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*Restitutio imperii*  
– The Role of the Anicius Family in One and a Half Centuries Of  
Legitimacy Endeavors –

Theses of the PhD Dissertation

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The thesis focuses on the equestrian statue of Justinian, which was built in 543 and that suggests numerous direct and indirect, mythological and secular references. It is an extraordinary coincidence with the epos of Homer that in the description of Procopius the statue was built up just ten years after the beginning of the reconquering wars, however, the end of Justinian's war was far away by then. The statue portrayal shows the emperor wearing the armor of Achilles, the Greek mythological hero. The time of the building of the statue and its iconography is a joint reference to the Trojan War, in which the tenth year was a fateful one. Amongst the mythological references, one can find a secular reference as well, in the form of Justinian's horse, that had been once the basis of the monument of Theodosius. Thereby in 543 the emperor symbolically associated not only with the mythological hero but with his predecessor who had lived 150 years earlier.

Nonetheless, the reference seems to be unsolvable as the male line of the Theodosius dynasty died out in 543, thus Justinian could not have an agnate relationship with his great predecessor. The symbiosis of these two worlds creates such a narrative that explains the political events of one and a half centuries from the empire unifying Theodosius to Justinian. Moreover, this narrative is preparing for the unification as well as the way of bridging the gap of their missing agnate relationship in the 6th century Constantinople. Justify this hypothesis, I will take more than one hundred historical work, epigraphic and numismatic data into account.

### **1. The Procopian narrative uses the archaic ethnonyms as a framing tool that explains the cause and the aim of the war against the Ostrogoths.**

The time frame starts at 410 and ends with 537, driven by a series of woman abductions, and its goal to recover the lost colonial area (Italy). The period considered for this research is indicated by the usage of the word *Getic*, that Procopius uses only two times in his works. First time when describing the siege of Rome in 410, then at the siege of Rome in 537. During the first siege of the city, the (Visi)Goths entered the town, whereas, in 538 the (Ostro)Goths left the walls of Rome. The occurrence of the word *Getic* was preceded by a story on woman abduction in both cases, moreover, they are framing a third abduction. In 410 when the word is first used, the Visigoths abducted Galla Placidia and forced her to marry Athaulf. In 455 the Vandal Geiseric left Rome with the heirs of Valentinian III, his daughter Eudocia later married with Hunerich. In 536, the second time when the word is used, Vitiges captured Matasuntha and forced her to marry him. By using the word *Getic*, Procopius refers to the main plot of Herodotus' *Histories* that rooted in women abductions. Procopius used the same approach with the word *Taulantioi*, which he first introduced at the introductory part of the siege of Rome in 410, then the introductory part of the section describing the Ostrogoths. On the other hand, by using the word he draws a parallel between the

Visigoths and the Ostrogoths and refers to the base conflict of the *History of the Peloponnesian War* by Thucydides. Procopius' both allusions refers to the core conflicts of these works that rooted in the unlawful governance connecting the legitim rule of the Heraclids and a Delphic prediction. According to Herodotus, the Heraclids regained their dominion after five generations, while in Thucydides' work, the colonial city of Epidamnus returned to its former Heraclids owner. In the Wars of Procopius, the impoverished western half of the empire returned to its rightful owner after five generations, when the army of the emperor abducted Matasuntha and carried her to Constantinople. The one-and-a-half-century genealogical relationship between the Visigoths and the Ostrogoths was, on the one hand, Theoderic's regency over Amalaric, therefore, the two power united in Theoderic's hand, on the other hand later Matasuntha, the daughter of Theoderic's proposed successor felt into captivity. Therefore both predictions fulfilled in the time of Justinian.

## **2. The authors of the 5-6th century explain Gothic-Roman relations along three main narratives, but these narratives share a common characteristic.**

The prophecy of Herodotus bears formal accordance with the *Book of Daniel* and its description of the statue of Nebuchadnezzar II, which destruction marked the day of the Last Judgement. This symbol was widely used by early Christian church fathers. According to St. Jerome's *Commentary on Daniel*, the collapse of the statue is followed by dynastic marriages, however, these dynasties can never be united, since the two bottom elements of the statue, the iron and clay, and these mixtures never form a stable compound. Either in its original or modified form, but the motif of Nebuchadnezzar's statue appears in all contemporary authors' works. Hydatius and Orosius, the disciples of Jerome, saw the fulfillment of the prophecy in the marriage of Galla Placidia and Athaulf, while Procopius, modeling the collapsing statue, created a mosaic description of Theoderic's heirs that indicated the marriage of Matasuntha and Germanus. The identification with the sculptural motif of Daniel's book provided the basis for those descriptions that saw the Goths as Jews, since Nebuchadnezzar became known as the destroyer of Jerusalem and who put the Jewish community into the Babylonian captivity.

