indolence for war,” he fell upon them and killed almost all of them. Friulian Lombards were annoyed by *latriunculi Sclavorum*, who “fell upon the flocks and upon the shepherd of the sheep that pastured in their neighborhoods and drove away the booty taken from them.” The Slavs were a familiar neighbor: in times of trouble, both Arnefrid, Lupus’ son, and Duke Penmo fled to the Slavs. Knowing that his audience was familiar with the Slavs, Paul projects this familiarity into the past. He argues that, sometime after 663, when the invading Slavs saw Duke Wechtaario coming from Forum Julii against them with only twenty-five men, “they laughed, saying that the patriarch was advancing against them with his clergy.” This is pure anachronism, since according to Paul’s own testimony, Calixtus, the patriarch of Aquileia, moved to Forum Julii only in 737 or shortly before that. Moreover, Wechtaario raising his helmet and thus provoking panic among Slavs, is a stereotypical gesture, pointing to the style and ethos of an oral heroic model, and may be easily paralleled by a series of similar accounts.78

Paul’s Slavs, particularly those from later references in Book v and vi, are lively beings, have “faces” and feelings, and are always active, not passive, elements. An old Slavic woman helped Paul’s great-grandfather to escape from the Avars, gave him food and told him what direction he ought to go. One can speak with the Slavs in their own language or use their corruptly constructed place names. They can laugh, recognize a hero from his bald head, be alarmed or terrified, cry, or even fight manfully. However, although Paul’s Slavs are a gens and even have a patria, they lack any political organization that would make them comparable to other gentes. Unlike Fredegar’s Wends, they have no rex and no regnum, despite the fact that by the time Paul wrote his *History*, the *Carantani* were already organized as a polity under their *dux* Boruth and his successors. No Slavic leader whatsoever appears in Paul’s account. He occasionally focused on individuals such as the old Slavic woman. If looking for more narrowly defined social groups, we are left only with the *latriunculi Sclavorum*. Despite its animation, Paul’s picture is thus a stereotypical one, probably rooted in ethnic stereotypes developed along the Friulian border by successive generations of Lombards.79

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### Table 1: Sources of Sources: Origin of Accounts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eyewitness</th>
<th>Possible Contact</th>
<th>Second-hand Information</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Strategikon</em></td>
<td>Procopius</td>
<td>Jordanes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George of Psidiana</td>
<td>Pseudo-Caesarius</td>
<td>Agathias</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Chronicon Paschale</em></td>
<td><em>Miraculae Sanctorum</em></td>
<td>John Malalas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theodore Synclius</td>
<td>Menander the Guardsman</td>
<td>John of Ephesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theophylact Simocatta (<em>Feldzugjournal</em>)</td>
<td></td>
<td>John of Bicalar</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gregory the Great</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Isidore of Seville</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fredegar</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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**Conclusion**

There are at least three important conclusions to be drawn from this survey of sources concerning the history of the early Slavs between c. 500 and 700. First, many contemporary accounts are based on second-hand information (Table 1). Some authors, like Jordanes, Agathias, or Menander the Guardsman, only used written sources of various origins. There are, however, a number of sources that most certainly originated in eyewitness accounts, such as the *Strategikon* or Theophylact Simocatta’s narrative of Maurice’s campaigns against Avars and Scalvines. The analysis of other accounts reveals a possible contact of some sort with the Slavs, as in the case of Procopius’ *Wars*, arguably based on interviews with Scalvine and Antian mercenaries in Italy. Second, there is a substantial overlap in the time-spans covered by these accounts (see Table 2), despite their divergent perspectives and aims. This has encouraged historians to look for parallels, but also to fill in the gaps of one source with material derived from another. It is clear, however, that only a few, relatively short, periods witnessed an increasing interest in Slavs and things Slavic (Table 3). No source specifically talks about Slavs before the reign of Justinian (527–65); despite Jordanes’ efforts to fabricate a venerable ancestry for them by linking Scalvines and Antes to Venethi.80 It was the first half of Justinian’s reign that witnessed the rise of a “Slavic problem.” During the last half of Justinian’s reign and during the reigns of his successors, Justin II (565–78) and

78 *Historia Langobardorum* iv 42, 44, 44, vi 45, vi 45, vi 51, vi 53; Aio’s death is also mentioned in the *Chronica Sancti Benedicti Caisinensis*, ed. G. H. Perret, MGH: Scriptores Rerum Langobardorum (Berlin, 1979), p. 202; see also Borodin 1983:56. For the hero raising his helmet, see Pizarro 1984:353 with n. 51.

79 *Historia Langobardorum* vi 24. See Curti 1992:166–1. Boroth ruled between c. 740 and c. 750, followed by his son Cacatus (c. 750 to 752) and his nephew Chetmar (752 to c. 769), then by Waltunc (c. 773 to c. 788), and Prèvildaungo (c. 788 to c. 799). See *Conversionis Boganorum et Carantanorum* c. 4–5.

