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BYZANTIUM AND THE
HERITAGE OF EUROPE:
CONNECTING THE
CULTURES

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THE PERCEPTION OF JUSTINIAN I IN THE EARLY MEDIEVAL LATIN WEST

Abstract: The paper aims at presenting and analyzing the information about Emperor Justinian I derived from selected historical works (histories and chronicles) by writers of the early medieval Latin West from the late 6th to the 11th centuries. The intention is to examine what the writers have to say about Justinian in their respective narratives and to define what image of the emperor they created from the sources at their disposal and consequently wanted to convey to their respective audiences and posterity. An effort is also made to discern the writers' method with handling the sources from which they extracted the information about Justinian for their own respective accounts of the past, see what interested them most and determine the possible reasons why they included or excluded certain type of information. With regard to that, it is also explored if and to what extent the later writers simply took the information *verbatim* from the earlier writers, only perpetuating the image already created by their predecessor(s).

As one of the pivotal personalities from the history of the Christian Roman Empire, Justinian I had a prominent place in the collective imaginary of the medieval Christians in the East. A detailed historiographic study, deriving from a comprehensive analysis of pictorial and written sources of various genres, has shown that the Byzantines remembered the emperor as a champion of orthodoxy and a zealous builder who erected the famous Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, a renown lawgiver and a great conqueror.¹ There is no such study for Justinian's perception in the medieval Latin West, even though one recent paper has offered elucidating remarks, especially with regard to Justinian's image in Dante's *Divine Comedy*.² It has also been inferred that Justinian enjoyed good reputation in the (later medieval) West that rested on the same three pillars as in the East: the building of Hagia Sophia, the codification of laws, and the military conquests, and it may very well be that the interest for the emperor was revived after the West rediscovered Justinian's laws in the late 11th century.³ This paper is designed to be a contribution to the study of the perception of the past in the early Middle Ages based on the analysis of the information that the early medieval Latin narrative sources provide about Emperor Justinian I.⁴

1 Cf. Günter Prinzing, „Das Bild Justinins I. in der Überlieferung der Byzantiner vom 7. bis 15. Jahrhundert,“ in *Fontes Minores VII*, ed. Dieter Simon, *Forschungen zur Byzantinischen Rechtsgeschichte*, vol. 14 (Frankfurt a. Main: Löwenklau Gesellschaft e.V., 1986), 1-99, vii-xi.

2 Daniel Hernández San José, „The Perception of Justinian in the Latin West: Considerations from Dante's Works“, available at http://www.eens.org/EENS_congresses/2014/hernandez-san-jose_daniel.pdf (accessed 18 March 2016).

3 Krijna Nelly Ciggar, *Western travellers to Constantinople. The West and Byzantium, 962-1204: Cultural and Political Relations*, The Medieval Mediterranean. Peoples, Economies and Cultures, 400-1453, vol. 10 (Leiden-New York-Köln: E.J. Brill, 1996), 98-99, with n. 55, where it is suggested that „a study of Justinian's reputation as builder, legislator, theologian and conquerer in Western sources, Latin and vernacular, could be very interesting“.

4 On the perception of the past in the early Middle Ages with regard to the Roman history, see Paolo Chiesa, „Storia romana e libri di storia romana fra ix e xi secolo“, in *Roma antica nel Medioevo. Mito, rappresentazioni, sopravvivenze nella 'Respublica Christiana' de secoli IX-XIII. Atti della quattordicesima Settimana internazionale di studio Mendola, 24-28 agosto 1998* (Milano: V&P università, 2001), 231-258; Marek Thue Kretschmer, *Rewriting Roman History in the Middle Ages. The 'Historia Romana' and the Manuscript Bamberg, Hist. 3*, *Mittelaltersche Studien und Texte*, vol. 36 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2007); Rosamund McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); *Idem, Perceptions of Past in the Early Middle Ages*, The Conway Lectures in

Sources and method

This study offers an examination of selected histories and chronicles dating from the late sixth to the late eleventh centuries. Of histories, these are Gregory of Tours' *Decem libri historiarum* (late 6th c.),⁵ Isidore of Seville's *Historia de regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum* (c. 624),⁶ the *Liber Pontificalis* (mid-7th c.),⁷ Paul the Deacon's *Historia Romana* and *Historia Langobardorum* (late 8th c.),⁸ and Agnellus of Ravenna's *Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis* (mid-9th c.).⁹ As for chronicles, the examination includes Isidore of Seville's *Chronica maiora* (c. 625),¹⁰ Bede the Venerable's *Chronica maiora* (725),¹¹ Hermann of Reichenau's *Chronicon* (1054),¹² and Marianus Scotus of Mainz's *Chronicon* (c. 1082).¹³ Interestingly, Justinian is almost completely absent from Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, even though the emperor is mentioned in Bede's *Chronicle*.¹⁴

Medieval Studies 2004 (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006); *Idem*, „Roman texts and Roman history in the early Middle Ages“, in Claudia Bolgia, Rosamond McKitterick, and John Osborne (eds), *Rome Across Time and Space. Cultural Transmission and the Exchange of Ideas c. 500-1400* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 19-34; *Idem*, „The pleasures of the past: history and identity in the early Middle Ages“, in Rosamund McKitterick (ed.), *Being Roman After Rome*, in *Early Medieval Europe* 22.4 (2014), 388-405; *Idem*, „Transformations of the Roman past and Roman identity in the early Middle Ages“, in Clemens Gartner, Rosamond McKitterick and Sven Meeder (eds), *The Resources of the Past in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 225-244.

5 *Gregorii Turonensis Opera, Pars prior: Libri historiarum X*, ed. Bruno Kursch and Wilhelm Levison, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum, vol. 1.1 (Hannover: Hahn, 1951; repr. 1982).

