

## Chapter 1.2.2. Heraclius and his dynasty (610-717): Internal reform and struggle for survival

Period: end of the 6th - early 7th century

Internal and external crisis of Byzantium

### A. What were the causes and effects of the internal crisis of Byzantium?

Causes: Plagues, bad harvests due to heavy winters, natural disasters (earthquakes).

Effects:

- a. Abandonment or decline of cities.
- b. Population decline.
- c. Decline of trade.
- d. Curtailment of currency circulation.
- e. Neglect of the army.

### B. What were the causes and the outcome of the external crisis of Byzantium?

Causes: Invasions of enemies on the territory of the empire -> Slavs, Persians (reached the Bosphorus).

Outcome: Need for radical reform to prevent destruction.

### C. How was the counterattack of Heraclius organized and what were its results?

- a. Heraclius also became the head of the army (general-emperor).
- b. He reorganized the army with the economic assistance of the church.
- c. He campaigned against the Persians, defeated them at Nineveh (627) and regained all Byzantine provinces in the Near East.
- d. He defeated the Avars and Slavs in 626, when in agreement with the Persians they besieged Constantinople (626).
- e. He gave a religious character to the campaigns, since the Persians had taken the Holy Cross.
- f. The successes were temporary:
- g. Recovery of all Byzantine provinces (Near East).
- h. Recovery of the Holy Cross - triumphant return.

### D. What were the themes (θέματα)?

- a. The themes were administrative regions with their own army and were headed by the general.
- b. They were applied by the successors of Heraclius in the 7th century in Asia Minor.
- c. They aimed to better deal with the Arab conquests.
- d. They spread to the European provinces towards the end of the 7th century.

### E. How did the thematic army function?

- a. It consisted of free farmers.
- b. It replaced the old mercenary armies.
- c. It became a kind of national army.

- d. It proved to be extremely effective for the defense of the empire.
- e. It was maintained by the military camps.
- f. It was administered by the general of the theme.

F. What were the στρατιωτόπια?

- They were estates granted by the state to the farmer-soldiers.
- With their income, the soldiers:
  - a. Maintained their families.
  - b. Bought their armament.
  - c. Covered the costs of the campaigns.

G. What were the duties of the general of the theme?

- a. The military and political administration of the provinces, which were previously exercised by different persons, were now combined in the person of the general.
- b. The general exercised the supreme authority within the limits of the theme.

H. How was the Hellenization of the state administration completed and what does this development signify?

- a. Establishment of Greek as the official language.
- b. Establishment of Greek titles instead of Roman.
- c. Establishment of the title: "βασιλεύς, πιστός ἐν Χριστῷ" (Heraclius).
- > This development signifies in a symbolic level the definitive end of the Roman Empire and the beginning of the medieval Greek Byzantine Empire.

**Exercises:**

- A. Explain the terms:

plague/famine, Bosphorus, Near East, Avars, Arabs, radical reform, themes, mercenary army, equipment, military camps, Hellenization.

- B. Find the correct answer.

- Στρατιωτόπια were:

- estates that the Byzantine Empire granted to Gothic mercenaries to guard the borders in the West.
- estates where the Ostrogothic soldiers grazed their flocks.
- estates that the Byzantine state granted to free farmers in exchange for military service.
- estates that the Byzantine Empire granted to its Persian mercenaries because they were excellent warriors.

- Constantinople was besieged in 626 by:

- the Avars and Arabs in agreement with the Persians.
- the Greeks and Persians in agreement with the Goths.
- the Avars and Slavs in agreement with the Persians.
- the Greeks and Slavs in agreement with the Persians.

- C. Characterize the following statements as correct (C) or incorrect (I). Correct any errors.
  - The campaigns of Heraclius had a commercial character.
  - The military successes of Heraclius lasted for many centuries after.
  - The thematic army was in some way national.
  - The Battle of Nineveh took place in 527.
  - Heraclius was both king and commander-in-chief of the army.
  - The themes were fields that were granted to the peasant warriors.
  - The Avars and Arabs are the same people.
  - With the process of Hellenization, the Greek titles became Roman.
  - The thematic army had no income, lived and was equipped with looting.
  - Heraclius adopted the title "king".
  
- D. Search for biographical information about Heraclius and write a common paragraph of 70-100 words with these elements in your groups.