80 Marcellinus Comes, whose chronicle covered the period between 579 and 588, to which he later added a sequel down to 534 (a supplement to 548 being added by another author), had no knowledge of Scalvines.
The making of the Slavs

Table 2  Time-spans covered by sixth- and seventh-century sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>500</th>
<th>525</th>
<th>550</th>
<th>575</th>
<th>600</th>
<th>625</th>
<th>650</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jordanes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Procopius</td>
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<td>Agathias</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Malalas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Menander the Guardsman</td>
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<td>Evagrius</td>
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<td>Theophylact Simocatta</td>
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<td>Minales i</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minales ii</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isidore of Seville</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chronicon Paschale</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fredigar</td>
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</table>

Tiberius II (578–82), informations about Slavs were scarce. The “Slavic problem” resurfaced under Emperor Maurice (582–602). This is the period in which some of the most important sources were written, such as Menander the Guardsman’s History, the Strategikon, and the campaign diary later used by Theophylact Simocatta for his History. Finally, the last period witnessing a considerable interest in Slavs is that of Heraclius’ reign, most probably because of their participation in the siege of Constantinople in 626. The Slavs now appear in the works of those who had witnessed the combined attacks of Avars, Slavs, and Persians on the capital city (George of Psidia, Theodore Synclenus, and the author of the Chronicon Paschale). Archbishop John of Thessalonica viewed them as a major threat to his city requiring the miraculous intervention of St Demetrius. Theophylact Simocatta incorporated the Feldzugsgeschicht written in the last few years of the sixth century into his narrative of Maurice’s reign. The same period witnessed the first attempts to convert the Slavs to Christianity, which most likely stimulated Fredigar to write the first independent account in the West. After Heraclius’ reign, there are no other sources referring to Slavs, except Book II of the Miracles of St Demetrius, Justinian (the mid-sixth century), Maurice (the late sixth century), and Heraclius (the second third of the seventh century) are thus the major chronological markers of the historiography of the early Slavs.

Sources

Table 3  Chronology of sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Emperor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>550/1</td>
<td>Jordanes, Getica</td>
<td>Justinian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jordanes, Romana</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Procopius, Wars i–vii</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Procopius, Secret History</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 554</td>
<td>Procopius, Wars vii</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Procopius, Buildings iv</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 560</td>
<td>Pseudo-Caesarius</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 560–80</td>
<td>Agathias</td>
<td>Justin II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 565–74</td>
<td>John Malalas</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 570–9</td>
<td>Martin of Braga</td>
<td>Maurice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>582–602</td>
<td>Menander the Guardsman</td>
<td>Tiberius II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 590</td>
<td>John of Ephesus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 592–602</td>
<td>John of Biclar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 593</td>
<td>Strategikon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>599/600</td>
<td>Evagrius</td>
<td>Gregory the Great</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>610–20</td>
<td>Miracles of St Demetrius i</td>
<td>Phocas</td>
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<tr>
<td>626</td>
<td>George of Psidia, Bellum Avium</td>
<td>Heraclius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>629</td>
<td>George of Psidia, Heraclias</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>630</td>
<td>Chronicon Paschale</td>
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<td>c. 630</td>
<td>Isidore of Seville, Chronica Maiora</td>
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<td>c. 630</td>
<td>Theophylact Simocatta</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 626–41</td>
<td>Theodore Synclenus</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>639–42</td>
<td>Jonas of Bobbio, Life of St Columbanus</td>
<td>Constans II</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 660</td>
<td>Fredigar</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 690</td>
<td>Miracles of St Demetrius ii</td>
<td>Constantin IV</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 3

THE SLAVS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL SOURCES

(c. 500–700)

A major, still unresolved, problem of the modern historiography of the early Middle Ages remains that of defining the settlement of the Slavs in the Balkans. On the assumption that the Slavs originated in an Urheimat located far from the Danube river, nineteenth-century historians used the concept of migration (Einwanderung, Auswanderung). They were followed by modern historians under the influence of the concept and the historiography of the Volkswanderung. More recently, a linguist searching for the original homeland of the Slavs even spoke of *reconquista.*

Palacký and Šafařík also insisted, a few years before the Slavic Congress in Prague (1848), that the migration of the Slavs was a peaceful one, quite unlike the brutal Germanic invasions. As a consequence, some modern historians and archaeologists prefer to write of colonization or of Landnahme and imagine the early Slavs as a people of farmers, travelling on foot, “entire families or even whole tribes,” to the promised land.

Noting, however, that such a Landnahme was completely invisible to early medieval sources, Lucien Musset called it an *obscure progressio,* a tag quickly adopted by others. After World War II, particularly in Communist countries, the acceptable terms were “infiltration” and “penetration” and the favorite metaphor, the wave. Others, more willing to use the perspective of contemporary sources, observed that more often than not, after successful raids, the Slavs returned to their homes north of the Danube. Current usage has therefore replaced “migration” and “infiltration” with “invasion” and “raid.”

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5 See Enslen 1929; Stein 1968; Waldmüller 1976; Ditten 1978.


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Slavs in early medieval sources

It is often assumed that Jordanes’ source for his account of the Slavs was Cassiodorus, who wrote in the late 520s or early 530s. Some argued therefore that the *Getica* is a genuine report of the earliest stages of the Slavic infiltration in Eastern Europe. In the eyes of Procopius, Jordanes’ contemporary, the Slavs were, however, a quite recent problem, which he specifically linked to the beginnings of Justinian’s reign. Since no other source referred to either Slavenes or Antes before Justinian, some have rightly concluded that these two *ethnies* were purely (early) medieval phenomena.

In this chapter, I intend to examine the historical sources regarding the Slavenes and the Antes in the light of a strictly chronological concern. My purpose is not a full narrative of events, for which there are better and more informative guides at hand. This chapter has a different scope. I devote particular attention to the broader picture in which Slavic raiding activity took place, partly in order to point up its relative impact in comparison to other problems of the Danube frontier. Discussion of interaction between Slavs, on one hand, Gepids, Cutrigurs, Avars, and Bulgars, on the other, occupies a large amount of space for similar reasons. The chapter’s emphasis is on the Slavs rather than the Empire, and so it points to the territories north of the Danube, where transformations may have occurred that are reflected in our sources. Those transformations may provide a key to the problem of defining the Slavic settlement and to understand the mechanisms of Slavic raiding activities, two aspects discussed in detail in the following chapters.