6 *Isidori Iunioris episcopi Hispalensis Historia Gothorum Wandalorum Sueborum ad a. DCXXIV*, ed. Theodor Mommsen, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi, vol. 11, Chronica minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII., vol. 2 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1894), 241-303 (repr. 1981).

7 *Gesta pontificum Romanorum: Liber Pontificalis. Pars prior*, ed. Theodor Mommsen, Monumenta Germaniae Historica (Berlin: Weidmann, 1898); *Le Liber pontificalis*, vols. 1-2, ed. Louis Duchesne, Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome. Sér. 2, t. 3.1-2 (Paris: Ernest Thorin, 1886-1892; repr. Paris: de Boccard, 1955), with vol. 3, *Additions et corrections de Mgr. L. Duchesne, avec l'histoire du Liber pontificalis depuis l'édition de L. Duchesne, une bibliographie et des tables général*, ed. Cyrille Vogel (Paris: de Boccard, 1957). The second edition of the collection of papal biographies which contains the ones relevant for this study seems to have been first compiled by 546 and then continued around 640. Cf. Raymond Davis, „Introduction“, in *The Book of Pontiffs (Liber Pontificalis). The Ancient Biographies of First Ninety Roman Bishops to AD 715*, revised edition, translated with introduction and notes by Raymond Davis, Translated Text for Historians, vol. 6 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), xlv-xlvii.

8 *Pauli Historia Langobardorum*, ed. Ludwig Bethmann and Georg Waitz, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum saec. VI-IX (Hannover: Hahn, 1878), 12-219 (repr. 1988) (= Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi, vol. 48); *Pauli Historia Romana*, ed. Hans Droysen, in *Eutropii Breviarium ab urbe condita eum versionibus Graecis et Pauli Landolfique additamentis*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi, vol. 2 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1879), 4-182 (repr. 1978) (= Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi, vol. 49).

9 *Agnelli qui et Andreas liber pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis*, ed. Otto Holder-Egger, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum saec. VI-IX (Hannover: Hahn, 1878), 265-391 (repr. 1988).

10 *Isidori Iunioris episcopi Hispalensis Chronica maiora*, ed. Theodor Mommsen, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi, vol. 11, Chronica minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII., vol. 2 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1894), 391-481 (repr. 1981).

11 *Bedae chronica maiora ad a. 725, eiusdem chronica minora ad a. 703*, ed. Theodor Mommsen, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores antiquissimi, vol. 13, Chronica minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII., vol. 3 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1898), 223-354 (repr. 1981).

12 *Herimanni Augiensis chronicon a. 1-1054*, ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz, Scriptores (in Folio), vol. 5, Annales et chronica aevi Salici (Hannover: Hahn, 1844), 67-133 (repr. 1985).

13 *Mariani Scotti chronicon a. 1-1082*, ed. Georg Waitz, Scriptores (in Folio), vol. 5, Annales et chronica aevi Salici (Hannover: Hahn, 1844), 481-568 (repr. 1985).

14 Justinian was passed over by Bede in the Ecclesiastical History of the English People except for a minor notice that Justin II succeeded Justinian in the Empire (3.4). Editions: Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People, ed. Roger A. B. Mynors, transl. Bertram Colgrave (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969, reprint with corrections 1992); Histoire ecclésiastique du peuple anglais, ed. Michael Lapidge, transl. Pierre Monat and Philippe Robin (Paris: Cerf, 2005); Storia degli inglesi - Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum, ed. Michael Lapidge, transl. Paolo Chiesa (Milano: Fondazione Valla-Arnoldo Mondadori, 2009).

The selected sources are taken as representative for the early medieval historical writing and indicative of the knowledge and perceptions about Emperor Justinian I that were disseminated in the medieval Latin West. The examination is centred around types of information that can be found in the selected sources, how the writers formed their respective narratives about Justinian, and what image of the emperor they wanted to communicate to or perpetuate in the eyes of their readership and the posterity. Since this paper is but a preliminary study with an obvious purpose to provide a glimpse of how Justinian was or may have been viewed in the early medieval West, it makes no pretensions to exhaustiveness or conclusiveness.

For the purpose of this examination, the types of information about Justinian derived from selected sources are classified in several groups: imperial titles and offices; chronological information; family and friends; wars and campaigns; religious matters; legislative and building activities; Justinian's person and rule.

Imperial titles and offices

The examined sources show the use of customary imperial titles and designations in relation to Justinian: *imperator* (*The Book of Pontiffs*, 58, 59, 60, 61; Gregory of Tours, *Histories*, 3.32, 4.40; Isidore of Seville, *History of the Goths, Vandals and Suevi*; Agnellus of Ravenna, *The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, 66, 70, 74; Hermann of Reichenau, *Chronicle*, 532, 533; Marianus Scotus, *Chronicle*, 555, 557, 559), *Augustus* (*The Book of Pontiffs*, 58, 59, 60; Isidore of Seville, *Chronicle*, 402; Paul the Deacon, *The History of the Longobards*, 1.25; Paul the Deacon, *The Roman History*, 1.Praefatio, 16.11, 16.23; Agnellus of Ravenna, *The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, 70, 74, 85, 86, 90; Hermann of Reichenau, *Chronicle*, 527, 534, 535, 536, 538, 545, 547, 548, 552; Marianus Scotus, *Chronicle*, 547, 548, 554), and *princeps* (*The Book of Pontiffs*, 59, 61; Paul the Deacon, *The History of the Longobards*, 2.4, 6.14; Paul the Deacon, *The Roman History*, 16.23).

