 8 fortresses, whereas rebuilt about 61 (Prendi 1979, 441) localities. One of the most magnificent constructions of the Emperor Justinian I was the construction of a new city near Bederiana, that was planned and built by engineers and architects of the capital city and was funded by the state (Browning 1982, 97). According to Procopius *Justiniana Prima* was in the territory of Dardans and was built near the village of birth of the Emperor Justinian I..."Somewhere near European Dardans, who live near the borders of Epidamnus, near Bederiana fortress, there is a village named Tauris, where Emperor Justinian was born, founder of the world empire. He surrounded this in a short period of time, by walls in square shape and built four towers on the four corners out of which it also took the name tetrapyrgos. He founded nearby a great city which he called Justiniana Prima..."(Prendi, et al. 1979, 438; Mirdita 1979, 141).

Emperor built here a splendid water supply system in order to have water in all seasons (Mirdita 1979, 153). Emperor Justinian I "...has left the traces of greatness of construction, with which he decorated the city with temples of galleries, public squares, palaces, spas and shops. Finally he made it a big city, highly populated and rich in such a way that it not only was established in the dignity of a metropolitan city, but it was also chosen as the center of the Archbishop of the Illyrians, since other cities left this honor to it as the largest city in the country. It gives the brightness to emperor as much as it has taken from him..."(Prendi, et al. 1979, 438). Justinian I on 14 April 535 delivered Novel XI to Archbishop, by which Justiniana Prima, in addition to metropolitan rank added also the rank of archbishop, judicial-church competences which expand over Dacia Mediterana, Dacia Ripensis, Moesia Prima, Dardania,...and with this act, Justinian I wanted to make his place of origin a center of civil and ecclesiastical power (Mirdita 2001,163). The first Archbishop in the town of *Justiniana Prima*, was Catelian who was not appointed by the Pope but no by Emperor Justinian I. The text of the novel signed by Emperor Justinian I in 535, addressed to the Archbishop of *Justiniana Prima*, Catelian, is this: "...Considering that so much we want to raise in numerous and different ways our city of birth, where for the first time God allowed us to appear into this world created by himself, we want also regarding the church power to have it grow at the highest level, so that today's bright spiritual leader of our city *Justiniana Prima*, becomes not only the metropolis but also Archbishopric and under its powers to have some provinces... " (Frashëri 2008, 173). Another city that was rebuilt by Justinian I was Ulpiana. In the huge earthquake in Dardania in year 518, Ulpiana suffered serious damages, but it was rebuilt by Justinian I and following the reconstruction it was named Justiniana Secunda. On the basis of archaeological excavations, it has been proved that Ulpiana was a very important city in Dardania.

We also have the first recognized Christian martyrs from Ulpiana, in Dardania: Florin and Laurin (Gjini 1992, 55). According to the up to date sources, the bishop of Ulpiana was mentioned for the first time in the 4th century, in the Council of Sardica in 342, as its priest, who signed the acts of the Council as "Machedonius a Dardania de Ulpianis" (Gjini 1992, 55). In this big city which in 3rd and 4th centuries was called "*urbs splendidissima*", where the emperor Teodosi I stayed in 380, who traveled from Sirmium to Thessaloniki (Gjini 1992, 54). Important routes went through Ulpiana: "From Adriatic Sea was the route Lissus through Ulpiana and led to Naissus" (Shtylla 1998, 20; Gjini 1992, 54). In the huge earthquake in Dardania in year 518, Ulpiana suffered seriously, but it was rebuilt by Justinian I and following the reconstruction it was named Justiniana Secunda.

Procopius of Caesarea in his work on constructions (*De Aedificis*), among other says : "...There was in Dardania, since ancient times, a city called Ulpiana. Its walls (that were falling) were all rebuilt by him (Emperor Justinian I). And after he decorated it with grandiosity and gave the beauty of today, named it Justiniana Secunda...." (Prendi et al...1979, 438-439). Name of Pal as the bishop of Justiniana Secunda in Council of Constantinople in 553 testifies for the existence of the headquarters of Bishops in Justiniana Secunda (Ulpiana), at that time. "...Finally on 5 May of year 553 Council of Constantinople began. In the second meeting held on 8 May, it was concluded that the bishops were not present at council >> Foca Istaliensis, Sabinianus Zapparensis, Projectus Naissusi, Paulus (Name Paulus proves to be first Christians, for more results see: Kajanto 1965, 243, 299; Mirdita 1981, 125). Justinianae Secundae << even though located in the city "(Gjini 1992, 51).

During archaeological excavations in the city of Ulpiana, Basilica of early Christianity was discovered and many archaeological materials, especially coins which mainly belong

to the period since mid-4th century until the beginning of the 6th century (Čerškov 1958, 280).

Following the reconstruction of Ulpiana (*Justiniana Secunda*), it is not known whether it had only this name, the name of Justiniana Secunda, or continued also to use the old name Ulpiana. A few centuries later, in 11th century. Justiniana Secunda was mentioned again with the old name Ulpiana. So the name Ulpiana, is found to be mentioned in the 11th century in the christobule of Emperor Basil II in 1020 (Gjini 1992, 55).