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**SLAVIC RAIDING DURING JUSTINIAN’S REIGN**

Procopius is the first author to speak of Slavic raiding across the Danube. According to his evidence, the first attack of the Antes, “who dwell close to the Sclaveni,” may be dated to 518. The raid was intercepted by Germanus, *magister militum per Thraciam,* and the Antes were defeated. There is no record of any other Antian raid until Justinian’s rise to power. It is possible therefore that this attack, like that of the *Getiae equites* of 517, was related to Vitalianus’ revolt.
The making of the Slavs

The Scylavenes first appear in the context of Justinian's new, aggressive policies on the Danube frontier. In the early 530s, Chilbuddus, a member of the imperial household, replaced Germanus as magister militum per Thraciam.7 He gave up defending the Balkan provinces behind the Danube line and boldly attacked barbarians on the left bank of the river.8 This was the first time the Romans had launched campaigns north of the Danube frontier since Valens' Gothic wars of 367–9. Chilbuddus' campaigns also indicate that the Scylavenes were not far from the frontier. Three years after his nomination, he was killed in one of his expeditions north of the river. Indirectly criticizing Justinian's subsequent policies in the Balkans, Procopius argues that thereafter, "the river became free for the barbarians to cross all times just as they wished." Elsewhere, he describes the territories between the Black Sea and the Danube as "impossible for the Romans to traverse," because of incessant raids.9

At the end of the episode of Chilbuddus, Procopius claims that "the entire Roman empire found itself utterly incapable of matching the valor of one single man." This may well have been intended as a reproach for Justinian.10 It is true, however, that the death of Chilbuddus, which coincides in time with the beginning of Justinian's wars in the West, was followed by a radical change of policy in the Balkans. Besides the measures taken to fortify both the frontier and the provinces in the interior, to be discussed in the next chapter, Justinian now remodeled the administrative structure of the Balkans. In 536, he created the quaestura exercitus. The new administrative unit combined territories at a considerable distance from each other, such as Moesia Inferior, Scythia Minor, some islands in the Aegean Sea, Caria, and Cyprus, all of which were ruled from Odessos (present-day Varna) by the "prefect of Scythia." The prefect of the quaestura was given a special forum for a court of justice and an entire staff, both of them being "generated from the prefecture [of the East]." The only links between all these provinces were the sea and the navigable Danube. Since Cyprus, the Aegean islands, and Caria represented the most

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8 The terms used by Procopius to indicate that Chilbuddus prevented barbarians from crossing the Danube (δε ποτεν διαβαςων την διαβασαν πολλακις διαβερας) allow Romans to cross the opposite side (ετε ημαιντον την αντιπρας ... ις επιστολα τα), show that, at least in his eyes, the Lower Danube was still an efficient barrier. See Chryssos 1987:27–8. For the date of Chilbuddus' death, see Walther 1976:36.

9 Procopius, Wars VII.14.4–6, III.1.10. See Ivanov, Gindin, and Cymburskii 1991:217. Chilbuddus' campaign north of the Danube may have taken advantage of the transfer of troops from the East following the 532 peace with Persia. See Duchen 1942.


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Slavs in early medieval sources

important naval bases of the Empire, but were also among the richest provinces, the rationale behind Justinian's measure may have been to secure both militarily and financially the efficient defense of the Danube frontier.11 Important changes were also introduced at the other end of the Danube frontier. The novel 11 of 535, which created an archbishopric of Justusina Prima, also intended to move the see of the Illyrian prefecture from Thessalonica to the northern provinces. The bishop of Aquila, a city in Dacia Ripensis, on the right bank of the Danube, was also given authority over the city and the neighboring forts, an indication that, instead of aggressive generals, Justinian's policies were now based on the new military responsibilities of bishops.12

But this adjustment of policy in the Balkans did not prevent Justinian from boasting about Chilbuddus' victories. In November 533, a law was issued with a new intuuture, in which Justinian was described as Antius, along with titles such as Vandalicus and Africus relating to Belisarius' success against the Vandals. The title Antius occurs in Justinian's intuuture until 542, then again between 552 and 565. It also appears in inscriptions. Despite Justinian's new defensive approach on the Danube frontier, Roman troops were still holding the left bank of the river. This is indicated by a law issued by Justinian in 538, which dealt with the collection of taxes in Egypt. Officers refusing to assist auxiliares in collecting taxes were facing the punishment of being transferred, together with their entire unit, to the region north of the river Danube, "in order to watch at the frontier of that place."13

But Justinian also adopted another way of dealing with the problems on the Danube frontier. In accordance with traditional Roman tactics, he sought to divide and rule. Shortly after the reconquest of Sirmium from the Ostrogoths (535/6), the Gepids took over the city and rapidly conquered "almost all of Dacia."14 The capture of Sirmium by his old allies, the Gepids, and their subsequent hostile acts were hard for Justinian

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11 Novel 41 of May 18, 536 (Corpus Iuris Civilis IV: 262); John Lydus, On Powers II.28. According to John, Justinian set aside for the prefect of Scythia "three provinces, which were almost the most prosperous of all" (It. 29). For the quaestura exercitus, see also Stein 1906:247–5; Lemerle 1960:286; Trendler 1954:88; Sadecky–Kordos 1985; Whitby 1988:32. The quaestus Iustinius exercitus was directly responsible for the annexation of the army and also exercised supreme judiciary power. See Tebatov 1997.

12 Corpus Iuris Civilis IV: 94. It is unlikely that the see was ever transferred to Justusina Prima. See Granić 1952:128; Maksmović 1934:149.

13 Codex Iustinius, edict 11 (Corpus Iuris Civilis IV: 785). See Whitby 1988:166 with n. 14. For the epithet Antius, see the introduction to Iustitiales (Corpus Iuris Civilis IV: xxii) and novel 17 (Corpus Iuris Civilis IV: 117). For inscriptions, see CIL IV 8636; CIL III 13673. See also Velkor 1987:159; Trimbacher 1980:161; Ivanov 1991:26; Günther 1992. Justinian's successors imitated his intuuture. The last emperor to do so was Heraclius (novel 12 of May 1, 612).