One source is particularly sensitive to the official titulature, *The Book of Pontiffs*, which is quite understandable considering the source's background. Justinian is called *imperator Augustus* (58), *domnus Augustus* (59), *imperator domnus Augustus* (59), *domnus imperator* (60), and *domnus Augustus* (60). The only other source that tries to be more precise about the imperial titulature is Agnellus of Ravenna's *Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, calling Justinian *imperator augustus* once (74). On the other hand, Bede the Venerable refers to Justinian solely by his name and never employs imperial titles for him. Of other offices related to emperors, Marianus Scotus' *Chronicle* mentions three Justinian's consulates, one before he had become emperor (542) and his first two as emperor (549, 554), and they are used as a chronological device to date events.

Chronological information

Justinian, his regnal years and the period of his rule are often employed in the selected sources to date events either approximately or to a specific year. Excluding general chronological phrases, the examples mentioning Justinian include following expressions: *anno imperii Iustiniani* (Isidore of Seville, *History of the Goths, Vandals and Suevi*, 40-41, 44-45, 47); *huius* (sc. *Iustiniani*) *temporibus* (Paul the Deacon, *The History of the Longobards*, 1.25); *sub Iustiniano principe* (Paul the Deacon, *The History of the Longobards*, 6.14); *ad Iustiniani Augusti tempora* (Paul the Deacon, *The Roman History*, 1.Praefatio), *ad Iustiniani usque tempora* (Paul the Deacon, *The Roman History*, 15.7), *temporibus Iustiniani* (Agnellus of Ravenna, *The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, 66); *ab hoc anno, scilicet Iustiniani imperatoris sexto* (Hermann of Reichenau, *Chronicle*, 532); *huius Iustiniani tempore* (Hermann of Reichenau, *Chronicle*, 542); *sub quo* (sc. *Iustiniano*) (Marianus Scotus, *Chronicle*, 548); 6. *anno Iustiniani* (Marianus Scotus, *Chronicle*, 554); 18. (sc. *anno Iustiniani*) (Marianus Scotus, *Chronicle*, 566).

A number of sources indicate the length of Justinian's reign, the beginning and the end of his rule or his place in the regnal list of Roman emperors. There are discrepancies that may be explained by various traditions that were followed by writers and by their method of calculation (as for dating, rounding the years or using or not the Roman manner of inclusive counting, and as for the Roman emperors, using different regnal lists). Bede the Venerable (*Chronicle*, 515) and Marianus Scotus (*Chronicle*, 548) have Justinian ruled for 38 years, with an addition by the latter chronicler that Justinian's reign lasted until 1 January of the 552nd year of the Passion. Hermann of Reichenau (*Chronicle*, 564) says that Justinian died in the 38th year of his reign, while Agnellus of Ravenna mentions that the emperor died in the 40th year of his reign (*The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, 90), both of them naming Constantinople as the place of his death. Particularly worth noting is the approach taken by Isidore of Seville (*Chronicle*, 397). In the earlier redaction of his chronicle he has Justinian occupying the throne for 39 years. However, in the later redaction he changed the reign length to 40 years.¹⁵ His source of information was Victor of Tunnuna whose chronicle was organized according to the chronology of Roman consuls, but switched to Justinian's regnal years for the last entries.¹⁶ There Isidore read that Justinian ruled, as 52nd Roman emperor, for 39 years and seven months (Victor of Tunnuna, *Chronicle*, a. 527). However, the very last entries in Victor of Tunnuna's *Chronicle* are dated as *XL imperii sui* (sc. *Iustiniani*) *anno*, and the chronicler recorded Justinian's death under this date, which may have finally tipped Isidore in favor of 40 years as Justinian's reign length after he first seems to have rounded down the reign length to 39 years. Isidore perhaps influenced Agnellus of Ravenna, whereas Bede the Venerable, Hermann of Reichenau and Marianus Scotus may have simply calculated the reign length in full years.

For Paul the Deacon, Justinian began his reign as the 49th Roman emperor in the 529th year of the Lord's incarnation (*The History of the Romans*, 16.11), and for Marinus Scottus, Justinian started his reign in 527 according to Dionysius' reckoning and ruled for five years until the first year of the Dionysian cycle, which is the 248th year from Diocletian and the 532nd year of the Lord's incarnation (*Chronicle*, 554), and was the 59th emperor of the Romans (*Chronicle*, 548). Marianus Scotus actually inserted the entry on the start of Justinian's reign under the year 526, saying that Justin made Justinian emperor four months before his death (*Chronicle*, 548). Hermann of Reichenau did the same, without additional chronological information and noting that Justin made Justinian his co-ruler and successor (*Chronicle*, 526). Finally, Gregory of Tours mentions Justinian's death in Constantinople as a chronological point to mark the start of Justin II's reign (*Histories*, 4.40). Incidentally, this is the only instance in which Justinian is referred to by name in Gregory of Tour's historical work.

Family and friends

Some selected sources offer information about Justinian's family ties. Bede Venerable (*Chronicle*, 515) and Paul the Deacon (*The Roman History*, 16.11) mention that Justinian was son of Emperor Justin's sister, and Agnellus of Ravenna (*The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, 96) says that Justin II was Justinian's nephew.¹⁷ Understandably, Empress Theodora attracted much attention, even though she does not figure in all selected sources and is never directly referred to as Justinian's wife (this information can be found in Victor of Tunnuna, a. 527). She is mentioned in *The Book of Pontiffs* (60.6-7, 61.1-7) and by Paul the Deacon (*The*

15 Cf. Sam Koon and Jamie Wood, „The *Chronica Maiora* of Isidore of Seville. An introduction and translation“, *e-Spania. Revue interdisciplinaire d'études hispaniques médiévales et modernes* 6 décembre 2008, n. 173, available at <https://e-spania.revues.org/15552> (accessed 27 March 2016).

16 Victoris Tonnennensis episcopi *Chronica a. ccccxlv-dlxvii*, ed. Theodor Mommsen, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi*, vol. 11, *Chronica minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII.*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1894), 184-206 (repr. 1981).

