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THE BALKANS BETWEEN ROME AND CONSTANTINOPLE
IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES 600-900, A.D.

The religious history of the Balkans has been remarkably turbulent due to the fact that as early as 395 A.D. the peninsula was divided between Eastern and Western Illyricum. While there was every indication that the bishops of Rome were presumed to hold all of the Balkans within their jurisdiction, as the civil border between East and West moved towards the Adriatic, the papacy also lost out to the ecumenical patriarchate of Constantinople. While at one time the Greeks of the Balkans looked to Rome, or more frequently to Rome's vicars in Thessaloniki, for their head, little by little only the Latin-speaking regions of the extreme western part of Illyricum, Dalmatia, was left in the popes' domain.

Rome's view held that, since first enunciated by Pope Damasus, it alone could claim *principatus apostolicae sedis* because of its Petrine and Pauline origins. Constantinople's bishop, on the other hand, only held authority given it by conciliary decree. The presence of the emperor in Constantinople, however, gave the patriarchate's jurisdiction in the Balkans a major asset. Much of the struggle between Rome and Constantinople was played out in the three centuries between 600 and 900.

While the fall of the western part of the Roman Empire occurred when the Germanic people overran the Rhine frontier, there was a much more serious collapse when the Avars and Slavs occupied the Danubian provinces in the sixth and seventh centuries. By the time of Pope Gregory the Great's death in 604 Justiniana Prima had disappeared along with the other major Balkan cities of the interior, Singidunum and Sirmium. In 614 an Avar attack devastated Salona, the most important of the Dalmatian cities and its Christians were forced to take refuge in Spalatum, within the walls of Diocletian's palace. Salona's last bishop fled for safety to Italy¹.

1. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, O. Moravcsik and R. J. H. Jenkins, eds. (Budapest, 1949), XXX. The Avars took Salona by dressing as Romans and thereby gained entrance into the city.

While a considerable amount of papal correspondence to Balkan bishops exists through the era of Gregory the Great, there is a precipitous decline as the cities and their bishops vanish from the map. After 604 there are no extant letters until the pontificate of Honorius I who in 625 wrote to the bishops of Epirus, a region still free of invaders, but not of problems. The pope protested an irregular election of the bishop of Nicopolis. Honorius refused to send the pallium until the situation was rectified².

The next papal contact with the Balkans occurred during John IV's pontificate. Born in Dalmatia, John's family was among the many refugees who had come to Italy. Elected pope in 640 he continued to keep in mind the sufferings of his homeland. The *Liber pontificalis* notes, "He sent a large amount of money to Abbot Martin for the redemption of captives through all Dalmatia and Istria". John's agents secured the relics of several Dalmatian saints and had them brought to Rome. Here they were lodged in the Oratory of St. Venantius located on the grounds of the Lateran palace³.

According to the *De Administrando imperio* of Constantine Porphyrogenitus it was about this time that Emperor Herakleios made contact with the Croatians and Serbs, inviting them to settle in Illyricum. They were made imperial allies appointed to fend off the Avars and Slavs who rejected Roman rule. According to Porphyrogenitus, the Croatians... "requested the holy baptism from the bishop of Rome and bishops were sent to them in the time of Porinos their prince"⁴.

It may well have been during John IV's pontificate that this happened since he would have had a natural interest in the conversion of people settled in Dalmatia. Nothing is known about the result of this early mission among the Croatians. Apparently it had only a slight effect. The first known Croatian bishopric was not established until the final years of the ninth century.

Meanwhile a new doctrinal dispute arose to trouble relations between the popes and the emperors. In an effort to reconcile the Monophysites to his rule Emperor Herakleios and his successors promoted the doctrine of

2. Honorius to the bishops of Epirus, Rome, Dec. 13, 625 in *Regesta pontificum Romanorum*, Philip Jaffé, ed. (2 vols., 2nd edn., Leipzig, 1885), I, 223; *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, Johannes Mansi, ed. (31 vols., Florence and Venice, 1759-98), X, 581.

3. *Liber pontificalis*, L. Duchesne, ed. (2 vols., Paris, 1886), I, 330. Abbot Martin is otherwise unknown. The oratory of St. Venantius is still extant. It contains a mosaic showing John making his donation.

4. *De administrando*, XXXI.

Monothelism, a modified form of the earlier heresy of Monophysitism. Monothelism held that Jesus, although human in other ways, had only a divine will. This belief the emperor published in a document, the *Ekthesis*. When the *Ekthesis* arrived in Rome, Pope John IV called a synod to examine it and found that it was in fact heretical⁵.

Once again the views of pope and emperor were at odds. Rome held that no compromise with Monophysitism was possible. Constantinople argued that the Monothelite compromise was essential to win over the Syrian and Egyptian Monophysites.