The making of the Slavs

to take. In response to this, he settled the Herules in the neighboring region of Singidunum (present-day Belgrade). The same principle was applied to the situation on the Lower Danube frontier. Procopius tells us that, sometime between 533/4 and 545, probably before the devastating invasion of the Huns in 539/40, the Antes and the Scalenes “became hostile to one another and engaged in battle,” which ended with a victory of the Scalenes over the Antes. It is possible, though not demonstrable, that the conflict had been fueled by Justinian. In any case, as Antes and Scalenes fought against each other, Romans recruited soldiers from both ethnic groups. In 537, 1,600 horsemen, most of whom were Scalenes and Antes, “who were settled above the Ister river not far from its banks,” were shipped to Italy, in order to rescue Belisarius, who was blocked in Rome by the Ostrogoths.

But none of Justinian’s attempts to solve the problems in the Danube area proved to be successful. In December 539, a numerous “Hunnic army” crossed the frozen Danube and fell as a scourage upon the eastern Balkan provinces. This, Procopius argued, “had happened many times before, but... never brought such a multitude of woes nor such dreadful things to the people of this land.” According to Procopius, the Hunnic raid covered the entire Balkan peninsula from the Adriatic coast to the environs of Constantinople, and resulted in 32 forts taken in Illyricum and no less than 120,000 Roman prisoners. Since Procopius is our only source for this raid, there is no way of assessing the accuracy of his testimony. It is possible, however, that he had the same raid in mind when claiming that the Huns, the Scalenes, and the Antes, in their daily inroads, wrought frightful havoc among the inhabitants of the Roman provinces. As in the Wars, he argues that more than twenty myriads of

these inhabitants were killed or enslaved, so that a veritable “Scythian wilderness” came to exist everywhere in the Balkan provinces. In the same vein, Jordanes refers to regular invasions of Bulgars, Antes, and Scalenes. A sixth-century Midrashic homilist also complains about havoc brought to Jewish communities by Berbers and Antes. Mistakenly applying John Malalas’ account of Zabergan’s invasion of 559 to the events of 540, some argued that the Scalenes may have also participated in the Hunnic invasion of 540. Taking into account that Procopius describes in his Wars similar invasions of the Scalenes, with a similar development, and clearly refers to Scalenes, along with Huns and Antes, in his Secret History, it is a likely possibility. However, since Procopius is our only source for the raid of 540, there is no way to prove the point and the wisest solution is to accept that Procopius’ reference to Scalenes in his Secret History cannot be dated with any precision. He might have referred in general to the situation in the Balkans during the 530s. On the other hand, Procopius certainly had in mind a new raid when claiming that during their conflict with the Scalenes between 533 and 545, the Antes invaded Thrace and plundered and enslaved many of the Roman inhabitants, leading the captives with them as they returned to their “native abode.”

At this point in his narrative, Procopius introduces a young Antian prisoner of war, named Chilbudus, like the former magister militum per Thraciam. The story is clearly influenced by plots most typical of neo-Attic comedy or of Plautus. Since Antes and Scalenes were now on peaceful terms, “phoney Chilbudus” was redeemed from the Scalenes by one of his fellow tribesmen, who also had a Roman prisoner with a Machiavellian mind. The latter persuaded his master that the man he had just purchased from the Scalenes was Chilbudus, the Roman general, and that he would be richly recompensated by Justinian if he would bring


17 Procopius, Wars vii 14.1.1: στη οποία τω Παταροχ ο Νέατζος πάντοτε τροχαίος τον Ζέβειαν. For the date of Procopius’ reference, see
The making of the Slavs

Chilbadius back to “the land of the Romans.” But as soon as he was brought back to his fellow tribesmen, “phoney Chilbadius” frankly revealed his true identity, for he now expected to join again his tribe as a freeman. The whole story was made public when “the report was carried about and reached the entire nation of the Antes.” Under their pressure, “phoney Chilbadius” then agreed to claim that he really was the Roman general and the Antes sent him immediately to Constantinople. At about the same time, as if knowing what was going on, Justinius sent an embassy to the Antes, asking them all to move into “an ancient city, Turris by name, situated to the north of the river Ister.” The city had been built by Trajan, but was left deserted, after it had been plundered by the barbarians of that region. Justinius promised to give them the city and the region around it, and to pay them great sums of money, on condition that they should become his allies and constantly block the way against the Huns, when these wished to overrun the Roman domain. The Antes accepted all conditions, provided that Chilbadius, the magister militum per Thraciam, would be restored to his office of general of the Roman army and would assist them in settling in Turris. The rationale behind their request, Procopius argues, was that they wanted and stoutly maintained that the man there among them was Chilbadius, the Roman general. In the end, the whole plot was unmasked by Narses, who captured “phoney Chilbadius” on his way to Constantinople.