17 In some instances sources mistake Justin II for Justinian I (*The Book of Pontiffs*, 63.3; Paul the Deacon, *The History of the Longobards*, 2.5; Agnellus of Ravenna, *The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, 96).

Roman History, 15.18), Agnellus of Ravenna (*The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, 62) and Marianus Scotus (*Chronicle*, 557, 575), but is passed over by Gregory of Tours, Isidore of Seville, Bede the Venerable and Hermann of Reichenau.

Particularly interesting is a singular entry by Hermann of Reichenau (*Chronicle*, 527) who explicitly calls Belisarius a friend of Justinian's (*amicus suus*), whom the emperor makes chief of the army (*princeps militiae*). It is likely that this assertion of friendship rests upon a tale known from the so-called *Chronicle of Fredegar* (7th c.) and Aimoin of Fleury's *History of the Franks* (10th/11th c.).¹⁸ Both sources speak of Justinian's and Belisarius' being close friends: Justinian, count of letters (*comex cartarum*: Fredegar), or head of an imperial office (*praepositus sacri scrinii*: Aimoin of Fleury) under Justin I, and Belisarius, count of stables (*comex aestabolarium*: Fredegar), or commander of cavalry (*praepositus equitum*: Aimoin of Fleury), are said to have held each other in great love (Fredegar), or offered each other right hands of secret friendship (Aimoin of Fleury), making their bond even stronger by pledging to forever keep their word of mutual support in as much as one of them prospers (Fredegar), or by obliging one another with a solemn promise that whoever of them first ascends to a more elevated position will make his companion equal in rank (Aimon of Fleury).¹⁹

The whole tale merits attention since it provides a legendary account of how Justinian and Belisarius met their respective future wives, which apparently has no link to any known source and seems to reflect oral traditions.²⁰ One day Justinian and Belisarius come to a brothel where they see two sisters of the Amazon race who have been carried off as captives and are now prostitutes (Aimon of Fleury). They take them as their concubines (Fredegar), or snatch them and take home with (Aimon of Fleury): Justinian the elder Antonia/Antunia (Fredegar) or Antonia (Aimon of Fleury), and Belisarius Antunia (Fredegar) or Antonina (Aimon of Fleury). One day, as Justinian is resting at noon under a tree with Antonia and falls asleep (Fredegar), or is laying with his head in the lap of his lover (Aimon of Fleury), an eagle comes and spreads its wings to protect him from the heat of the sun.²¹ Antonia sees this as a sign hoping that Justinian will accede to the throne (Fredegar), or recognizes this as a portent fortelling Justinian that he will become emperor (Aimon of Fleury). She says to Justinian: „If you become emperor, your servant will be worthy of sharing your bed“ (Fredegar), or asks him not to judge her unworthy of a married embrace after he has acquired the sceptre (Aimon of Fleury). Even though this would be difficult for him should he attain such a dignity, he smiles and tells her: „If I become emperor, you will be my Augusta“ (Fredegar), or says that it is impossible for him to rise to the throne, but she, certain of her knowledge, asks him not to show himself inexorable to her (Aimon of Fleury). They exchange rings (Fredegar), or first Justinian gives his consent, then they exchange rings and part (Aimon of Fleury). Justinian tells Belisarius that Antonia will be his Augusta should he become emperor, and (the younger) Antonia says to Belisarius that he should marry her if her sister becomes Augusta, which he confirms and they exchange rings and part (Fredegar). Or Belisarius makes a marriage pact with Antonina that, since he does not doubt that he will obtain a more higher station if Justinian acquires the throne, he will associate her as his partner in rank (Aimon of Fleury). Before

18 *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii Scholastici libri IV. cum continuationibus*, ed. Bruno Krusch, in *Fredegarii et aliorum chronica. Vitae sanctorum*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum, vol. 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1888), 1-193 (repr. 1984); *Aimoni Historiae Francorum libri quatuor*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina, vol. 139 (Paris: Garnier fratres, 1880), cols. 627-802.

19 *Chronicle of Fredegar*, 2.62; Aimon of Fleury, *History of the Franks*, 2.5.

20 Cf. David Potter, *Theodora. Actress, Empress, Saint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 205-206. He has failed to notice that this legend first appeared in the *Chronicle of Fredegar*. For the interpretation, see Georg Scheibelreiter, „Justinian und Belisar in fränkischer Sicht. Zur Interpretation von Fredegar, Chronicon II 62“, in Wolfram Hörandner, Johannes Koder, Otto Kresten, and Erich Trapp (eds), *Βυζάντιος. Festschrift für Herbert Hunger zum 70. Geburtstag* (Wien: Bervar, 1984), 267-280; with Ian N. Wood, „Fredegar's Fables“, in Anton Scharer, Georg Scheibelreiter (eds), *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung, vol. 32 (Wien-München: Oldenbourg, 1994), 361-362; and Richard Salomon, „Belisariana in der Geschichtsschreibung des abendländischen Mittelalters“, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 30 (1929/30), 102-109.