In 649 the newly-elected pope was Martin I. In Constantinople the emperor was now Constans II, grandson of Herakleios. Monothelite doctrine was still a point of controversy despite the loss of Syria and Egypt to the Arab Muslims. In the very first year of his pontificate Martin held a council in Rome which pronounced against it.

Pope Martin appointed a delegate to go to the emperor to present Rome's case. He could not depend on his apostolic vicar in Thessaloniki, since Archbishop Paul, the incumbent, supported the imperial theology. The pope was so angry at Paul that he dispatched a letter to the bishops of Macedonia. They were to hold a synod to examine Paul's views and, unless exonerated, he was to be excommunicated⁶.

The emperor was not at all pleased with Pope Martin. He sought to have Martin murdered by an assassin sent to Italy, but the plot failed. Next Constans ordered the Ravenna exarch to go to Rome and arrest the pope. When this official reached Rome he found the pope, suffering from gout, lying on a bed inside the Basilica of St. John Lateran. Ignoring the pope's illness and his appeal for sanctuary, the exarch bundled him up and sent him off under guard to Constantinople. For a year the soldiers kept their prisoner on the island of Naxos until delivered to Constantinople. There he received a sentence of exile to the Crimea where, soon afterwards, he died⁷.

Emperor Constans II won several military victories in the Balkans against

5. Horace K. Mann, *The Lives of the Popes in the Early Middle Ages* (18 vols. in 19, 2nd edn., London, 1902-32) I, 1, 363; V. Grumel, "Recherches sur l'histoire de Monothelisme", *Echos d'Orient*, XXVIII (1929), 272-82; Luigi Magi, *La Sede Romana nella corrispondenza degli imperatori e patriarchi bizantini (VI-VII sec.)* (Louvain, 1972), pp. 206-26.

6. Martin I to the bishops of Macedonia, Rome, 649 in Jaffé, *Regesta*, I, 231; Mansi, *Collectio*, X, 843. See also Jan L. Van Dieten, *Geschichte der Patriarchen von Sergios I bis Joannes VI. 610-75* (Amsterdam, 1972).

7. *Liber pontificalis*, I, 336-38. Martin's death occurred on September 6, 655. He is considered a martyr.

Avars and Slavs. Encouraged by this success in 664 he left for a campaign in Italy with an army of 20,000 men where he defeated several Lombard forces and then moved on to Rome.

Pope Vitalian swallowed hard and with his clergy met Constans outside the city to escort the emperor into Rome with proper ceremony. The emperor attended Sunday Mass in St. Peter's and was a guest at a banquet given by the pope in his honor. On the surface pope and emperor seemed to be the best of friends. Monothelism and the fate of Martin I must not have been discussed. While in the city the emperor betrayed his character when he ordered all the copper roofs of Rome, many of its statues and art works, to be taken to be sold in order to support his army. Later Constans was murdered in Syracuse and the Romans may well have breathed a sigh of relief⁸.

This same Vitalian, pope from 656 to 672, has left two letters to Paul, Archbishop of Crete. In these documents he complained that Paul had unjustly deposed one of his bishops and in the second letter required him to restore a sequestered monastery to its monks⁹. Vitalian's correspondence demonstrates the continued interest of Rome in the Greek churches of the Balkans.

At this time Italy began to fill with clerical and monastic refugees as Islamic armies continued their advance in the Middle East. Christian Syrians and Greeks arrived in such large numbers that several soon occupied the papacy. These exiles held an advantage over local Romans since most were better educated and enjoyed reputations for ascetical practices unknown in Italy. This was especially true of the monks. Between 686 and 752 there were eleven popes and of that number four were Syrian and five were Greek.

Once it was evident that the Muslim occupation of the Middle East was a permanent one, there was little reason to pursue Monothelism any longer. Emperor Constantine IV abandoned the theology of his family and in 681 summoned a council to meet at Constantinople to withdraw imperial support for the heresy.

Pope Agatho was delighted to send legates to participate in this, the Sixth Ecumenical Council. When the signatures were placed on the official documents, the archbishops of Thessaloniki, Corinth, and Crete all made mention of their connection to the papacy¹⁰.

8. *Liber pontificalis*, I, 343-44; L. Duchesne, "L'Illyricum ecclésiastique", in *Églises séparées* (2nd ed., Paris, 1905), p. 231.

9. Vitalian to Paul of Crete, Jan. 27, 667 in Jaffé, *Regesta*, I, 236; Mansi, *Collectio*, XI, 16, 18.

10. Mansi, *Collectio*, XI, 658; Karl J. Hefele, *Histoire des conciles d'après les documents originaux*, H. Leclercq, ed. (11 vols., Paris, 1907-49), III, 1, 508-15.

Emperor Constantine IV was so much in admiration of the papacy that he asked a later pope to accept his two sons as his adopted children. He sent locks of their hair to Rome to certify that a special relationship now existed between the pope and the imperial family¹¹.

