



St Nicholas News

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THE PALACE OF THE BYZANTINE GOVERNOR IN BARI

42

WITH THE ARRIVAL OF ST NICHOLAS'
RELICS IN 1087 WAS RESTRUCTURED
AND BECAME ST NICHOLAS' BASILICA



In the year 871 the allied armies of the Franks of Ludovick II and the Byzantines of Basil the Macedonian liberated Bari driving the Muslims out of the city.

In the year 968 (first documents few years later) Bari became the headquarters of the Catepan, the representative in Southern Italy (*Tema of Longobardy*) of the emperor of Byzantium. His palace was exactly where now is the imposing Basilica of St Nicholas.

Year 1032. Leaden seal of the Catepan Michael, *the first of the imperial domestics* (επι των οικειακων).

This seal, the most ancient of St Nicholas' Archives, unites two parchments, one in Latin, the other in Greek (ABS, *Byzantine Period*, 10/11, ed. in CDB IV, 21).

With no figures, the inscription goes from one side to the other, starting here with: *M(ICHAEL), PROTOSPATARIUS, CHAMBER-LAIN, JUDGE OF THE HYPPODROME*



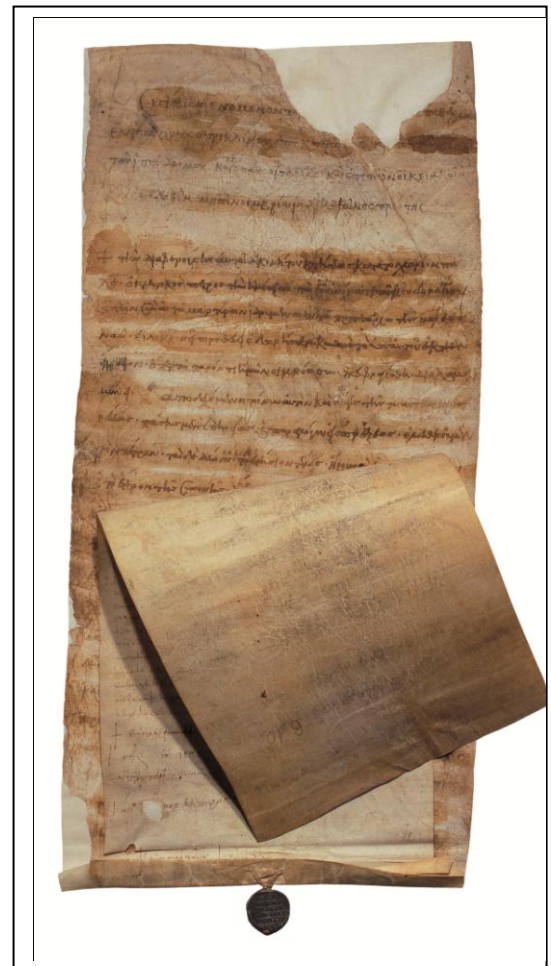
**... FIRST OF THE DOMESTICS
AND CATEPAN OF ITALY**

NB. The loss of some letters makes a little difficult the transcription of the "legend". The Greek text of the parchment however helps to insert the lacking letters.

The parchment contains a donation act by a certain Peter son of Jaquintus of the town of Palo **in favor of the St Eustratios' church**, inside the Catepan court.