21 Wood, „Fredegar's Fables“, 363, has understood the passage as meaning that the eagle extinguishes a lamp.

long Emperor Justin dies leaving for a campaign (Fredegar), or during preparations for a campaign against the king of Persia (Aimon of Fleury), and Justinian is made Augustus by the consent of the Senate and the military. He collects his forces, proceeds against the barbarians, vanquishes the enemy in a battle and captures their king (Aimon of Fleury). Justinian asks the king to return all that had been captured by the Persians. To the king's saying: „I will not give“, Justinian replies: „You will give“ (*Daras*). This is how a newly built town called Daras gets its name. After the king of Persia has restored everything, he is allowed to return to his kingdom, and Justinian goes back to Constantinople in a great triumph. Antonia, who was his lover once, and has never been forgotten (Aimon of Fleury), takes five gold pieces and comes to the palace. She gives two gold pieces to doorkeepers (*hostiarii*: Fredegar; *janitores*: Aimon of Fleury) to obtain the entrance, and three gold pieces to those who hold the curtain (*velum*: Fredegar; *cortina*: Aimon of Fleury) so she may be given a chance to expound her case. She tells the emperor of a young man living in the capital who has exchanged rings with her and promised to take her as his legitimate wife. She has come before the emperor so she may hear his judgement on the matter (Aimon of Fleury). The emperor says that the promise is not to be changed if it has been given (Fredegar), or if the word has been given it must not be made void (Aimon of Fleury). After she has heard this she takes a ring off of her finger, shows it to the Augustus (Aimon of Fleury), and says: „Let the lord learn whose ring this was and he who gave it to me cannot hide from you“ (Fredegar), or: „Let my lord see whose this ring might be“ (Aimon of Fleury). The emperor recognizes the ring (Fredegar), or recognizes her as the one whom he gave the ring (Aimon of Fleury), and orders her brought to his chamber and clothed with splendid (Fredegar) or imperial (Aimon of Fleury) garments, and makes her Augusta. After the people is informed of this, a Senate faction publicly yells: „Lord emperor, give us a wife“ (Fredegar), or the emperor's act is met with a vehement opposition by the people and the entire Senate, and they openly cry out that the August has made a nefarious deed by taking an abject prostitute as his wife (Aimon of Fleury). Upon hearing this, Justinian inquires about who has started the faction and orders two senators killed because of the shout (Fredegar), or, stirred up by this insult, the emperor orders many senators brought to execution (Aimon of Fleury). After this, everyone keeps silent and no one dares to utter the shout (Fredegar), or people are made so terrified by this that everyone is afraid of Justinian and offers minimum opposition to his endeavors in the future (Aimon of Fleury).²²

Another tale preserved in both sources revolves around Belisarius, and his relationship to Justinian is central to the story.²³ Belisarius is called Justinian's comrade in arms (*com-milito*) and said to be very much loved by the emperor who is eager to enrich him with great riches (Aimon of Fleury). However, the Senate is envious of Belisarius and they seek to effect his downfall so they come and unanimously tell the emperor: „If we had wanted to yield to Belisarius' plan you would have been toppled from the throne long ago“. Justinian furtively develops jealousy towards Belisarius but, on advice by the Senate, sends him to expel the Vandals from Africa (Fredegar). Or Justinian is persuaded by some most dishonest men that Belisarius aspires to kill him and usurp the imperial power. The emperor is easily impelled to believe this, but before he has investigated the attempt of a murderous crime or removed the suspicion of falsehood by examining the truth he orders Belisarius to expel the Vandals (Aimon of Fleury). Believing that the Vandals are unconquerable Belisarius goes home full of worry and sorrow, but he is consoled by his wife Antunina, told to accept the true Christian creed and advised how to conquer the Vandals. Belisarius and Antunina vanquish the Vandals together, and Belisarius captures the Vandal king Ghyldemer (Fredegar) or Childemerus (Aimon of Fleury) who is presented to the emperor. Justinian has him living in the palace, but at one point the former king cannot stand to bear the insults of the courtiers any longer and ask of Justinian to allow him to fight, on horseback, twelve of his oppressors in a duel before the emperor. For the sake of a spectacle, Justinian has twelve youths face the Vandal, but he

²² *Chronicle of Fredegar*, 2.62; Aimon of Fleury, *History of the Franks*, 2.5.

²³ *Chronicle of Fredegar*, 2.62; Aimon of Fleury, *History of the Franks*, 2.6.

kills them. On Justinian's order Ghyldemer/Childemerus is made an eunuch and sent over as patrician to provinces bordering Persia, where he wins many victories against the Persians. Whereas Aimon of Fleury's narration stops here, Fredegar returns to the story of Justinian's and Belisarius' relationship. The Senate envies Belisarius and makes Justinian hateful of him by claiming that Belisarius wants to take Justinian's throne because he is elated by his victory over the Vandals. Since the Senate cannot effect Belisarius's death but only his demotion from the dignity of a patrician, they try to overthrow Justinian and elevate a certain Florianus instead. After Justinian is robbed of his crown, he sends a servant to Belisarius asking him for help. Belisarius responds by saying that he could help had he been kept in his honors, but now he cannot do anything of service. He sends his servants to secure the circus where an imperial throne is being prepared for Florianus. Pretending to be about to express reverence for Florianus, Belisarius says to his servants: „I notice all my enemies around the imperial throne. Whatever you see me do when I enter, you are to do the same“. He strikes down Florianus with a sword and his servants surround and kill all his enemies. Belisarius captures the imperial crown and brings it to Justinian saying: „Your sycophants have degraded you from the imperial position; you have used their counsel and agreed to humiliate me. And to you I return evil with good, not taking you upon your word, but remembering my promise and keeping my word intact“. Then Belisarius puts the crown on Justinian's head and establishes him on the throne.