It is difficult to visualize the source of this story. Some have argued that Procopius may have had access to the official forms of the cross-examination of “phoney Chilbadius” by Narses, others that he might have taken the whole story from the Antian envoys in Constantinople. Whatever its origin, Procopius surely re-worked the account and arranged it according to comic narrative patterns. He may have intended to stress a few important points. First, there is the ambition of the Antes, as a group, to be given a Roman official who would guide them into some more sophisticated organization. They all agreed to become Justinian’s ἐνσεβείαν and would remain allies of the Empire until 602. The fact that Justinian transferred to his new allies a Roman fort on the left bank of the Danube river shows that the Romans were still claiming rights to territories north of the frontier. Procopius’ story is thus designed to adjust such claims to the actual situation. He also needed “phoney Chilbadius” in order to explain how Justinius could conceivably have allied himself with barbarians who “are not ruled by one man, but . . . lived from old under a democracy” and by whom “everything which involves their welfare, whether for good or for ill, is referred to the people.” Barbarian ignorant of the benefits of monarchy may have understood “Chilbadius” not as a certain person, but as a military and political title of an official able to bolster their request. Narses unmasking the plot of the Antes did not, therefore, cause the invalidation of the foedus, for in the following years, Antes would constantly appear in historical sources as allies of the Romans. Just two years after the treaty of 545, 300 Antes were fighting in Lucania (Italy) against the Ostrogoths. In the 580s, the Romans bribed the Antes to attack the settlements of the Scavenses. In 602, the qagan dispatched Apsich, his general, to destroy the “nation of the Antes, which was in fact allied to the Romans.” From a Roman perspective, the treaty of 545 was meant to eliminate the problem of Hunnic raids, against which one of its stipulations was

23 Procopius, Historia 1.14.21 and 32–3. It would make sense to locate Turris, the city transferred by Justinian to the Antes, in the region that could have blocked the access of steppe nomads to the Danube frontier. Procopius’ description (ἐνπερὶ πολλοὺς Ὀρτοὺς) is very vague and he does not seem to have had a clear idea of the geography of the region. Since he uses neither ἐν τῇ ἀντίπαρῃ (ἐπὶ ἐπὶ ἀπόβασις) nor ἐν ἐπίθετο, however, it is not reason to believe that Turris was located next to the Danube river. On the other hand, any land offered for settlement through the foedus had to be less populated, have no major cities, and be relatively strategical and isolated. See Chryssylos 1989:17. For Turris, see also Bohacov-Olimpiu 1969; Madgecza 1992.
24 Desvigns’ unfortunate translation (“to give them all the assistance within his power while they were establishing themselves”) stands for καὶ ὀφει ἔνωσις μὲν ἀνακύκλωσε τῇ πόλις. But συνόροι literally means “to settle,” as in Μοετία 11.14.1: “Now Chosores built a city in Assyria . . . and settled (ἔσχισασσα) there all the captures from Antioch.” Note that the use of the prefix ἐν- implies that Justinius intended to bring together at least two different groups. See Ivanov, Gindin, and Cymburski 1991:229.
25 Procopius, Historia 1.14.32–3; see also 11.24–6. “Phoney Chilbadius” fluently spoke Latin (which greatly contributed to his successful impersonation of the Roman general). This is remarkable, given that Glicucus, an Armenian who had become a military commander in the Roman army, “did not know how to speak either Greek or Latin or Gothic or any other language except Armenian” (Historia 11.24).
26 Esslin 1929:68–9; Ditten 1978:82; cfr. Stein 1968:52. For the source of Procopius’ account, see Rubin 1953:198; Livanis 1966:27. For ἐνσεβείαν see Isidore of Seville and γνώμαι as barbarian troops under their own commanders, see Christou 1991:32–5. Romans, too, could become ἐνσεβείαν, for example in relation to Persia (Historia 11.24; Secret History 11.12). Unlike γνώμαι, ἐνσεβείαν were not only military allies, but also political partners. Other examples of ἐνσεβείαν: the Lombards (Historia 13.12), the Gepids (Historia 13.10), the Sasanians (Historia 12.18), the Goths (Historia 5.13), the Sabirs (Historia 11.24), and the Cirtugars (Historia 19.9). The majority were on the northern frontier of the Empire.
27 Procopius, Historia 11.22: ὑπὸ δημοκρατίαν ἐν παλαιοὶ ἐνσέβειαν. For the concept of “democracy” desirably applied to Slavic society, as the opposite of Byzantine monarchy, see Benfey 1963:46–7; Havlík 1985:174. Patrick Amory (1997:287–8) sees this episode as an illustration of how uncertain (ethnic) identity was, since “the Slavs were unable to tell the difference” between Chilbadius, the Roman general, and his Antian namesake. This is a naive interpretation, for it takes Procopius’ account at its face value.
28 Theophylact Simocatta 5.13. For the 100 Antes in Italy, see Procopius, Historia 2.23–6; for Antes attacking the Scavenses, see John of Ephesus 45. Dabraegazas, a Roman officer of Antian origin, led the Roman fleet during the siege of Phasis, in Crimea, and took part in the campaigns of 555 and 556 against Persia, in Lazica. See Agathias 6.9 (Δαβραγγαζας, ἄντι τοῦ ταξίαρχος), 7.2, 21.6.

Slavs in early medieval sources

80

81
The making of the Slavs

clearly phrased. The rationale behind Justinian’s offer may have been the devastating invasion of 540. But the respite was relatively short, for a still more destructive attack would follow in 558.

In response to the threat posed by the Frankish king Theudebert, who, according to Agathias, was preparing a large coalition of barbarians against the Empire, Justinian offered in 546 an alliance to the Lombard king Auduin. Like the Antes, the Lombards were settled on formerly Roman territory (Pannonia), and were paid great sums of money. Like Turris, Pannonia was only nominally under the control of the Romans. The Lombards were now very close to the Gepids and a conflict soon arose between the two groups. Since both recognized the Empire’s nominal claims of suzerainty over their respective territories, embassies from both arrived in Constantinople. Justinian decided for the Lombards, because the Gepids were still controlling Sirmium. However, despite his victory over the Herules, who had meanwhile turned into the allies of the Gepids, and despite his permanent efforts to fuel the rivalry between Lombards and Gepids, both groups eventually agreed to a truce in 549.29

