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Thematic Session of Free Communications:

THE MIDDLE BYZANTINE PERIOD – PART 2

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Kostiantyn Bardola

Byzantine Ideology of War: Between East and West

In the turbulent times of VI-XII centuries war was an everyday affair, with no exceptions both for the West and for the East. The Byzantine Empire found itself between two fires, and due to this affair, the state paid much attention to it. In addition to the strategic and tactical skills of the commander, the state of weapons and equipment of soldiers and the level of logistical support services, not less, and sometimes a psychological, moral training of troops was even more important. This issue was controlled with ideologically prepared military doctrine. Despite the fact that ideological message to the “right of conquest” existed in the Byzantine law since the times of the Roman Empire, the emperors gradually declined it in contrast to the barbarian kingdoms which actively used it. This was largely due to the social changes, strengthening of the state apparatus, strengthening the idea of the emperor as the kind of manager responsible for the fate of all citizens, rather than as the supreme military commander, in the minds of the Byzantines. In these circumstances, Byzantine ambassadors and other officials have actively used the idea of “the return of their lands,” since the reign of the Emperor Justinian I and up to the XII century, usually in the form of rhetorical propaganda to justify the offensive or defensive military operations. This thesis gradually became part of the Byzantine, and later of Western theory of “the just war.” This ideological reception was successfully carried out in the fights against the Western barbarian and nomadic people. But it should be noted that the Byzantine diplomacy soberly assessed the possibility of ideological influence on the morale of the enemy, using the rhetorical devices usual for them only when they had a chance to be adequately perceived both by the enemies and own troops. Perhaps the inefficiency of this doctrine in the East explains the fact that the ideology of “the return of their own lands” almost was not used in the fight against the Muslims.

On the other hand, the Byzantine emperors did not seek to follow the Muslims and to paint its military actions in the ideological color of “holy war”, despite the fact that the religious factor played a significant role in the training of soldiers. Such care was directly dependent on the reluctance of the Byzantine bureaucracy to become dependent on the religious ideologies and the Church itself. Thus, the emperors’ form of military ideology depended on the socio-political character of Byzantine power and, of course, was limited by this issue. In general, it can be noted that the Byzantine military doctrine was weaker than the Muslim one, which was quite invariant, ideologically. It led to a decrease in enthusiasm of the Byzantines in the fight against the Muslims, which was fixed by multiple sources.

Despite this, the diplomatic service of the Romans, skillfully using the inherited history and traditions of the Roman Empire, made its contribution to the theory of international relations, and in the future its activities served as an example for the diplomats of many countries.