Wars and campaigns

As it might be expected, Justinian's wars loom large as a topic in the sources. The majority of sources mention the triumph over the Persians (Isidore of Seville, *Chronicle*, 398; Paul the Deacon, *The History of the Longobards* 1.25, *The Roman History*, 16.11; Hermann of Reichenau, *Chronicle*, 527; Marianus Scotus, *Chronicle*, 549), and the victory over the Vandals (Isidore of Seville, *History of the Goths, Vandals and Suevi*, 83-84; *Chronicle*, 399; Bede, *Chronicle*, 516; Paul the Deacon, *The History of the Longobards* 1.25, *The Roman History*, 16.14; Hermann of Reichenau, *Chronicle*, 534; Marianus Scotus, *Chronicle*, 550,556). Some sources provide additional information: Isidore of Seville notes that Belisarius brought riches gained from the plundering of the provinces and of Africa to Emperor Justinian at Constantinople (*History of the Goths, Vandals and Suevi*, 84), Paul the Deacon adds that Belisarius was allowed by the emperor to enter in triumph into Constantinople after his victories over the Persians (*The Roman History*, 16.11), while Hermann of Reichenau says that the Vandal king Gelimer was made comes by Justinian and established at borders to defend them against the Parthians (= Persians) (*Chronicle*, 534). Gregory of Tours (*Histories*, 4.8) and Isidore of Seville (*History of the Goths, Vandals and Suevi*, 47; *Chronicle*, 399) record the Roman intervention in Spain, which is understandable considering the geographical proximity and the special interest in local affairs. Similarly, Paul the Deacon reports about events in Africa, the subjugation of the Moors (*The History of the Longobards*, 1.25), an entry repeated by Hermann of Reichenau (*Chronicle*, 551), and Belisarius' campaign against the rebel Guntharit and the remaining Vandals (*The Roman History*, 16.19), an information which Paul found in the *Book of Pontiffs* (61.1), and Marianus Scotus spreads in three entries (*Chronicle*, 561-563). Paul even adds that Justinian is deservedly called Alamannicus, Gothicus, Francicus, Germanicus, Anticus, Alanicus, Wandalicus, and Africanus through the subjugation of other nations by war and on account of his victories (*The History of the Longobards*, 1.25).²⁴

Of the wars during Justinian's age, the war against the Goths in Italy has received by far the most attention in the selected sources. *The Book of Pontiffs* (59.2, 60.2), Paul the Deacon

²⁴ It may be that Paul the Deacon read all these victory names in the Preamble of Justinian's *Institutes*: *Imperator Caesar Flavius Iustinianus Alamannicus Gothicus Francicus Germanicus Anticus Alanicus Wandalicus Africanus pius felix inclitus victor ac triumphator semper Augustus*. Cf. *Institutiones*, ed. Paul Krüger, in *Corpus iuris civilis*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1872).

(*The Roman History*, 16.12), Hermann of Reichenau (*Chronicle*, 535, 536) and Marianus Scotus (*Chronicle*, 555) stress Justinian's anger over King Theodahad's murdering Amalsuntha as a reason for the start of the war. *The Book of Pontiffs* (60.2) and Paul the Deacon (*The Roman History*, 16.15) explicitly state that Justinian sent Belisarius to liberate Italy from the Gothic enslavement. Hermann of Reichenau simply notes that Belisarius was sent by Justinian against the Goths in Italy (*Chronicle*, 536), and Marianus Scotus is more specific saying that Justinian sent Belisarius against Theodahad (*Chronicle*, 556), an information which he found in Paul the Deacon's *Roman History* (16.15). Justinian rejoices over the victory after King Witigis has been brought by Belisarius to Constantinople, and then makes Witigis patricius and comes, and sends him over to the lands bordering the Persians, where Witigis ends his life (*The Book of Pontiffs*, 61.1; Paul the Deacon, *The Roman History*, 16.19: mentions only the dignity of patricius, *The History of the Longobards*, 1.25: notes simply that Justinian vanquished the Goths in Italy and captured King Witigis through Belisarius' forces; Hermann of Reichenau, *Chronicle*, 538: adds that Belisarius also brought Witigis' wife and treasure to Constantinople; Marianus Scotus, 559: omits Witigis' subsequent career). Finally, Justinian sends the eunuch and his chamberlain Narses to Italy to help the Romans, and he vanquishes the Goths and their king Totila (*The Book of Pontiffs*, 61.8: tells that God gave Narses the victory; Isidore of Sevilla, *Chronicle*, 399b + 400: calls Narses patrician and simply says that he overcame Totila; Paul the Deacon, *The Roman History*, 16.23: stresses that Narses brought the whole of Italy under the Roman rule; Hermann of Reichenau, *Chronicle*, 552: adds that Narses was *cartularius*, was made chief of the army, *princeps militiae*, by Justinian, won the victory over King Totila by God's grace and destroyed the Goths with the help of the Longobards;²⁵ Marianus Scotus, *Chronicle*, 588: notes that the patrician Narses came to Italy, killed Totila and brought the whole of Italy back in the state).

Gregory of Tours brings both Justinian and Belisarius in connection to the events in Italy following the demise of Totila. Justinian removes Belisarius from the command after he has often been defeated by Buccelinus who is in Frankish service, appoint Narses instead and makes, as a humiliation, Belisarius count of the stables (*Histories*, 3.32). Neither Narses has much success against Buccelinus and reports to the emperor of this. The emperor hires other nations and sends help to Narses who is nevertheless defeated.²⁶

Religious matters

Justinian's religious policy is the most controversial topic with regard to how the selected sources view the emperor. Understandably, *The Book of Pontiffs* provides the most details about the emperor's dealings with popes, John II (58), Agapetus (59), Silverius (60), and Vigilius (61). Other sources are much less informative. Paul the Deacon describes the relations between Justinian and Pope Agapetus (Paul the Deacon, *The Roman History*, 16.13), Hermann of Reichenau mentions that Pope Vigilius was brought, at an imperial order, from Rome to Constantinople by force and sent to exile after he had opposed the emperor (*Chronicle*, 547), and Marianus Scotus says that Empress Theodora had Pope Silverius sent to exile with Emperor Justinian's consent (*Chronicle*, 557), whereas *The Book of Pontiffs* ascribes the responsibility for Silverius' exile to the archdeacon Vigilius, the future pope (60.9). Paul the Deacon (*The History of the Longobards*, 6.14: *sinodus*) and Hermann of Reichenau (*Chronicle*, 542: *sexta sinodus universalis*) are the only who note a general Church council that was held under Justinian in Constantinople.