When one of these boys, Justinian II, succeeded to the imperial throne he showed that his "adoption" meant little to him. He was such a firm believer in the discipline and usages of the Greek church that he had nothing but contempt for Latin traditions. In late 691 or early 692 he summoned a council for Constantinople which has received the name Quinisextum, since its stated purpose was to complete the fifth and sixth ecumenical councils. At the council the Archbishop of Gortyne (modern Gortis) in Crete described himself as, "representing all the synod of the holy church in Rome"¹². Apparently this was a personal honor conferred on him by the then-reigning Pope Sergius I.

The archbishop did not, however, represent the Roman church well. Of the 102 canons of the council many were concerned with "abuses" among the Latins. For example, lay persons who fasted on Saturdays of Lent merited an excommunication and clerics were suspended from office. If a clergyman lived apart from his wife he was to be deposed—a canon which if extended to Rome would have forced the pope himself out of office¹³.

Six copies of the *Acts* of the synod were sent off to Rome for papal approval, but when Sergius, himself a Greek, read their contents he announced he would never agree to sign them. Justinian II ordered the exarch of Ravenna to arrest Sergius, but when news of this threat reached Italy, crowds of people leapt to the pope's defense. The exarch who had come to Rome to arrest the pope was saved from lynching only by hiding in the pope's bedroom until Sergius quieted the mob outside the Lateran. It was the pope, not the emperor, to whom the harrassed Italian population looked for leadership¹⁴.

For a while Justinian II, his nose slit thanks to a conspiracy, was ousted from office. Later he returned to the throne a second time and, having mel-
lowed, sought to be more accommodating in his relations with the papacy. In 711 he invited Pope Constantine I to come to the East to discuss the Canons of the Quinisextum Council. Constantine agreed. With him went

11. Hefele, *Conciles*, V, 289-301.

12. *Liber pontificalis*, I, 371-76; Jeffrey Richards, *The Popes and the Papacy in the Early Middle Ages, 476-752* (London, 1979), p. 210.

13. Mansi, *Collectio*, XI, 929-1006. This council is also known as "in Trullo", since it was in this hall that the bishops assembled.

14. *Liber pontificalis*, I, 375-76; Richards, *The Popes*, pp. 213-14.

two bishops, three priests, and his deacon Gregory. When he reached Constantinople the pope was lodged in the Placidia palace and officials sent word to Justinian that his guest had arrived. Justinian returned to the capital, greeted the pope in the western tradition, kneeling before him and kissing his foot. On the following Sunday Justinian received the Eucharist at the papal Mass. Apparently the talks were productive. Deacon Gregory was chief negotiator, explaining to Justinian's satisfaction that the Roman customs were legitimate. For a time harmony prevailed between Rome and Constantinople, between pope and emperor¹⁵.

Hardly a decade passed, however, before a new controversy broke out. This time the issue was iconoclasm. Should representational art, pictures of Christ, Mary, and the saints be used in Christian worship and for private devotion? Emperor Leo III thought they should not, reversing a tradition of at least six hundred years. Apparently, persuaded by iconoclastic bishops and a volcanic eruption in the caldera of the island of Santorini in the late summer of 726, the emperor began his move against the use of icons.

In the Balkans, Christian churches, now reduced to an area hardly more than the Greek mainland and islands, there was little support for the imperial policy. Discontented soldiers organized a revolt and a fleet prepared to sail for Constantinople. On board was the rebel leader, Cosmas. However, Leo III's army and the navy attached to the imperial garrison remained loyal; they used Greek fire to destroy the revolutionaries' ships. Cosmas was caught and beheaded¹⁶.

The papacy was not prepared for the imperial attack on icons. The emperor had said nothing about the veneration of icons in a letter to Pope Gregory II as late as spring 726. Once Pope Gregory learned of the imperial measures taken against the icons he immediately wrote to the emperor to desist. Gregory chided him that his policy was a grave mistake, "Even the little children are provoked at you. Go into a schoolroom, tell them you are an enemy of the images and at once they will throw their writing tablets at your head..."¹⁷.

15. Mann, *Lives of the Popes*, I, 2, 133.

16. George Ostrogorsky, "Les débuts de la Querelle des Images", *Mélanges Charles Diehl*, II (1930), 235-42. Jean Gouillard, "Aux origines de l'Iconoclasme: le témoignage de Grégoire II", *Travaux et Mémoires*, III (1968), 243-307.

17. Gregory II to Emperor Leo III, Rome, 727 and 729 in Jaffé, *Regesta*, I, 252-53; Mansi, *Collectio*, XII, 991. See also E. Caspar, "Papst Gregor II und der Bilderstreit", *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, LII (1933), 72-89. Some scholars doubt that the correspondence between the pope and the emperor is genuine. See Hans Gratz, "Beobachten zu den Zwei

Leo III following the Justinian tradition decided to arrest the pope. He ordered the Ravenna exarch to go to Rome despite the unpopularity of his cause. The exarch failed in his mission, however, for the Lombard princes in Italy acted as the pope's defenders.