## **3. Mixed marriages were solely prohibited in endangered, borderline provinces.**

The scientific literature of the 20th century saw a special event in the marriage of Galla Placidia and Athaulf because most of them considered that emperor Valentinian's decree of 343 (3.14.1) prohibited the marriage between Goths and Romans. In spite of this, the number of marriages with foreigners tripled by the 4th century compared to previous periods, furthermore, their number also increased in the 5th century, and there is no information about death penalties in connection with the decree. From the

lawmaker's perspective, mixed marriage should be penalized if some kind of conspiracy was proven involving barbarous relatives and spouses.

#### **4. Historians begin to associate St. Stephen I's relics with the members of the Theodosius dynasty and their descendants, the Anicius family.**

In his work against the pagans (*Historia adversus paganos libri VII*), Orosius describes the marriage of Galla Placidia and Athaulf at the same time as he took over a piece of St. Stephen's relic. The miraculous turnaround of Athaulf happened simultaneously. Not long after, Orosius put the relic on the island of Menorca, whose influence on the local community has been processed by the *Epistula Severi*. The *Epistula Severi's* description of the forced conversion of the Jews shows formal accordance with five chapters of the Pars Posterior, which started with the closure of the Acacian schism in 519. In the work of Anonymus Valesianus, the tragic events began with a decision of Theoderic who gave an order the destruction of St. Stephen's altar, and then he made charges against (Anicius) Albinus. In Constantinople, the Nika riots begun with the event when the prefect's subordinates imprisoned some of the asylum seekers from the basilica of St. Laurentius. In 439 Eudocia founded the basilica shortly after she returned from Jerusalem and placed some of St. Stephen's relics there. Pulcheria later completed the construction of the building, and then Anicia Juliana further decorated it. Consequently, the historians first associate the relics with members of the Theodosius dynasty, then, after the extinction of the dynasty, with members of the Anicius family.

#### **5. The Anician family secured the continuity after the fall of the Theodosian dynasty. The integration of the two halves of the empire could only be realized through them.**

The year of 395 brought an administrative shift, when Theodosius of the Great divided the empire between his sons, however, the Eastern and Western sides still concentrated in the hands of the family. The death of Valentinian III brought changes, because the dynasty's male branch died out. The female members of the ruling family were carried to Geiserich's court, where Hunerich married his fiancée, Eudocia. Hilderic, the later ruler of the Vandals, was born out of this relationship. The Eastern sources tried to invalidate the marriage in various ways, they mostly saw it as a result of a woman abduction. One of these tries was when they described that Placidia, Valentinian's younger daughter married Anicius Olybrius in 455, although this happened only after her disengagement from the Vandal Kingdom. In 455, the daughters of Valentinian left Italy with their fiancés (Gaudentius, Hilderic) so the theory about woman abduction can be rejected. The procedure of the Eastern sources lies on the fact that after the death of Theodosius II, they have to prove their connection with the Theodosian dynasty to secure their legitimacy. However, this legitimacy will be guaranteed only

after the early 460s when Geiseric set free Valentinian's widow and his younger daughter. After the death of Licinia Eudoxia (493) the legitimacy transferred to Anicia Juliana, who was born from the marriage of Placidia and (Anicius) Olybrius. In 493, due to the death of Licinia Eudoxia, the last straight-line descendant of the Theodosian dynasty disappeared from the court of Constantinople. At this time, the court ceremony of the *nobilissimus/ nobilissima* transformed into an honorary award that could attach anybody into the emperor's family. The first non-Theodosian *nobilissima* was Anicia Juliana. At the beginning of the 6th century, some sources already considered the male members of the Anician family as the next ruling generation. The *Oracle of Baalbek* predicted Anicia Juliana's son or grandson as the next emperor after Anastasius, who could restore the unity of the divided empire. The same political thought appeared also in the work of Ioannes Malas, , when he stated that Theoderic could get Anicia Juliana as his wife.