²⁵ That Narses conquered the Goths with the help of the Longobards is recorded by Paul the Deacon (*The History of the Longobards*, 2.1).

²⁶ Contrarily, Paul the Deacon preserves a tradition favorable to Narses who vanquishes Buccelinus (*The History of the Longobards*, 2.2). See also Hermann of Reichenau, *Chronicle*, 552, who found information in the so-called *Chronicle of Fredegar*, 3.50.

The emperor himself is depicted both as a Christian devout and as prone to heresy and harsh dealings with the opposing church dignitaries and clergy, which clearly indicates the writers' ambivalent attitude and, consequently, shows that such a conflicting image was transmitted to the readership. *The Book of Pontiffs* calls Justinian „a devout man in the highest of love for the Christian religion“ (58.1: *vir religiosus sumo amore christianae religionis*), „the most Christian emperor“ (58.2, 59.3: *christianissimus imperator*), „the most pious Augustus“ (59.5: *piissimus Augustus*) and „the most pious prince“ (61.6: *piissimus princeps*), but at the same time likens him to Diocletian (59.3, 61.6), a model of a Christians' arch-enemy among the secular rulers in both eastern and western traditions.²⁷ An ambivalent position is also reflected in Paul the Deacon who characterizes Justinian as a Catholic by faith (*The History of the Longobards*, 1.25: *fide catholicus*), but also reproduces the story from *The Book of Pontiffs* where Pope Agapitus compares Justinian to Diocletian (*The Roman History*, 16.13). Apart from *The Book of Pontiffs*' calling Justinian not adequate in the Christian religion (59.3), which is an assertion put in the mouth of Pope Agapitus, the most explicit about Justinian's heretical inclinations is Isidore of Seville who says that the emperor received²⁸ the heresy of the Acephali and compelled every bishop in his kingdom to condemn the three chapters of the Council of Chalcedon (*Chronicle*, 397a). Hermann of Reichenau is simply content to say that Justinian favored some heretics (*Chronicle*, 526). On the other hand, Agnellus of Ravenna is consistently positive about Justinian's religious tendencies and calls him „orthodox“ (66: *orthodoxus*), „pious“ (74: *pius*), „Augustus of the proper faith“ (85: *rectae fidei augustus*) and „such an orthodox man“ (90: *talis orthodoxus vir*).

Legislative and building activities

As opposed to religious matters, Justinian's legislative and building activities are unanimously very positive aspects of Justinian's reign. Justinian's codification of law is mentioned in several sources, of which Paul the Deacon is the most detailed and informative, clearly expressing his admiration: Justinian arranges in wonderful brevity the laws of the Romans whose prolixity was very great and whose lack of harmony was injurious, abridges many volumes of the constitutions by princes into twelve books and orders this volume called the Justinian Code, reduces nearly two thousand books of laws by magistrates and judges into one code of five hundreds books and calls it Digest or Pandects, composes anew four books of Institutes which contain the abridged text of all laws, and collects new laws which he himself has decreed into a single volume named the Code of New Laws (*The History of the Longobards*, 1.25). The *Codex Iustinianus* is also mentioned by Bede the Venerable who only notes its promulgation (*Chronicle*, 519), Hermann of Reichenau who distinguishes Justinian's effort to collect the endless number of Roman laws in an abridged manner from his composition of the Justinianic laws (*Chronicle*, 548), and Marianus Scotus who copies *verbatim* from Paul the Deacon a passage about the composition of the Justinianic code.

As for Justinian's building activity, which is epitomized in the construction of the main cathedral basilica in the Eastern Roman imperial capital, Paul the Deacon is again most favorable towards the emperor. He mentions that Justinian built a temple at Constantinople dedicated to Lord Christ and called Hagia Sophia in Greek, or Holy Wisdom, a building that excels all other buildings, and the like of which is nowhere to be found in the whole world (*The History of the Longobards*, 1.25). Similarly, Hermann of Reichenau speaks of, among other magnificent Justinian's works (*inter alia magnifica*), a church of the Savior called Hagia Sophia which was constructed with incomparable workmanship (*Chronicle*, 548).

27 Cf. Hrvoje Gračanin, „Religious Policy and Policizing Religion during the tetrarchy“, in Vesselina Vachkova and Dimitar Dimitrov (eds), *Serdica Edict (311 AD). Concepts and Realizations of the Idea of Religious Toleration* (Sofia: TANGRA TanNakRa Publishing House Ltd, 2004), 154-156.

28 Much less strong is the expression by Sam Koon and Jamie Wood who have translated Isidore of Seville's *iste Acefalorum haeresim suscepti* as „admiring the heresy of the Acefali“.

Justinian as a man and a ruler

A number of selected sources offer types of information that depict Justinian as just, appreciative and sensitive to the plight of people, or they pass direct judgment about the emperor and his rule. *The Book of Pontiffs* (61.7) narrates how some Roman senators, the patricians and ex-consuls Cethegus, Albinus and Basilius, escaped to Constantinople and came, afflicted and desolated, before Emperor Justinian who consoled them and enriched them as befitted Roman consuls. The story is repeated by Paul the Deacon who omits the senators' names but adds that they told the emperor about Rome's misfortunes which spurred him to send Narses with an army to Italy and help the afflicted city (*The Roman History*, 16.23).²⁹ *The Book of Pontiffs* also indicates Justinian's joy because, thanks to Narses' victory over the Goths, God had given peace to the Romans, which makes the emperor willing to free Pope Vigilius and other exiled clergymen (61.8).

Paul the Deacon is very favorable towards the emperor. In the *History of the Longobards*, he says that Justinian governed the Empire with good fortune, was both prosperous in waging wars and admirable in civil matters, of Catholic faith, upright in his deeds and just in his judgments, and therefore, to him all things came together for good (1.25). In his *Roman History*, Paul is much less abundant in his praiseful attitude. He only mentions that Justinian set his mind to recover the Roman state soon after he had acquired the imperial power (6.11) and says that everything else about Emperor Justinian's success (*felicitas*) is to be made known in another book (6.23).