Despite these provocations Gregory II continued to support the Roman emperor's authority. He subsidized an imperial army, ransomed Roman-captives, and quashed any effort to embroil him in a revolt against Constantinople. He cautioned his Italian friends that they must "not abandon their love or fidelity to the Roman Empire"¹⁸.

Gregory II died in February 731 and his office was immediately filled by Gregory III, a Roman priest, but descended from a family of Greek Syrians. The new pope followed his predecessor in upbraiding Leo III for his iconoclasm and called a council for November 1, 731 to meet in St. Peter's to examine the matter one more time. The pope anticipated affirmation by the Italian bishops, which would strengthen his hand in dealing with Leo. Gregory's messenger who was sent to deliver the letter to Leo outlining the council's renewed support of the icons came back without doing so. The messenger announced that he was afraid of the consequences. Sent back a second time, the messenger was in fact arrested in Sicily and held there for a year¹⁹.

When at last in 732 or 733 Leo read the letter of Gregory III he was so angry that he ordered a fleet prepared to sail to Italy and arrest the pope. In the Adriatic crossing a terrible storm destroyed the fleet. According to Theophanes, Leo III then transferred the papal patrimonies in Byzantine territories, with an annual income totaling three and one-half talents of gold, to the public treasury. In addition the emperor raised the tribute levied on the populations of Sicily and Calabria by one-third.

Two interpretations have been drawn from Theophanes' report about this event. One holds that Illyricum was included in the confiscation of territories and that the Balkan bishoprics were assumed by Constantinople's patriarch at this time. A second point of view argues that the text says nothing about bishoprics, only patrimonies, nor does it mention Illyricum. The problem may be stated, "Should Theophanes' account include bishoprics as

Briefen Papst Gregor II an Kaiser Leo III", *Archivum historiae pontificiae*, XVIII (1980) 9-40.

18. *Liber pontificalis*, I, 371-76.

19. Gregory III to the bishops, Rome, Nov. 1, 735 in Jaffé, *Regesta*, I, 731; *Liber pontificalis*, pp. 415-21.

well as patrimonies? Should it include Illyricum as well as Sicily and Calabria?"²⁰.

If in fact Leo III had taken away the bishoprics it should be expected that Gregory III would have made some mention of it. Relations would surely have cooled—it was bad enough that the pope had been shorn of much of his resources. Yet this was not the case. Gregory III continued to profess loyalty to Constantinople and to pay subsidies to the exarch's army in a campaign to regain Ravenna which had fallen into Lombard hands.

In a letter Gregory III wrote to Antonius, bishop of Grado, he states, "Your Brotherly Holiness ought to be loyal to him (the exarch) and with us strive to work with him so that the city of Ravenna may be restored to its former status in the sacred empire and to the imperial service of our lords and sons, the great emperors Leo and Constantine. We trust that with the help of the Lord, we may firmly remain within the borders of the empire and in the imperial service"²¹. Such sentiments are hard to imagine coming from a pope who has just lost authority over his Balkan bishoprics, stolen from him by the "great emperors". None of Gregory III's correspondence in subsequent years speaks of the loss of Illyricum's bishoprics.

In 741 Gregory III died and was replaced by Pope Zacharias, the last of the Oriental popes to govern the Roman church. Early in 742, when his legates reached Constantinople to announce his election to Constantine V, they found that the emperor's brother-in-law Artavasdos was in power. The situation was a delicate one since Constantine was out of the city leading a campaign against Muslim invaders. The legates waited to see if Constantine would prevail, an outcome decided only in November 743, when Constantine fought his way back to the imperial throne. In the letter from the pope, which he now had in hand, the emperor learned that the papacy's policy supported

20. Theophanes, *Chronicle*, H. Turtledove, trans. (Philadelphia, 1982), pp. 100-01. According to V. Grumel, "L'annexion de l'Illyricum oriental, de la Sicile et de la Calabre au patriarcat de Constantinople. Le témoignage de Théophane le chronographe", *Recherches de science religieuse*, XL (1952), 191-200 there was no transfer of the bishoprics of the Balkans and Southern Italy at this time. The opposite opinion is held by M. V. Anastos, "The Transfer of Illyricum, Calabria, and Sicily to the Jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 732-33", *Silloge bizantina in onore di S.G.Mercati* (Rome, 1957), pp. 14-31. This is the text: "He [Leo] imposed a tribute, a head tax on each man, on the people of Sicily and Calabria. Also the patrimonies and the holy churches which were set apart for the prince of the apostles of Rome, which from ancient times brought in three and one-half talents, he commanded to be put in the public treasury...".

21. Gregory III to Antonius of Grado, in Jaffé, *Regesta*, I, 257.

the restoration of the images—hardly a surprise. The pope then petitioned Constantine to transfer the nearby estates of Nimphas and Normiae to the Roman church. The pope was obviously asking for compensation for his lost patrimonies in Sicily and Calabria. The emperor agreed to do so. Again, the fact that the pope makes no mention of the loss of the Balkan bishoprics is strange if that had actually occurred²².