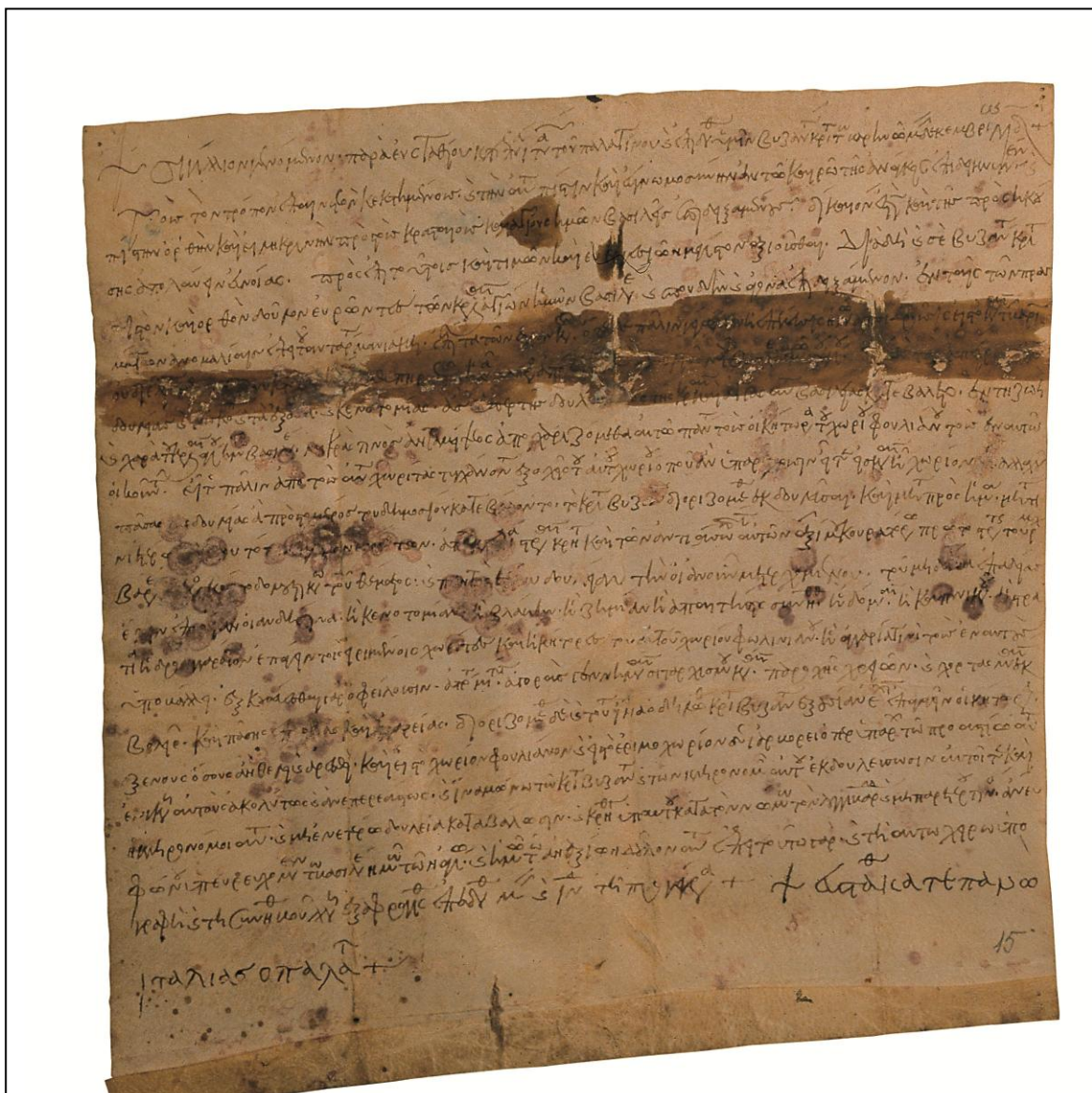
On the leaden seal is mentioned as catepan Ykeiakòn (literally: Domestic). He is to be identified with the Catepan Michael, Proto-spatarius and Domestic.

The document is formed by two parchments, one in Greek and the other in Latin, kept united by the seal. This is because while the authorities were Greek, the population was Latin speaking.



Inside the walls of the Catepan's Court there were six little churches: St Demetrius, St Basil, St Sofia, St Gregory, St Stephen, St Eustratius.

After the first three days in the monastery of St Benedict, while the renovation works of the Crypt were going on (July 8 1087 – September 30, 1089) St Nicholas bones were hosted in St Eustratius (exactly the church mentioned in the parchment) and St Stephen (the most external of the Court). Out of all these churches St Gregory alone is today functioning as church. S. Stephen is the generating station in the southern side of the church. The others were all demolished in order to give the Basilica wider spaces.



Parchment of the Catepan Eustratius Palatinus, December 1045 (1046 of the Byzantine Calendar, according to which the year starts September the 1st). St Nicholas' Archives, *Per. Bizantino*, C 3 (CDB IV, 32, today in the Museo Nicolaiano).

The Catepan rewards the judge Byzantius who in Bari maintained himself faithful to the emperor during the rebellions of George Maniakes and Argyros in the year 1042. Maniakes, the conqueror of Edessa against the Muslims, had arrived in Apulia to crush the dangerous uprising of the Normans headed by the Barian Argyros. In the course of the military operations he himself revolted against the emperor. How Byzantius contributed to keep Bari faithful to the emperor against Maniakes and the Normans is not known. May be he convinced Argyros to leave the Normans and turn again faithful to the emperor. The Catepan donates to Byzantius the town of *Foulianon* (Polignano ?) with the faculty to govern according the ancient Longobard laws.



The leaden seal of the Catepan Eustratius Palatinus in a time unknown was torn out from the parchment. The dimensions are: mm 26 x 27 x 3. Today is preserved in the box of the seals detached from the parchments. . The inscription says: *Eustratius Protospatarius Catepan of Italy Palatinus*.

NB. The “Proto” (the first) in Greek is indicated with an A circumflex. Therefore, Protospatarius is written (like in this seal) Aspatarius.

SEAL OF THE POPE NICHOLAS II.

