


Liudprand of Cremona, Antapodosis.

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Liudprand of Cremona: Constantinople in 949

In this selection, and that which follows, a change of attitude of West toward East is caught in the mind of one man, a noble Lombard from the great urban center of Lombard life, Pavia. He became bishop of Cremona as well as one of the most cosmopolitan, well-educated, articulate, and enthusiastic of Otto I's men. This particular change of attitude was affected by a number of particular and personal circumstances. Liudprand's own career, in which an Italian from a family bred for official service gave his support to a new ruler of a new house, provokes comparison with Cassiodorus's career. In their sameness and difference, Liudprand and Cassiodorus tell a lot about the history of the period they enclose. In the beginning of this selection from Liudprand's *Antapodosis*, his description of his own times, he establishes again the repeated contrast between the king in name and the king in deed, a pattern that early medieval eyes were trained to see. Liudprand was born about 920; he was bishop of Cremona from 961 to 972.

Constantinople in 949

 II] AFTER the death of King Hugh in Provence the fame of Berengar spread abroad in many lands, and especially among the Greek peoples. By virtue of his abilities he was the chief man in Italy, while Lothair was king only in name. So Constantine, who after the downfall of Romanos and his sons had become emperor at Constantinople, hearing that in actual power Berengar was superior

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to Lothair, sent him a letter by the hand of a certain Andreas, who from his functions had the title of "prefect of the guard". In this letter he said that he was very desirous of a visit from an envoy of Berengar's, that the latter on his messenger's return might know with what affection he was regarded. He also wrote him another letter on Lothair's behalf, commending him to his care and begging him to be faithful in administering the realm, to whose governance by God's favour he had been appointed. Constantine indeed had no small regard for Lothair's welfare and made it a subject of scrupulous thought, owing to the affection he felt for his son's wife who was Lothair's sister.

37
 III] Accordingly Berengar, who was a man stuffed full of cunning, began to consider whom he could best send without contributing anything himself to the expense of the long journey: He therefore sent for my stepfather, under whose care I was then living, and addressed him thus: — "What a boon it would be to me if your stepson knew Greek!" My stepfather replied: "I would spend half my estate to give him that knowledge." "Nay," said Berengar, "you need not spend one hundredth part of it. The emperor of Constantinople begs me in this letter to send an envoy to his court. As far as courage goes, no one could be better than your stepson, and on the score of eloquence no one could be more satisfactory than he will be. And I need not tell you how easily there he will imbibe the learning of Greece, he who in his youth has drunk so deep of Latin knowledge". At this my stepfather was fired by hope, contributed all the expenses of the journey, and sent me off, the bearer of handsome gifts, to Constantinople.

IV] On the first of August I left Pavia and sailing down the Po arrived in three days at Venice. There I met a Greek envoy, the eunuch Salerno, chamberlain of the palace, who had just returned from Spain and Saxony. He was anxious to sail for Constantinople and was taking there with him an envoy from my present master, who was then king and is now emperor. This man, who was the bearer of costly presents, was a rich merchant of Maintz called Liutefred. Finally we left Venice on the twenty-fifth of August and reached Constantinople on the seventeenth of September. It will be a pleasant task to describe the marvellous and unheard of manner of our reception.

V] Next to the imperial residence at Constantinople there is a

palace of remarkable size and beauty which the Greeks call Magnavra, the letter v taking the place of the digamma, and the name being equivalent to "Fresh breeze". In order to receive some Spanish envoys, who had recently arrived, as well as myself and Liutefred, Constantine gave orders that this palace should be got ready and the following preparations were made,

Before the emperor's seat stood a tree, made of bronze gilded over, whose branches were filled with birds, also made of gilded bronze, which uttered different cries, each according to its varying species. The throne itself was so marvellously fashioned that at one moment it seemed a low structure, and at another it rose high into the air. It was of immense size and was guarded by lions, made either of bronze or of wood covered with gold, who beat the ground with their tails and gave a dreadful roar with open mouth and quivering tongue. Leaning upon the shoulders of two eunuchs I was brought into the emperor's presence. At my approach the lions began to roar and the birds to cry out, each according to its kind; but I was neither terrified nor surprised, for I had previously made enquiry about all these things from people who were well acquainted with them. So after I had three times made obeisance to the emperor with my face upon the ground, I lifted my head, and behold! the man whom just before I had seen sitting on a moderately elevated seat had now changed his raiment and was sitting on the level of the ceiling. How it was done I could not imagine, unless perhaps he was lifted up by some such sort of device as we use for raising the timbers of a wine press. On that occasion he did not address me personally, since even if he had wished to do so the wide distance between us would have rendered conversation unseemly, but by the intermediary of a secretary he enquired about Berengar's doings and asked after his health. I made a fitting reply and then, at a nod from the interpreter, left his presence and retired to my lodging.