In 751 the Lombard King Aistulf took Ravenna from the Byzantines. With this conquest the Ravenna exarchate forever disappeared. Apparently Emperor Constantine decided it was impossible to hold on to the city. Nevertheless in 752 Pope Stephen II, successor of Zacharias, wrote to the emperor that he should restore the images—nothing new here—but also, “that he come with his army to defend Italy and free the city of Rome and all Italy from the clutches of the Son of Iniquity (King Aistulf of the Lombards)”²³.

It is likely that it was at this moment in history, the extinguishing of the Ravenna exarchate, that the Balkan provinces finally were lost to Rome and papal jurisdiction. It was the demise of the exarchate rather than any imperial decree that made the difference. The result of the Byzantine withdrawal from Italy also meant a retreat from Dalmatia, since that province was governed from Ravenna.

These events caused Stephen II to turn to the Franks for aid against the Lombards. Pippin’s army came to the pope’s defense. Later Stephen sent a letter to Pippin to ask that he intercede with Constantine V “to regain the churches and properties taken by the Greeks”²⁴. In this correspondence the pope recognizes that his authority no longer holds sway over the Balkan churches. Illyricum, so long an integral part of the pope’s jurisdiction, was gone.

The final blow to papal authority in the Balkans paralleled the end of Byzantine power in Italy. Ravenna, capital of Dalmatia as well as Italy, was no longer the residence of an imperial official. In the upper Danubian provinces, now under Avars and Slavs, the change in jurisdiction meant little, but in the Southern Balkans, its effects were to be long lasting. The Greek bishops of these lands no longer looked to Rome, henceforth their eyes were turned to Constantinople.

If it is true that Roman jurisdiction in the Balkans collapsed at the same time as the Exarchate of Ravenna, there was no sign in the following century

22. Zacharias to Constantine V, Rome, 742 in Jaffé, *Regesta*, I, 263; Mansi, *Collectio*, XII, 1061; *Liber pontificalis*, pp. 426-35.

23. Stephen II to Constantine V, Rome, 752 in Jaffé, *Regesta*, I, 271; *Liber pontificalis*, I, 440-56.

24. Stephen II to Pippin, Rome, 757 in Jaffé, *Regesta*, I, 276; Mansi, *Collectio*, XII, 546.

that the popes were willing to give up as easily as Constantine V. Over the next hundred years the papacy sought to restore what it believed was its rightful claim to the bishoprics in Southeastern Europe.

Papal policy was active on several fronts. Once the Iconoclast Controversy ended, Rome and the imperial court were again on good terms. The popes tried hard to get the emperors to act on their behalf, but with little tangible results. The papacy's new alliance with the Franks gave them a strong ally in Western Europe. They counted upon the Frankish kings to support their claims in the Balkans. The popes were fortunate that the mission of Cyril and Methodios to Moravia and the conversion of the Bulgarians offered them two opportunities to restore Rome's position in Illyricum.

When Irene, regent for her young son Constantine VI, summoned a council to restore the icons, the major reason for estrangement between East and West appeared to dissipate. In August 785 Irene invited Pope Hadrian I to come in person to oversee the work of the bishops since, "He is the chief priest and presides in the place and chair of Peter"²⁵.

The pope responded to her in a guarded manner. He was pleased that the council should be held but did not like the way Patriarch Tarasios had been elected and his use of the hateful title 'Ecumenical Patriarch'. The pope insisted that the question of restoring his lost patrimonies be discussed when the council met²⁶.

In September 787 the II Council of Nicaea assembled and according to plan voted in favor of the icons' restoration. Despite the presence of Pope Hadrian's legates, the first to sign the conciliar decrees, all efforts to raise the issue of the patrimonies was unsuccessful. When Hadrian reported these events to Charlemagne he expressed his disappointment that no restitution had taken place. Hadrian spoke of his lost provinces "which were taken away with our patrimonies when they destroyed the sacred images"²⁷. The pope's statement may be interpreted that by this time the perception in Rome was that both bishoprics and patrimonies were lost at the same time.

Rome's good relations with the Franks brought a limited victory to the

25. Irene to Hadrian I, Constantinople, 787 in *Patrologiae cursus completus: series graeca*, J. P. Migne ed. (161 vols., Paris, 1857-66), CXXXIX, 199.

26. Hadrian I to Constantine and Irene, Rome, Oct. 26, 785 in Jaffé, *Regesta*, I, 299; Mansi, *Collectio*, XII, 1056. After demanding back all his ancient patrimonies, Hadrian also required, "that the consecration of archbishops and bishops, as tradition had established, be placed under Roman jurisdiction".