At this moment, a candidate to the Lombard throne, Hildigis, fled to the Slavenes, who presumably lived somewhere near the Gepids and the Lombards. As Justinian offered the foedus to Auduin, Hildigis went to the Gepids, followed by a retinue of Lombards and Slavenes. He later returned to the Slavenes, together with his followers, but then moved to Italy, where he joined the army of King Totila, “having with him an army of not less than six thousand men.” After brief skirmishes with Roman troops, Hildigis recrossed the Danube river and, once again, went to the Slavenes. Meanwhile, in 549, the kings of the Lombards and the Gepids had agreed to a truce. But the attitude of the Gepids toward the Empire remained hostile, for they would later invite the Cutrigurs to a joint raid across the Danube.30

By 550, Justinian seems to have contained the threat on the Danube frontier by means of large payments. He allied himself with Lombards and Antes against Gepids and Huns, respectively. The Slavenes were obviously not part of this system of alliances. It is no surprise, therefore, to see them starting their own, independent raids. In 545, a great throng of Slavenes crossed the river Danube, plundering the adjoining country, and enslaved a great number of Romans. The Herulian mercenaries under Nares’s command intercepted and detainted them and released the prisoners. According to Procopius, this is the moment when Nares discovered “a certain man who was pretending to bear the name of Chilbudius.”31 It would be difficult to believe that the recently appointed leader of the Antes, who wished so much to enter the Roman alliance, could have joined the plundering raid of the Slavenes. Procopius has told us that “phoney Chilbudius” had spent some time with the Slavenes, as a prisoner of war, and, according to the chronology of his narrative, the raid of the Slavenes may have followed the assembly of the Antes, in which they had proclaimed their fellow tribesman as “Chilbudius.”32 It is very unlikely that the Antian envoys to Constantinople arrived there as Nares’s prisoners. Did Procopius intend to minimize the importance of the foedus of 545 by implying that it had been agreed upon by an emperor dealing with a barbarian liar who had entered Roman territory as an enemy? In view of his criticism of Justinian, who “kept bringing all the barbarians into collision with one another,” it may be a plausible hypothesis.33 It is also possible that the entire story of “phoney Chilbudius” was made up by Procopius, as a narrative strategy in order to emphasize Justinian’s weakness. The use of comic patterns may support this idea.

In any case, Procopius provides clear evidence that no attempts were made to approach the Slavenes with similar offers of alliance. They always appear on the side of the Empire’s enemies, as in the episode of Hildigis. To Procopius, the Slavenes were unpredictable and disorderly barbarians. His attitude thus comes very close to that of the author of the Strategikon who, some decades later, describes the Slavenes as completely faithless and having “no regard for treaties, which they agree to more out of fear than by gifts.”34 Here and there, individual Slavenes may indeed appear as fighting for the Romans, as in the case of Sourouman, a Slavene soldier in the Roman army operating in the Caucasus region.35

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31 Procopius, Hs v 7: 11.16. See also Waldmüller 1976: 39 and 52; Krumm 1980:16; Velkov 1987:155. The word “throne” (θρόνος) appears seventy times in Procopius’ Hs, always in reference to a group of warriors without either discipline or order. For Justinian’s successful attempts to set one barbarian group against another, see Patoura 1997.
35 Agathias 1.6. Apollinarius also mentions Darabages, the Anton officer who commanded the Roman fleet in Crimea (33.10.16). See Werner 1980:390; Strumpos’ex 1979–80:179. In the same context (33.16), he mentions another officer, Leontios, whom many believed to be Darabages’ son. This is further viewed as a case of a successful assimilation of the Slav. See Ditzen 1978:85; Waldmüller 1976:64. However, Leontios έστε οἱ δαραβαγιος refers to Darabages’ brother, not son, for the phrase is obviously a counterpart to ξειτε οἱ Μακεδόνες διστακτος in the first part of the sentence.

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82

83
Another Scythe mercenary proved himself useful to Belisarius during the siege of Axium in 540. But unlike the Antes, these soldiers seem to have been hired on an individual basis, due to their special skills. In 548, another army of Scythes crossed the Danube, probably via the Iron Gates ford. They raided deep into Roman territory, reaching Dyrrachium in Epirus Nova. Procopius even claims that they succeeded in capturing numerous strongholds, “which previously had been reputed to be strong places.” The military commanders of Illyricum followed them at a distance with an army of 15,000 men, without getting too close or engaging in any battle. The following year (549), another 3,000 Scythe warriors crossed the Danube and immediately advanced to the Hebrus (present-day Maritsa) river, which they also crossed with no difficulty. They split into two groups, one with 1,800, the other with 1,200 men. The two sections separated from each other. One of them attacked the cities in Thrace, while the other invaded Illyricum. Both routed Roman armies sent against them, and both captured many fortresses, although, as Procopius argues, “they neither had any previous experience in attacking cities, nor had they dared to come down to the open plain.” But Procopius’ narrative focuses more on those Scythes who came closer to the capital city. He tells us that the commander of the cavalry cohorts stationed at Tzurullum (present-day Corlu) was defeated, captured, and savagely executed. Procopius claims that the Scythes of 549 “had never in all time crossed the Ister river with an army before.”

It is hardly conceivable that Procopius forgot what he had reported about the invasions following Chilibudus’ death, particularly about that of 545. Could he have implied that the Scythes of 549 were not those of 545?