VI] It would give me some pleasure also to record here what I did then for Berengar, so that all may recognize what affection I showed to him and what recompense I have received from him for my services. The Spanish envoys and the aforesaid Liutefred, who represented my present master who was then King Otto, had brought handsome gifts from their masters to the emperor Constantine. I for my part had brought nothing from Berengar except a letter and that was full of lies. I was very greatly disturbed and shamed at this and

began to consider anxiously what I had better do. In my doubt and perplexity it finally occurred to me that I might offer the gifts, which on my own account I had brought for the emperor, as coming from Berengar, and trick out my humble present with fine words. I therefore presented him with nine excellent cuirasses, seven excellent shields with gilded bosses, two silver gilt cauldrons, some swords, spears and spits, and what was more precious to the emperor than anything, four carzimasia; that being the Greek name for young eunuchs who have had both their testicles and their penis removed. This operation is performed by traders at Verdun, who take the boys into Spain and make a huge profit.

vii] Three days after I had presented my gifts the emperor summoned me to the palace and personally invited me to dinner with him, after the banquet bestowing a handsome present on myself and my attendants. As the opportunity has occurred to describe the appearance of the emperor's table, particularly on a feast day, and also the entertainments that given there, I think it best not to pass the matter over in silence but to give an account.

viii] There is a palace near the Hippodrome looking northwards, wonderfully lofty and beautiful, which is called "Decanneacubita", "The house of the nineteen couches". The reason of its name is obvious: "deca" is greek for ten, "ennea" for nine, and "cubita" are couches with curved ends; and on the day when Our Lord Jesus Christ was born according to the flesh nineteen covers are always laid here at the table. The emperor and his guests on this occasion do not sit at dinner, as they usually do, but recline on couches: and everything is served in vessels, not of silver, but of gold. After the solid food fruit is brought on in three golden bowls, which are too heavy for men to lift and come in on carriers covered over with purple cloth. Two of them are put on the table in the following way. Through openings in the ceiling hang three ropes covered with gilded leather and furnished with golden rings. These rings are attached to the handles projecting from the bowls, and with four or five men helping from below, they are swung on to the table by means of a moveable device in the ceiling and removed again in the same fashion. As for the various entertainments I saw there, it would be too long a task to describe them all, and so for the moment I pass them by. One, however, was so remarkable that it will not be out of place to insert an account of it here.

ix] A man came in carrying on his head, without using his hands, a wooden pole twenty-four feet or more long, which a foot and a half from the top had a cross piece three feet wide. Then two boys appeared, naked except for loin cloths round their middle, who went up the pole, did various tricks on it, and then came down head first, keeping the pole all the time as steady as though it were rooted in the earth. When one had come down, the other remained on the pole and performed by himself, which filled me with even greater astonishment and admiration. While they were both performing their feat seemed barely possible; for, wonderful as it was, the evenness of their weights kept the pole up which they climbed balanced. But when one remained at the top and kept his balance so accurately that he could both do his tricks and come down again without mishap, I was so bewildered that the emperor himself noticed my astonishment. He therefore called an interpreter, and asked me which seemed the more wonderful, the boy who had moved so carefully that the pole remained firm, or the man who had so deftly balanced it on his head that neither the boys' weight nor their performance had disturbed it in the least. I said that I did not know which I thought *plus merveilleux* that is, more wonderful; and he burst into a loud laugh and said he was in the same case, he did not know either.

x] I do not think that I ought to pass over in silence another strange and wonderful sight that I saw there. In the week before the feast Vaiophoron, which we call the Feast of Palms, the emperor makes a payment in gold coins to his vassals and to the different officers of his court, each one receiving a sum proportionate to his office. As I wished to be present at the ceremony; the emperor bade me attend it. The procedure was as follows. A table was brought in, fifteen feet long and six feet broad, which had upon it parcels of money tied up in bags, according to each man's due, the amount being written on the outside of the bag. The recipients then came in and stood before the king, advancing in order as they were called up by a herald. The first to be summoned was the marshall of the palace, who carried off his money, not in his hands but on his shoulders, together with four cloaks of honour. After him came the commander in chief of the army and the lord high admiral of the fleet. These being of equal rank received an equal number of money bags and cloaks, which they did not carry off on their shoulders but with some assistance dragged

laboriously away. After them came twenty-four controllers, who each received twenty-four pounds of gold coins together with two cloaks. Then followed the order of patricians, of whom every one in turn was given twelve pounds of gold and one cloak. As I do not know how many patricians there are, I do not know the total amount that was paid; but every one received an equal share. After them came a huge crowd of minor dignitaries; knights of the sword of the first, second and third class, chamberlains, treasury and admiralty officials. Some of these received seven pounds of gold, others six, five, four, three, two and one, according to their rank. I would not have you think that this was all done in one day. It began on the fifth day of the week at six o'clock in the morning and went on till ten, and the emperor finished his part in the proceedings on the sixth and seventh day. Those who take less than a pound receive their share, not from the emperor, but from the chief chamberlain during the week before Easter. While I was standing and marvelling at the proceedings the emperor sent his chancellor to me and asked me how the ceremony pleased me. "It would please me", I replied, "if it did me any good. When Dives was in torment the rest that he saw Lazarus enjoying would have pleased him, if it had come his way. As it did not, how, pray, could it have pleased him?" The emperor smiled in some confusion, and motioned me to come to him. He then presented me with a large cloak and a pound of gold coins; a gift which he willingly made and I even more willingly accepted.