27. Hadrian I to Charlemagne, Rome, 787 in Mansi, *Collectio*, XIII, 808; Hefele, *Conciles*, III, 2, 680-81.

popes. Thanks to Charlemagne's campaigns in the East and his alliance with the Slavs in the northwest corner of the Balkans both the Slovenes and Croats joined Rome rather than Constantinople. In 788 Cacatius, prince of the Slovenes, became a Latin Christian bringing his nation under Rome's authority. Eleven years later the first Slovenian bishopric was founded. In 879 the Croats of Dalmatia took the same step when Prince Branimir joined the Latin church and a year later Pope John VIII established the first Croatian bishopric in the town of Nin²⁸.

When Cyril and Methodios made their famous journey to Moravia they honored the pope's authority by checking in with Rome to have their mission approved. The pope named Methodios bishop of Sirmium although that town had not existed for several centuries. The title was an important one since it showed that the pope still believed he, and not the patriarch, should exercise jurisdiction in the interior of Illyricum. Methodios' bishopric probably extended to all of ancient Pannonia as well as Moesia, but it was a unique event. Methodios had no successor²⁹.

After 858 one more opportunity presented itself to the papacy to regain its position in the Balkans. Nicholas I became pope in that year, a strong personality intent upon asserting Roman authority wherever and whenever it was possible. After a lapse of more than a century Nicholas sought to revive the vicariate of Thessaloniki.

In a letter of September 25, 860 the pope wrote to Ruphos, Archbishop of Thessaloniki, to confirm his responsibility to supervise the provinces which his archbishopric held since the fourth century. The pope gave Ruphos "authority to oversee and hear appeals (*curam causaque*), if any arise in Achaea, Thessaly, Old and New Epirus, Crete, Mediterranean and Riparian Dacia, Moesia, Dardania, and Praevalitana". Nicholas urged Ruphos to act to regain the papal patrimonies in Sicily and Calabria "which were given to our church and which once were our possession and which were governed by our officials"³⁰. Nicholas hoped to turn back the clock, but the pope's efforts were

28. Zdenek Vána, *The World of the Ancient Slavs* (Detroit, 1983), p. 125. It was about this time that the *Donation of Constantine* was forged by an Italian cleric anxious to support papal claims in Europe. It is interesting to think the loss of the Balkan bishoprics may have been linked to its appearance.

29. Francis Dvornik, *Les legendes de Constantin et de Method vues de Byzance* (Prague, 1933), pp. 249-83. See also P. Duthilleul, *L'évangélisation des Slaves: Cyrille et Methode* (Tournai, 1963) and Josef Bujnoch, *Zwischen Rom und Byzanz* (Graz, 1972).

30. Nicholas I to Ruphos, Rome, September 25, 860 in Jaffé, *Regesta*, I, 343; Mansi, *Collectio*, XV, 162.

frustrated by time and distance. This letter appears to be the last that a pope wrote to Thessaloniki's bishop in his capacity as Rome's vicar.

When Khan Boris of the Bulgarians decided on becoming a Christian, Nicholas was given another chance to assert the former papal jurisdiction in the Balkans. Boris, who had ruled since 852, joined forces with Ludwig II, king of the East Franks, helping him to suppress a rebellion led by one of Ludwig's sons. Afterwards, in 862, Ludwig encouraged Boris to contact the pope to send missionaries to his people.

Before that could happen a Byzantine army invaded Bulgaria while Boris was out of the country and a famine was scouring the land. Boris had no choice but to accept Greek terms for a truce and to welcome Christianity from a bishop attached to Constantinople. In 864 at his baptism by Greek clergy sent by Patriarch Photios, Boris received the name of his godfather, Emperor Michael III. The exact place and time remain unknown³¹.

As soon as Boris had a chance, however, to distance himself from Constantinople, he sent off a delegation to the Roman papacy. Its members arrived in August 866, with a letter addressed to Pope Nicholas, inquiring how the Bulgarian ruler should lead his people into the Christian faith. Boris had 106 questions to ask. The Bulgarian khan sent a gift to the pope. These were the arms he had used fighting the pagan tribes along the Danube³².

According to the *Liber pontificalis* the pope was delighted to receive word from the Bulgarian prince. He appointed Paul, bishop of Populonia and Formosus, bishop of Porto, to go to Ochrid and meet with the Bulgarian ruler³³.

The delegation set off at a bad time. Photios who held the patriarchate in Constantinople, was considered by Rome a usurper and illegally holding office so long as his displaced predecessor Ignatios lived. Photios was no friend of the Roman papacy. He was convinced the Latin church had defected from the true Christian tradition in many ways, especially in its toleration of the *filio-que* clause in the Creed. He was prepared to do battle with the pope for the Bulgarians' allegiance.

31. Hincmar of Reims, *Annales* in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum*, XII, 465. In the account of Anastasius the Librarian Boris was baptized by a Latin priest, *Patrologiae cursus completus: series latina*. J. P. Migne, ed. (221 vols., Paris, 1844-64), CXXIX, 875; Matthew Spinka, *A History of Christianity in the Balkans* (New York, 1933, rep. 1968), pp. 32 ff.