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**Slavs in early medieval sources**

Theoretically, it is not impossible that the marauders of 549 were just a different group from those of 545. However, there are two reasons for not favoring this interpretation. First, Procopius’ source for this raid seems to have been a combination of archival material (as suggested by such indications as the number of Scythes, the direction of their attacks, or the mention of Asbadus, Justinian’s bodyguard, who commanded the cavalry troops stationed at Tzurullum) and oral reports (as indicated by the obviously exaggerated number of prisoners taken after the capture of Topeiros and by the description of their torture and execution). Second, what Procopius has to say about these “newcomers” (“they [never] dared to come down to the open plain”) is strikingly similar to what John of Ephesus would write about the Scythes of the 580s: “they had never dared to leave the woods and the inaccessible areas.” The details of the account of the 549 raid look suspiciously like stereotypes. Procopius was certainly not an alert observer of the Scythes and it is unlikely that he was able to distinguish between the two raids in minute details. He might, however, have access to more material on the raid of 549 than on those of 545 or 548, which allowed him to make comments on the margins. He reports that, for the first time, the Scythes succeeded in conquering a city (Topeiros, near Abdara, in Rhodope). In a long passage, he also describes in detail how the Scythes captured the city and what happened to the Roman captives. Procopius’ description of the atrocities committed by Scythes after conquering Topeiros matches not only contemporary historiographical cliches about barbarians, but also the appalling portrait of the Scythes by Pseudo-Caesarius. But Procopius’ argument is consistent: the Slavs were indeed an unpredictable enemy. Until conquering Topeiros, they “had spared no age . . ., so that the whole land inhabited by the Illyrians and Thracians came to be everywhere filled with unburied corpses.” After the bloodshed at Topeiros, as if they “were drunk with the great quantity of blood they had shed,” the Scythes suddenly decided to spare some prisoners, whom they took with them when departing on their homeward way.

Again, Procopius seems to have forgotten what he himself told us,

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36 Procopius, Wars vii 26.16–22. At Axium, Belisarius is told that the Scythes are “accustomed to conceal themselves behind a rock or any bush which may happen to be near and pounce upon an enemy” and that “they are constantly practicing this in their native haunts along the river Ister, both on the Romans and on the other barbarians as well.” This reminds one of what the Strategikon has to say about Scythes: “They make effective use of ambus, sudden attacks, and raids, devising many different methods by night and by day.” (XIII.4.9).

37 Procopius, Wars vii 29.2. The Scythes of 548 were most probably horsemen, for Procopius calls them an “army” (στρατιά), a word he commonly uses for cavalry troops (e.g., Wars i 12.6, i 21.15, ii 4.4, iii 18.13; see also Ivanov, Gindin, and Cynburgski 1991:224). This is also indicated by the fact that they raided deep into Roman territory, moving rapidly. Iron Gates ford: Maksimovitch 1980:33–4. Date: Eunusin 1929:221; Waldmüller 1976:39; Inrmacher 1980:162; Bonev 1983:114; Velkov 1987:155.

38 Procopius, Wars vii 38.7. For the commanders of Illyricum, see Wars vii 29.3. Scythes of 549 as horsemen: Ivanov, Gindin, and Cynburgski 1991:226.

39 Wars vii 38.10. See also Braichevski 1931:24. Only Berthold Rubin (1954:226) seems to have noticed this difficulty. According to Rubin, Procopius’ narrative of events taking place after Chilibudus’ death is often contradictory.

40 Procopius, Wars vii 15.24–6. Note also the difference in terms applied by Procopius to these two groups. The Scythes of 543 were a “throng” (διαδρομή), those of 549, an “army” (στρατιά).

41 John of Ephesus vi 25. For the execution of the Roman prisoners by katoikoméνοι, see Vergote 1972:139–40.

42 Procopius, Wars viii 38.11–23. For Pseudo-Caesarius, see Riedinger 1969:102. Topeiros captured by Scythes is also mentioned in the Bodho (iv 11). For the location, see Sosial 1991:71 and 480–1; Kasapides 1991:2. According to Procopius, the Scythes of 549 imprisoned their victims in their huts (θυροι Καρυάθους) together with their cattle and sheep, and then “set fire to the huts without mercy.” This is remarkably similar to the episode of the Cetae equites of 517, who burnt their prisoners alive, locked in their own houses (inclusi suis anum demumque capti Romani inveniuntur; Marcellinus Comes, pp. 39 and 120). For a comparable treatment of prisoners by Vidun and Gelones, see Ammianus Marcellinus 31.2.13–16.

43 Wars vii 38.19.

44 Wars vii 38.23.
The making of the Slavs

namely that in 545, the Sculvones had also taken a great number of prisoners, later to be released by the Herulian mercenaries of Narses.

In the summer of the year 550, as Roman troops were gathering in Sirmia under the command of Germanus in order to be sent to Italy against Totila, a great throng of Sculvones, "such as never before was known," crossed the Danube and easily came close to Naissus (present-day Niš). 45 The attack of the Sculvones occurred at a time when Narses, who was also preparing to embark on a campaign to Italy, was forced to postpone his departure by Cutrigur attacks on Philopappos (present-day Plovdiv). 46 According to Procopius, the Sculvones were bent on capturing Thessalonica and the surrounding cities. The threat must have been truly serious, for Justinian ordered Germanus to defer his expedition to Italy and to defend Thessalonica and the other cities. This measure proved to be efficient, for the Sculvones gave up their plans to capture Thessalonica. Instead, they crossed the mountain ranges to the west and entered Dalmatia, at that time still disputed between Ostrogoths and Romans. Germanus did not follow them, both because of his other commitments and because once in Dalmatia, the Sculvones did not represent any major threat to southern Macedonia. He would soon die, before being able to advance on Italy. As for the Sculvones, the Romans did nothing to make them leave Dalmatia. Despite their great number, therefore, the Sculvones of 550 did not pose any major problem to the Roman defense. But the raid is significant for a different reason. Procopius tells us that the Sculvones spent the winter of 550 and most of the following year in Dalmatia, "as if in their own land." 47 They had no fear of any possible Roman attack, an indication of the confused situation in Dalmatia on the eve of Narses' campaign of 552, which put an end to the Ostrogothic war and kingdom. This is the first case of a two-year Sculvene raid, but there is no reason to believe that the Sculvones intended to settle. They seem to have recrossed the mountains to the east in the spring of 551 and joined another group of Sculvones warriors who had just crossed the Danube. Just as in 549, they all divided themselves into three groups operating separately. Procopius' narrative, however, focuses only on the group approaching Constantinople. 48