### **6. Theoderic's 30-year reign and its extension.**

Theoderic arrived in Italy without an Anicius bride, and as a subordinate of the emperor, therefore, he had thirty years to administrate the Western parts. The contemporary sources report quite differently on the starting point of the Ostrogoth reign in Italy. Behind these differences, the authors' endeavor to eliminate the possibility of the Ostrogothic usucapion of Italy. According to the Roman law, anyone could legitimize a possession, if he was able to keep it safe without any legal or other interruption for 30 years. From the Eastern point of view, Theoderic's reign dated from 489, which was supposed to be ceased 30 years later when the Emperor sent prince Eutharic to Italy. However, the unexpected death of the Visigoth Prince confused the possession of Italy. The disarray is also manifested in the sources. Regarding the beginning of Theoderic's reign, the sources repeatedly strengthen his 'good soldier'/*magister militum* image (Anonymus Valesianus, Malalas, Procopius). The brief mention of the refused Anicius marriage is nothing more than an expression of that the Ostrogoths managed Italy as the emperor's subordinate. Procopius started the characterization of Theoderic with an allusion of Thukydides that he applied on Pericles, who himself was a good statesman, soldier, and citizen, but after the death of Ephialtes he became tyrannos and the first man of the state. In Italy, this change was induced by the death of Eutharic. The different descriptions show how the Ostrogoths tried to keep the power over Italy. According to the *Edictum Theoderici*, in the case of a property's ownership, the prior owner's years shall be counted for the benefit of the current holder. This viewpoint is represented in the entry of Marcellinus, who called both Theoderic and Odoacer 'Goth', also proven by the accounts about the common reign of Theoderic and Odoacer over Italy. Others, including Procopius and Cassiodorus, counted the ruling years from 489, when the Ostrogoths arrived in Italy,

therefore the legal ruling period ended in 519, in the year of Eutharic's inauguration. After the death of Eutharic, the power could be legally preserved through the guardianship over the young Athalaric and Matasuntha. The magister officiorum prepared this solution, however, Boethius' delay resulted in a lawsuit that caused his death and the fall of his father-law.

### **7. Theodahad tried to gain the imperial recognition of his Italian power through an Anicius marriage.**

However, the days of legitimacy through guardianship were limited, Athalaric and Matasuntha came closer to the age of adulthood in each year. To solve this limitation, Theodahad intended to legitimize the independent Ostrogothic regime through an Anicius marriage: According to the *Variae*, one of his close relatives, presumably his daughter, had to marry Anicius Maximus *primicerius*. Procopius emphasizes the importance of merging the lineage of Anicius Maximus with two earlier usurpers (Magnus Maximus, Petronius Maximus), although, not being affiliated with each other. In the first phase of the Gothic war, Anicius Maximus was killed, so the Western branch of the Anicius family was interrupted. Therefore, the legitimization could only take place through the Eastern branch of the family.

### **8. The legitimacy claim of the Anicius family also appeared during the Nika riot.**

Members of the Anicius family had a significant role during Justinian's ruling as well. During Justin's ruling, Anicia Juliana, the *nobilissima*, was still alive; however, her death in 530 led to legitimacy issues since at least one of Anastasius's nephews was married into the Anicius family. Among the four nephews of Justin, Germanus and Justinus seemed to be potential successors. It was an advantage of Germanus that his father was born from a marriage with an Anicius, nonetheless, the emperor adopted and made Justinian his successor before Anicia Juliana's death. However, after Anicius Juliana's death, the emperor ruled without any dynastic relation. The aspiration towards the Theodosius dynasty can be recognized in the case of the Nika riots, too. The riot escalated after the *praefectus*' men went after some convicts despite the St. Laurentius Basilica's law of asylum. This building, where St. Stephen I's relics were placed, was the *dominium* of the Theodosius dynasty and at that time, of the Anicius family. The dissatisfaction partly emerged because Aelia vanished from the empress's official name that had a status-signifying role after the failure of the Theodosius dynasty. The beginning of the anti-emperor demonstration could be connected to the Anicius family, as its end as well. Existing research did not consider that senatorial speech that was only narrated by Procopius. In senator Origenes's speech, the two palaces are the symbols of the current reigning power and the Theodosius-Anicius family.

After the Nika riots, Justin's other nephew, Germanus also vindicated the throne lawfully because Hypatius's arrest was not considered to be the merit of Belisarius, but of Justin's two nephews, brothers of Germanus, namely Boraïdes and Justus by Procopius. The historian in this way uses a similar illustration that Valesianus used, by portraying both nephews of Anastasius. Pompeius and Hypatius slept in one bed while Probus in another bed thereby no one slept in the bed containing the ensigns. That is how Justin followed Anastasius on the throne, and that is how after Justin Justinian became the ruler. Anonymus Valesianus's description of Anastasius's succession is the allusion of the Nika riot.