32. Hincmar, *Annales*, 866. Emperor Ludwig, then at Beneventum, asked the pope to give him the arms that Boris sent. The pope agreed he should have some, but not all of the treasure. See Mann, *History*, III, 12.

33. *Liber pontificalis*, II, 164; *Patrologiae: series latina*, CIX, 978-1017.

When Paul and Formosus reached Bulgaria they delivered a communication from Nicholas. In it the pope stressed that there were only three original, authentic patriarchates: Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch. Constantinople's patriarch was a late comer, a junior member of the chiefs of the church, whose authority was more the result of imperial favor than ecclesiastical right. The pope sent Boris several liturgical books, a manuscript containing the canons of the Roman church as well as answers to the Bulgarian khan's 106 questions. Nicholas promised to send Boris a bishop to settle in Bulgaria at once and later, after the church was well established, an archbishop complete with papal pallium³⁴.

Boris was impressed; he ordered the Greek clergy in Bulgaria to leave. He then sent off a letter to Nicholas, "The primates and all the Bulgarian nation should know that from this day forward I am the servant of God and blessed Peter and his representative". He asked Nicholas to appoint Formosus archbishop of the Bulgarians³⁵.

After their success in Bulgaria the Latin delegates sought to report to the emperor in Constantinople on what had occurred. As they approached the border crossing between Bulgaria and the Empire a Byzantine official barred the way. He hurled threats at the Latins, struck their horses and shouted, "Our emperor thinks you have no business here". Finding it impossible to move forward, the Latins returned to Bulgaria and thence journeyed back to Rome³⁶.

When Patriarch Photios learned that the Bulgarians had turned away from Constantinople, he dispatched a letter to the patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch complaining, "Wild beasts have come from the West destroying the Lord's vineyard in Bulgaria"³⁷. Another letter was dispatched to the Bulgarian ruler with a list of charges against the Latins. He told Boris how chrism in the Roman church was made from river water and how at Easter the Latins continued to sacrifice a lamb just like the Jews. He noted that the Roman priests wore no beards and deacons moved from their office to the bishopric without priestly ordination. He concluded that Bulgaria lay within Con-

34. Nicholas to Boris, Rome, in Jaffé, *Regesta*, I, 360; Mansi, *Collectio*, XV, 401.

35. This account follows Anastasius the Librarian, Preface, in Migne, *Patrologiae: series latina*, CXXIX, 20. Formosus was not well liked in Rome. He died in exile at the court of the Frankish King, Charles the Bald.

36. So it was reported in Nicholas I's letter to Hincmar, Rome, Migne, *Patrologiae: series latina*, CLII, 1152; *Liber pontificalis*, II, 165.

37. Photios to the patriarchs, Constantinople, in Migne, *Patrologiae: series graeca*, CII, 722.

stantinople's jurisdiction since "the privileges of the Roman church were transferred along with the imperial". Photios' remark alludes to the fourth century grant of Illyricum to the Eastern part of the Empire during the rule of Emperor Honorius³⁸.

Meanwhile upon the return of his Bulgarian delegates to Rome, Pope Nicholas received their news with satisfaction. However he did not want to appoint Formosus to Bulgaria since he already held an Italian diocese. The pope was incensed when he learned of the treatment of the Latin clerics when they attempted to reach Constantinople. Nicholas made a report to Bishop Hincmar of Reims in a letter of October 867. After telling of the legates' rebuff, the pope noted, "There is no doubt that they (the Greeks) consider the people living in this region to be their subjects. They want no interference from legates of the Apostolic See seeking to promote the faith and church tradition...". The pope professes to be shocked at the Greeks' belligerent attitude towards Rome³⁹.

By the time Nicholas composed this letter Photios had already called a synod in Constantinople which excommunicated the pope and severed relations with Rome. This had little effect since Nicholas had died in late 867. A few weeks later Photios himself was ousted due to a palace coup which brought Basil I to the throne in Constantinople.

Just before his death Nicholas was in the process of preparing a second embassy to go to Bulgaria. It was left to his successor, Hadrian II, to confirm its members, two bishops and several priests. Hadrian shared the opinion of Pope Nicholas that Formosus should not return to Bulgaria. Once the Latin clerics of this new delegation reached Bulgaria the khan gave them a cool reception. Boris was upset that Formosus, his friend, had not returned nor was anyone in the embassy of a rank that suited the Bulgarian. Perceiving he had been insulted by Rome, Boris told the mission's head, Subdeacon Silvester, to leave the country⁴⁰.