In Agnellus of Ravenna's *The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, Justinian figures as an honest and generous prince and a human being of flesh and blood. The emperor receives riches from Maximian, then a deacon in Pula, which Maximian has found by accident, considers how to repay him for such a faithful deed and makes him Bishop of Ravenna (70). When Maximian again travels to Constantinople to settle a dispute over some forest in Istria, he comes before the emperor who is as gray-haired as the bishop and they begin to recall the past in a most bitter way, „separated from the youth and joined in old age“ (*a iuventute disiuncti, in senectute coniuncti*). Then the emperor recognizes justly and rationally that the forest belongs to the church of Ravenna and confirms it as its legal and perpetual property (74). Another instance of Justinian's generosity is his granting to the church of Ravenna all the property that has once belonged to the Goths (85). Agnellus also mentions a mosaic image of Justinian in Sant'Apollinare Nuovo (86), which may be construed as an example of Agnellus' particular interest for the emperor. Finally, Agnellus' description of how Justinian's death was experienced is a clear testimony of his sympathy for the emperor: his passing causes a huge grief everywhere and an immense sorrow, and is accompanied by red signs in the sky and conflagrations (90).

A terse commentary by Hermann of Reichenau is still positively intoned and shows what the writer found of a particular note to appraise Justinian's character with a touch of criticism: the emperor was remarkable for his much piety and prudence, except that he favored some heretics (*Chronicle*, 526).

Concluding remarks

An analysis of the selected sources has shown a variety of information about Justinian that can be found in medieval Latin sources. At the same time, the quantity of information varies greatly depending on a historiographic genre and the writers' interest and their overall attitude towards the emperor. Particularly informative and positively inclined to Justinian is Paul the Deacon. Such a favorable appraisal of the emperor is shared by Agnellus of Ravenna.

²⁹ An entry about some senators' fleeing to Constantinople can also be found in Hermann of Reichenau, but he does not mention Justinian (*Chronicle* 550).

Other sources can be quite critical: Isidore of Seville actually turns Justinian into a heretic, even though his source refers to the emperor's being himself deceived since he is said to have been instigated by subreptions of the Acephali (Victor of Tunnuna's *Chronicle*, 544.1); and *The Book of Pontiffs* compares Justinian to Diocletian in two places in the narrative. The early medieval writers had at their disposal a limited repository of facts about Justinian. The majority of later writers used Isidore of Seville (who in turn used Victor of Tunnuna's *Chronicle*) and *The Book of Pontiffs*, but they sometimes added information that originates from other sources, retold extracted information in their own words putting their own personal spin, copied almost *verbatim*, or provided a completely new narrative. For instance, Paul the Deacon used both Isidore of Seville and *The Book of Pontiffs*, but he also found other sources of information. Similarly, Hermann of Reichenau used the so-called *Chronicle of Fredegar* which has the Vandal king Gelimer sent by Justinian to the border with the Persians and not the Gothic king Witigis as is usually preserved in sources (*The Book of Pontiffs*, Paul the Deacon's *Roman History*, cf. Hermann of Reichenau, *Chronicle*, 538). Furthermore, Agnellus of Ravenna used local knowledge and traditions that for the most part do not correspond with what is known from other analyzed sources.

Writers sometimes closely follow earlier sources, for example: Isidore of Seville, *Chronicle*, 397a = Victor of Tunnuna, *Chronicle*, a. 544.1; Paul the Deacon, *The Roman History*, 16.12 = *The Book of Pontiffs*, 59.3; Paul the Deacon, *The Roman History*, 16.19 = *The Book of Pontiffs*, 61.1; Hermann of Reichenau, *Chronicle*, 552 = *The Book of Pontiffs*, 61.8; or even copy information *verbatim*, for instance: Isidore of Seville, *History of the Goths, Vandals and Suevi*, 83 = Victor of Tunnuna, *Chronicle*, 534.1; Isidore of Seville, *History of the Goths, Vandals and Suevi*, 84 = Victor of Tunnuna, *Chronicle*, 534.2; Marianus Scotus, *Chronicle*, 549 = Isidore of Seville, *Chronicle*, 398; Marianus Scotus, *Chronicle*, 550 = Isidore of Seville, *Chronicle*, 399; Marianus Scotus, *Chronicle*, 554 = Bede the Venerable, *Chronicle*, 519; Marianus Scotus, *Chronicle*, 556 = Paul the Deacon, *The Roman History*, 16.14+ Bede the Venerable, *Chronicle*, 516. Marianus Scotus even repeats the information about Belisarius' campaign against the Vandals in Africa in two different entries (*Chronicle*, 550, 556), the second time with more details, since he compiled it from different sources.

Some writers show conspicuous lack of interest in Justinian, such as Gregory of Tours and Bede the Venerable, which perhaps may be explained not as a sign of their distinct dislike, but more as a result of their uneasiness to mention an emperor who was both remarkable and religiously controversial. Gregory of Tours devotes a chapter to Justinian's successor Justin II, albeit he is quite critical of that emperor (*Histories*, 4.40).

On balance, the perception of Justinian I in the analyzed early medieval sources is in general positive, and in some cases even openly panegyric (Paul the Deacon, Agnellus of Ravenna). The emperor is praised as a successful conqueror, a prudent lawgiver and a great builder, and his piety and orthodoxy are even highlighted in sources that provide examples of his religious inadequacy (*The Book of Pontiffs*). This positive image of Justinian was perpetuated and passed on, even though his flirting with what the Church characterized as heretical doctrines was still remembered as late as the 11th century.