

Proposal for the 3rd MMHN Conference

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Gazmouloi, Tzakones and Prosalentai: last elite marine troops of Byzantium, a proposed reconstruction of dress and equipment.

The last centuries of the Roman army of Byzantium were a very intriguing period, characterized by the continuous efforts of the central authority, in the middle of the chaos of the civil wars and of the centrifuge tendency of the last Roman elites, to structure and re-organize their military resources against the constant menaces of Latins, Franks, Venetians, Slavs, Bulgarians and Turks. Although the military power of the Empire was now a shadow of the previous period, some elite unities raised by the Palaeologian Emperors show themselves highly effective and able to stand and confront with success the external enemies, as well as participated in the dramatic changes of powers and Palace coups of this very convulse period.

After the reconquest of Constantinople in 1261 AD Michael VIII rebuild a strong naval maritime power, able to stand the menaced military expedition of Charles D'Anjou, to balance the mastership of the Venetian and Genoese sailors and to coordinate the wide range naval operations of the resurrected Empire of the Palaeologians. This great Fleet, described by Gregoras and Pachymeres, was the most important and huge of the 13th century Byzantium. It was posed under the order of Alexios Philanthrôpènos, stationed in the Provinces and commanded by the regional doukes. The Emperor created, among the others, three military divisions: the Gasmouloi, the Marine Tzakones and the Prosalentai.

These regiments, that continued to exist as military bodies for generations, were assigned to the navy, organised into a number of military group or divisions and posed under the command of Lochagoi, Tagmatarchai, Komètés and Navarchoi.

The first contingent of soldiers for the fleet was sought and obtained by Michael VIII from the ferocious Gasmouloi, who originated from the region around Byzantium and lived in and around the City, but that are said by him to have been resettled also from the Peloponnese in the 1260s.

To provide further manpower for his new fleet, the Emperor, through distribution of largesses and investing huge amounts of money, transported to Byzantium, in 1261 or early 1262, also families of Tzakones from the region of Lakonia and Monemvasia, assigning them special regions in the city and enlisting the men in his new fleet.

The third group enlisted by Michael VIII for his new fleet were native Romans, probably smallholding soldiers, called Prosalentai. They were employed as rowers, remiges.

The new marine soldiers were ethnically considered as belonging to the same race of the Rhomaioi, i.e. Greek-speakers, embracing Orthodox Christianity, following the uses, the dressed and the customs of the Empire's citizens, so culturally indistinguishable by the other Romans. The marine Tzakones and the Gasmouloi were at the same time half-breeds serving as mercenaries in the army, and their military accoutrement should have been influenced both from Byzantium both from the Latins.

CV

Raffaele D'Amato is born in Bagnolo Piemonte in November 1964, the 18th. After having worked, contextually to the studies in University, as Director of the Civic Library in Torre Pellice (Torino, Italy), has achieved his Law Diplom in Romano-Byzantine Law, nearby the University of Turin, in 1993, with the thesis "Gregorio Magno ed il Diritto Romano alla luce del Registrum Epistularum (Gregory the Great and the Roman Law at the light of the Registrum Epistularium)", with the Professor Fausto Gorla.

Although he was for 10 years responsible of the Legal Office of a Foreigner Worldwide Company in Italy in the field of the Express-Transport, his passion for history and archaeology, mainly in the military field and in the domain of the material culture, has brought him to collaborate with several prestigious magazines in Italy and outside, for which he has written many articles, together with his active collaboration with Historical and Archaeological Institutes and Italian and Foreigner Universities.

Searcher of history and archaeology, Raffaele D'Amato has gone deeply inside the field of the history and of the military archaeology, through continuous learning and updating travels outside Italy, particularly in Egypt, Turkey, Balkans and Greece, through his participation to conferences and studies and through visiting, together with scholars and specialists in the sector, the most recent fields of archaeological research in the topics of his interest, as those still in act at Yenikapi, Istanbul. Apart from the necessary knowledge of the ancient and medieval Greek and Latin, he speaks and writes currently in English, French and German, while he knows at elementary level the modern Greek and Polish, that he is learning together with the Turkish and the Serbo-Croatian.

Actually he has published, with Italian and foreign worldwide publishers, various books on the weaponry in the Greek Bronze Age, in the Antiquity and Dark Ages, with reference to the weapons and clothing of Greeks and Romans.

In 2006 he collaborated with the University of Bologna, department of Ravenna, under the supervision of Dr. Andrea Augenti, to the set up the exhibition "Santi, Banchieri e Re (Saints, Bankers and Kings)", like curator of the archaeological reconstruction of the Late-Antique clothing in Ravenna in 6th cent. AD, and the publication of the related article on the catalogue of the exhibition.

Always in 2006 he has stirred up, together with the Archeoclub of Crecchio, in collaboration with the Dr. Andrea Rosario Staffa of Soprintendenza Archeologica dell'Abruzzo, the exhibition "The Bizantines in war" at the Museo dell'Abruzzo Bizantino ed Altomedioevale, Crecchio, between the 21 and 22 July 2006, and he has been preparing the exhibition of 2009.

Actually he is working in collaboration with the Professor Taxiarchis Koliadis of the Hellenic Centre of Byzantine Studies in the Athens University, and with the Professor Giorgio Ravegnani of University of Venezia, upon various projects linked to the armament of the Byzantine Period. In the same time he is finishing his work upon the Roman weaponry and clothing from Romulus to Justinian the Great, in III volumes, the first of whose will be forthcoming in June 2009.

Contextually he has consolidated his relations with the archaeological world of the Balkans, in particular with the professor Ivanisevic of the Beograd Archaeological Institute, with whom is

preparing a very wide project upon the site, recently excavated, of Caricin Grad (Justiniana Prima).

He is at the same time curator of the Romano-Byzantine artefacts of the Museum of the man in Orlando, Florida.

He is actually working as juridical consultant of ON. Marco Calgaro, member of Italian Parliament and representative of ON. Enrico Letta in Piemonte, and as manager of the OFFICINA DELLA STORIA SAS, a society of historical-archaeological consultancy, which deals with all the business and the activities linked to archaeology and history.

It is also President of the Association ONLUS ROMEI, whose purpose is the development and diffusion of the study of the material culture of Rome and Byzantium.

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