Meanwhile in Constantinople Emperor Basil I had restored the former patriarch, Ignatios, and invited Pope Hadrian to send legates to the capital to oversee a synod called to restore those bishops whom his predecessor Photios had dismissed. A papal delegation was dispatched and when it reached

38. Photios to Boris, 865, Constantinople, in Migne, *Patrologiae: series graeca*, CII, 72.

39. Nicholas I to Hincmar, Rome, Oct. 23, 867 in Jaffé, *Regesta*, I, 367; Mansi, *Collectio*, XV, 355.

40. This account follows Anastasius the Librarian, Preface, in Migne, *Patrologiae: series latina*, CXXIX, 19.

Thessaloniki received an official honor guard which escorted it for the rest of the journey to Constantinople.

Here the synod duly performed as expected: Photios was deposed and his activities annulled. Then an unexpected event occurred. Just as the bishops were completing their work ambassadors of Khan Boris arrived from Bulgaria, announcing that their ruler was now ready to accept the Christian faith of the Greeks. Emperor Basil agreed to the khan's request and Patriarch Ignatios consecrated an archbishop for the Bulgarians. When this bishop reached the country, he ordered the few Latin clergy remaining in Bulgaria to leave⁴¹.

To add injury to insult, on their journey to Rome the papal legates were captured by Slavic pirates and imprisoned. All their luggage, including the documents concluded at the synod, was taken. When at last they were freed and safely back in Rome they told the pope of their trials. Pope Hadrian fired off a letter to Basil complaining of his failure to provide his ambassadors sufficient security. The pope expressed his outrage at the consecration of a Greek bishop for Bulgaria and threatened Basil that if he were not withdrawn the khan faced excommunication⁴².

When John VIII followed Hadrian in the papacy in December 872 he continued to press Rome's case in the Balkans. In a series of letters addressed to Ochrid and Constantinople John insisted that the Bulgarians were linked to Rome. In 872 he wrote Khan Boris that he should remember that Rome alone represented the universal church. The "perfidious Greeks" now in his country should be regarded as trespassers. Another dispatch followed. The pope told Boris that to receive sacraments from the Greeks placed him in schism from Rome and one more time threatened excommunication. John also let Constantinople know that Bulgaria was within his authority. It had been converted by Roman legates and that a problem existed due to Patriarch Ignatios who, "not content with the limits of his own diocese, has brashly invaded the Roman jurisdiction"⁴³.

Despite the pope's protests the Greeks remained in Bulgaria; the eastern presence was afterwards confirmed through the missionary efforts of Clement of Ochrid and Nahum. Moreover the Serbian Zhupan, Mutimir, asked Con-

41. Mann, *Lives*, III, 240 ff.

42. Hadrian to Basil, Rome, Nov. 10, 871 in Jaffé, *Regesta*, I, 374; Mansi, *Collectio*, XVI, 206.

43. John VIII to Boris, Rome, 872, and 874; John VIII to Basil I, Rome, 874 to 875 in Jaffé, *Regesta*, I, 377, 382, 383.

stantinople to send his nation missionaries linking one more Balkan people to Constantinople's authority rather than Rome's. By 900 Eastern and a good portion of Western Illyricum was definitely under Constantinople's patriarchate.

The perception of the Greeks in Constantinople is found in a contemporary document, the *Notitia*. In it the author points out, "These provinces have been attached to the synod of Constantinople because barbarians overwhelmed the rule of the Roman pope". A parallel situation was noted with Seleucia of Isauria's position under the Arabs⁴⁴.

Possibly Balkan geography had more to do with Constantinople's final victory than anything else. The Bulgarians and Serbians lived closer to Constantinople than Rome. Greek clergy supported by the emperor could reach them more easily. On the other hand the pope's success with the Slovenes and Croatians in Dalmatia can also be seen as a result of proximity to centers of Roman influence. Writing in the tenth century Constantine Porphyrogenitus says as much, "Dalmatia is a country in Italy"⁴⁵.

The struggle between popes and patriarchs to control the southern Balkans finally comes to an end with the Bulgarian and Serbian conversion. The centuries old battle was decided against the popes despite all their efforts to preserve what they believed to be legitimately theirs.

The failure of papal policy to hold on to the territory of Illyricum in the ninth and tenth centuries had far reaching results. It contributed to the 'Balkanization' of Southeastern Europe, strengthening the divisions rather than the unifying forces among the people who still live in that part of the world.

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44. *Notitia I* in Hierocles *Synecdemus et Notitiae graecae episcopatum*, 74, Gustav Parthey, ed. (Berlin, 1866) p. 124 and list, pp. 6-17. See also Nilus Doxapatrios, *Taxis ton Patriarchikon Thronon*, in *Synecdemus* p. 294. Writing in the mid-twelfth century Doxapatrios affirms, "Sicily, Calabria, and Sancta Severina were annexed to the throne of Constantinople since the barbarians made it impossible for the Roman popes to rule them". *Notitia I* was written by an Armenian cleric of the ninth century. It is the first official document to speak of the transfer of the Illyrian bishoprics to Constantinople.

45. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De thematibus*, IX, in A. Pertusi, ed., (Vatican City, 1952), p. 94.