**9. Justinian used the horse statue of Theodosius the Great to his triumphant column, expressing that the two parts of the empire were united again in his hand.**

For his monument in 543, Justinian used Theodosius' former monument that celebrated his predecessor's victory over the ancestors of the Ostrogoths. In 540, a similar victory happened when Matasuntha and Vitiges were captured and carried to Constantinople. The emperor still did not have any dynastic ancestors, but he managed to have it after Justin's nephews died and he could adopt his underage successors. For the very first time, he handled this opportunity after he could take care of Boraïdes's widow and orphan. Soon after this, that equestrian statue was built up on the main square of Constantinople, which belonged to Theodosius once. Thereby Justinian became a member of the same community as the dynasty of the former emperor. Justinian's equestrian statue emphasized this political thought. After Germanus' death, the emperor became Germanus' posthumous guardian, who was born from the marriage of Germanus and Matasuntha. Justinian, using his guardianship, declared *Pragmatica Sanctio* to arrange Italy's situation legally, so he could start ruling over peninsula.

### **Conference papers related to the topic of the Ph.D. dissertation**

1. "Justinian and the base of his imperial legitimacy." 6th Days of Justinian, Ohrid, Macedonia, 23-24 November 2018.
2. "Victory without military success: The literary basis of the imperial propaganda." Laetae segetes VI, Masaryk University, Brno, Poland, 12-14 November 2018.
3. "Privatissimum mit Herwig Wolfram." Institut für Mittelalterforschung der ÖAW, Zwettl Abbey, Austria, 19-20 October 2015.
4. "Early Efforts of a Pre-Justinian's 'Reconquest'." VIII<sup>e</sup> Rencontres byzantines, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris, France, 2-3 October 2015.
5. "Egy eltűnt szcenátor: Albinus." IX. Medieviztikai PhD Konferencia, Szeged, Hungary, 17-19 June 2015.
6. "Egy félreértelmezett családfa története." ELTE Középkorral foglalkozó doktoranduszok konferenciája, Budapest, Hungary, 21-22 May 2015.
7. "The Dynamic Middle Ages II: The Dynamics of European Cultures and Societies in the Middle Ages." The Higher School of Economics & Deutsches Historisches Institut, Moscow, Russia, 7-10 October 2014.
8. "The Anicii and Decii in the Late Antiquity: Problems and Possible Solutions." Sapiens Ubique Civis II, Szeged, Hungary, 27-30 August 2014.
9. "The Importance of the Eastern Influence under Great Theoderic's Reign." International Medieval Congress, Leeds, United Kingdom, 6-10 July 2014.
10. "(Re)creation of Christian Identity through Theoderic's Italy." 20th International Research Center for Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages Colloquium, Poreč, Croatia, 1-6 October 2013.
11. "'Pleasure' of food in Ostrogothic Italy: A story of an envoy." International Medieval Congress, Leeds, United Kingdom, 1-4 July 2013.
12. "Nagy Theoderich külpolitikájának egy szakasza: A sirmiumi háború." VIII. Medieviztikai PhD Konferencia, Szeged, Hungary, 17-19 June 2013.
13. "Etnikai ellentétek Itáliában az 5. század fordulóján." EthnOriens Konferencia, Szeged, Hungary, 20 November 2010.

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1. "Procopius in Hungarian", in Geoffrey Greatrex, ed., *Recent Work on Procopius outside the English-speaking World: A Survey*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Histos Supplement 9, 2019, 7.1-7.10.
2. "Some remarks on Anonymus Valesianus' Pars Posterior," *Chronica 13 (2017): 5-16*.



3. "Colosseum," *Határtalan Régészet* 2 (2016). 78-81.
4. *Anonymus Valesianus Pars Posterior*. Fordította, jegyzetelte és tanulmányokkal ellátta Kovács Tamás. Vivarium Fontium sorozat. Genianet, 2016. ISBN: 978-963-89394-8-7.
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6. "Cassiodorus újraértelmezve...", *Aetas* 1 (2014): 145-151.
7. "Szenátori családok pártharcai az 5. század végén," *Aetas* 3 (2011): 124-139.
8. "Elfeledett követjárások a késő antikvitás történetéből," *Aetas* 1 (2008): 182-188.