We do not have sufficient information about this matter as we are dealing with the period of congestions, which occurred in the Roman and the Byzantine Empire (Hoxhaj 2006, 101-113). Barbaric invasion changed the church map of Dardania and during this period sustained major damage in headquarters of Bishoprics in Skopje, Ulpiana, Nis and Remesiana (Drançolli 2008, 23). Since the city was destroyed, the Emperor Justinian began the construction of new buildings and constructed and reconstructed protective wall of the city and gave the name to the city as *Justiniana Secunda*. Procopius of Caesarea in his work on constructions (*De Aedificis*), among other says : "...There was in Dardania, since ancient times, a city called Ulpiana. Its walls (that were falling) were all rebuilt by him. And after he decorated it with grandiosity and gave the beauty of today, named it Justiniana Secunda...." (Prendi, et al., 1979, 438-439). Procopius of Caesarea also speaks about the other cities built by Emperor Justinian in Dardania. Also in the field of military construction carried out by Emperor Justinian I, the largest number of castles was built in Dardania, compared to other Byzantine provinces (Frashëri, 2008, 165). At the time of the Emperor Justinian I, the largest number of fortresses was built in Dardania, in comparison to the constructions in other provinces of Balkans (Frasher, 2008, 168). According to Procopius, there were built 8 castles and rebuilt 61 in the province of Dardania, in the province of Nis

there were built 32 castles and 7 castles were rebuilt; in the province of Pautalia there were built 5 castles and no reconstruction took place, in the province of Germa there were built 6 castles, no reconstruction, and in the province of Remesiana there were built 30 castles, no reconstruction (for more results see: Frashëri 2008, 167-168; Shufflaj 1968, 27).

Castle of Kasterc was one of the most important localities of 6th century. Between villages Nishor and Kasterc, about 11 km northwest of Suhareka, there is the Castle of Kasterc, which is located on the hill and has a mainly flat surface which occupies an area of about 1.6 h (Peja and Hajdari 2012, 229). Important archaeological remains were discovered in this locality. In addition to that, archaeological remains were discovered in a trinity basilica. Based on the structural composition this facility has and based on the structure of its construction and archaeological remains of trinity basilica, it enables us to assume that Kasterc Castle was an important ecclesiastic center in Dardania, at the time of reign of the Emperor Justinian I. Finding a considerable number of broken and full bricks shows that they were used for construction of figures and placed horizontally in a sequence, techniques which are a characteristic for churches of 6-9 centuries. If we are guided by the onomastic similarity of Kasterc castle, it is very likely to correspond to the fortification *Castellina* (Peja and Hajdari 2012, 348). Fortification *Castelina* is mentioned by the historian *Procopius of Caesarea*, in the work *De Aedificis* (on buildings), where in the range of fortifications constructed and reconstructed by Emperor Justinian I, mentioned *Castelina* (Frano Prendi et al. 1979, 441). Based on ancient sources and archaeological excavations, we can say that: Kasterc Basilica was a very important ecclesiastic center in Dardania.

From archaeological excavations that took place in the village of Korisha (in 2002), among others a Paleochristian church was discovered, which belongs to the Emperor's rule, Justinian I (527-565). The church is oriented from east to west

(church apse is oriented to east side while entry to the west) and has a length of 20.7 m (Boshtrakaj Camaj 2013, 112). First Christian objects seem that were built by local masters, who had embraced the Christian faith, and in some cases (which was also a characteristic) even priests were distinguished as good builders and architects, on this occasion it is interesting to mention the Illyrian priest Pjetri (Drançolli, 2011, 62). In addition to building, he also was recognized as a master of Illyrian sacral Christian works, but after attacks and demolitions from barbaric tribes, he managed to take refuge in Rome, where he built a basilica "Santa Sabina", in Aventine in Rome (Drançolli 2011, 62-63), a basilica that was made known in the world art. The group of castles of the 6th century mainly includes mountain castles built for protection of the population in case of unexpected attacks. It is important to emphasize the fact that: In some of the fortresses, the same planimetry was implemented, such as the example of Jablanica, Pogradja, etc. and that this phenomenon is well known in Danube Limes. This fact indicates the best that construction of castles was made based on the programs oriented by the Byzantine Empire, by Emperor Justinian I. System of fortifications fell significantly in the period after the rule of the Emperor Justinian I, (Shufflaj 1968, 27).

Therefore considering ancient sources, we can say that by the earthquake of year 518 there were destroyed many Dardan settlements, among which Skopje was destroyed, but this was not a full destruction of Dardania. Many settlements destroyed in Dardania were rebuilt by Emperor Justinian I. Many Dardan churches were also destroyed, which at that time were very well organized. However Emperor Justinian I took care of the construction and reconstruction of churches as he took care of the construction of other facilities. On the basis of up to date resources, Dardania or his homeland seems to have taken a great attention of Emperor Justinian I.

A good example is not only the building of many cities in Dardania, but also the example of city Justiniana Prima, which was not only in the range of the metropolis of Dardania, but in 535 Emperor Justinian raised it in the range of Archbishopric, and by this time Dardan bishops did not respond to bishop in Thessaloniki, but to the bishops of Justiniana Prima.

The epoch of reign of the Emperor Justinian I (527-565) is one of the brightest periods, in terms of history of Dardani, in the political, economic, cultural and religious aspects of the history of Dardania. In addition to the written sources, we have also referred to the material resources that are necessary facts to reach the scientific truth, especially when it comes to a far period of time, that in our case is the 6th century. As a conclusion, I can say that the period of rule of the Emperor Justinian I was a very bright period of history of Dardania, in political, cultural, religious, construction aspects etc., therefore his multidimensional work represents a very important period for the history of Dardania.

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