*Legenda: Tibi Petre dabo claves regni caelorum.
To you Peter I'll give the keys of the heavenly Kingdom*

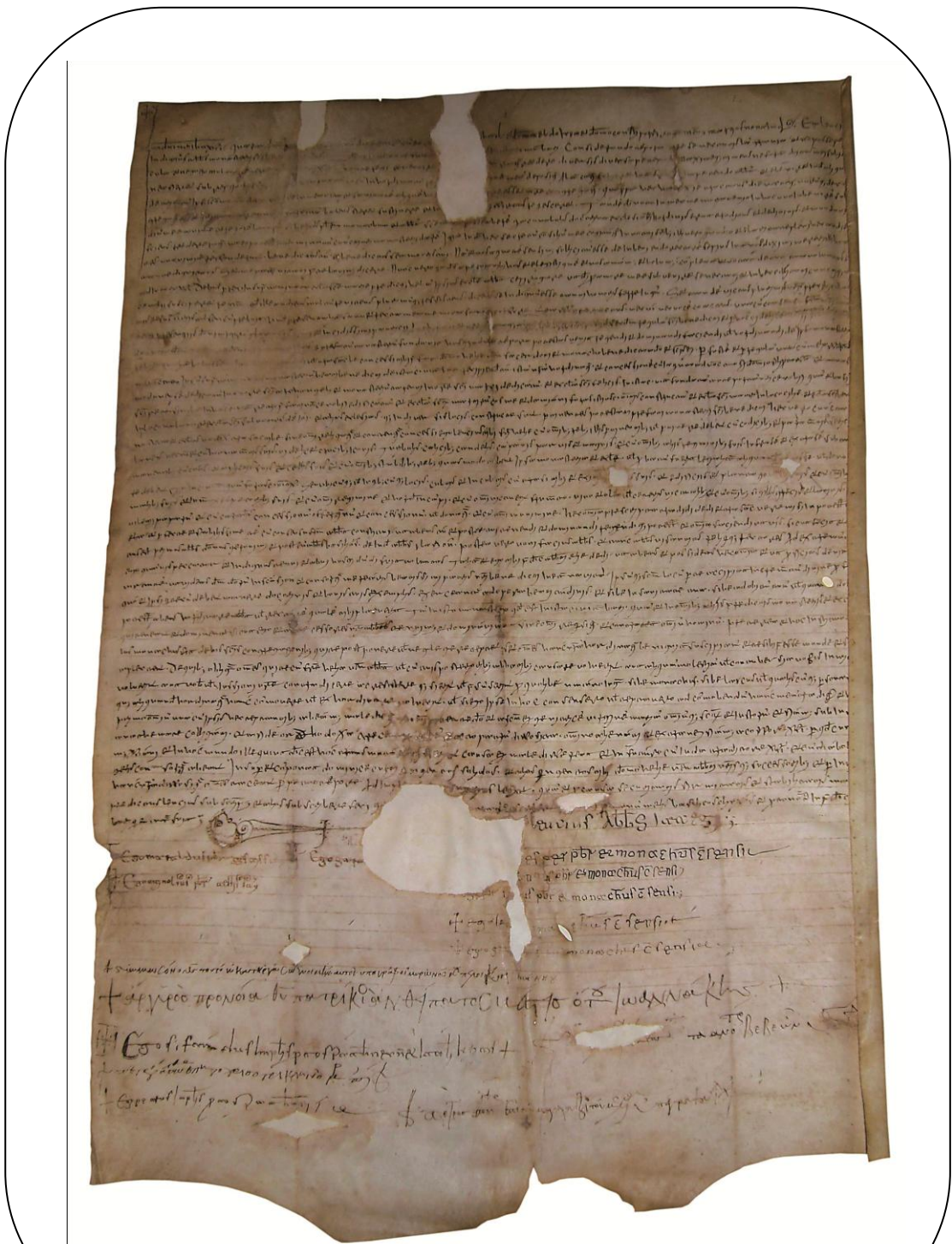
With the exception of this one (with St Peter alone), all the papal leaden seals of our Archives have the images of the saints Peter and Paul.

In a bad state of oxidation it is no more attached to the parchment **written in Melfi in the year 1059.**



In the year 754, the emperor Constatin V took away all southern Italy from the jurisdiction of the Popes (in retaliation for their opposition to the iconoclasm) to submit it to the Patriarch of Constantinople. Afterwards, very rarely the Popes tried to recover their role in this region. But, the conflict between the Pope and the Patriarch that led to the schism of the year 1054 (between Catholics and Orthodox) brought the Popes to change the previous politics. In 1059 the Pope Nicholas II gathered a council in Melfi, where he removed the excommunication against the Normans and consecrated Robert Guiscard duke of Apulia. The Normans became the Pope’s right hand, and helped him to recover the jurisdiction on southern Italy .

The parchment to which was attached this seal reports **an episode** in the context of this **new politics of the Popes in Southern Italy**. The Pope recognizes freedom and immunity to the church of the Saints Peter and Paul in Rutigliano (not far away from Bari).



Archivio di S. Nicola. Perg. Per. Biz. (CDB IV, n. 45). Seal lost.

After three years of siege by the Normans of Robert the Guiscard, with no help from Constantinople, in the month of march 1071 the Barians starved to death. The parchment above tells how the old abbot of St Benedict Leucius did not know what to do, and resigned, leaving his place to abbot Eliah, who had the agreement of Byzantine authorities and of the monks. Less than one month later (April 15) Bari opened the doors to the Norman conqueror, who deprived the city of its role as capital. He spared the catepan's life. 16 years later (1087) the abandoned catepan's palace was restructured by that same Eliah and became the St Nicholas' Basilica.