Annoyed by their devastations, the emperor now sent an army commanded by several generals, but headed by an imperial eunuch, Scholastikos. At only five days' journey from Constantinople, near Adrianople, the Roman army came upon one of the three groups mentioned by Procopius. The Sculvones were carrying with them a great deal of booty. In the ensuing battle, most of the Roman army was destroyed, and, according to Procopius, "the generals came within a little of falling into the hands of the enemy, succeeding only with difficulty in making their escape with the remnant of the army." The Sculvones savagely plundered the region in the vicinity of the capital, up to the Long Walls. With some of the troops saved from the debacle at Adrianople, the Romans intercepted the Sculvones marauders, rescued a vast number of Roman captives, and recovered a standard, which has been captured during the battle of Adrianople. The rest of the Sculvones, however, "departed on the homeward way with the other booty." 49

The year 551 was not yet over, when a great throng of Sculvones (Σκλαβηνοί δέ πολίς ζώλοις) descended upon Ilyricum and "inflicted sufferings there not easily described." The army sent by Justinian under the command of Germanus' sons cautiously followed the raiders, without engaging into any confrontation. The raid continued and the Sculvones were able to return home with all their plunder. The Romans did nothing to stop them at the crossing of the Danube river, for the Gepids took the Sculvones "under their protection and ferried them across," receiving one solidus per head as payment for their labor. 50

In response, Justinian started negotiations with the Gepids, but at the same time supported the Lombards against them. An army sent by Justinian under the command of Analafridas, King Alboin's brother-in-law, sided with the Lombards, defeated the Gepids, and killed their king Turismod. The "eternal peace" agreed upon by King Alboin and Turisind, the new king of the Gepids, would last another ten years. 51

But the key to Justinian's new policy in the Balkans was not playing off Lombards and Gepids against each other. Shortly before 558, most likely

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45 Παλ. ν. 40.4-5 and 7-8. It is possible that the Sculvones of 550, like those of 549, crossed the river by the Iron Gates ford. See Popović 1978:608; Maksimović 1980:35; Janković 1981:197. For the date of this raid, see Teall 1905:311.

46 Procopius, Χριστ. Πολ. Β. 21.20-1. Some interpreted this coincidence as an indication that the Sculvene attack had been instigated by Totila. See Emsin 1929:696; Weidmann 1978:68; Ditten 1978:87; Irmischer 1980:162. According to Procopius, however, Justinian ordered his military commanders in Thrace and Illyricum to avoid any confrontation with the invading Huns, for they were his allies against the Ostrogoths (Secret History 21.26).

47 Procopius, Χριστ. Πολ. Β. 40.31-2: οὔτε ἐν χειρὶ φιλοίς διδονταί οὔτε. For the Ostrogothic–Byzantine war in Dalmatia, see Basler 1993:17. Indulf led a raid on the Dalmatian coast in 548, but Totila was unable to regain Dalmatia. On the other hand, by 555, only parts of the former province of Dalmatia had been reoccupied by Roman troops. Parts of northern Bosnia may have been already controlled by the Lombards.

48 See Procopius, Παλ. ν. 40.31: "But the Slavs reappeared, both those who had previously come into the emperor's land, as I have recounted above, and others who had crossed the Ister not long afterwards and joined the first, and they began to overrun the Roman domain with complete freedom." First two-year raid: Nestor 1961:47-8; Cankova-Petkova 1970:231; Waldmüller 1976:44; Velkov 1987:161. The Slavs of 550/1 as settlers: Ditten 1978:87.

49 Procopius, Χριστ. Πολ. Β. 40.31-45. See also Emsin 1929:699.

50 Procopius, Χριστ. Πολ. Β. 25.1-6.

51 Jordanes, Ρωμαίοι 386-7; Procopius, Παλ. ν. 25.1-10 and 13-15, 27.1-5 and 7-29; Paul the Deacon, Χριστιανική Ιστορία 1.23-4.
in 554, as Procopius was finishing Book iv of his Buildings, the building program on the Danube frontier was completed. According to Procopius, Justinian built or renewed more than 600 forts in the Balkans, eight times more than in the entire Asian part of the Empire. There is a tendency among scholars to downplay the significance of this major building program or to treat Procopius’ evidence with extreme suspicion. The archaeological evidence will be examined in detail in the following chapter. It is worth mentioning for the moment that, just because the Buildings is a panegyric, it does not mean that we should expect a heightening of the evidence. It is not true that Procopius, in accordance with the convention of the time, credited Justinian with achievements which were not his. Two recently discovered inscriptions from Albania corroborate Book iv. One of them clearly attests that the forts in Moesia, Scythia Minor, Illyricum, and Thrace were built for Justinian by his architect, Viktorinos. We have all reasons to believe that Justinian’s strategy described in Book iv was realized in practice and that Procopius’ description of it is, in its essentials, sound. The ending phase of this building program may have been sped up by the devastating Sculaveni raids of 549–51, for the Sculaveni are the only barbarians to whom Procopius specifically refers in relation to Justinian’s building program. He tells us that the fort at Ulmetum (present-day Pantelimonu de Sus, in Dobrudja) had come to be wholly deserted and “nothing of it was left except the name,” for the Sculaveni had been making their ambuscades there for a great length of time and had been tarrying there very long (διατρήθην τι αυτόθι ἐπί μακρότατον ἐποχήσατον). The fort was built all up from the foundations. Justinian also built a new fort named Adina, because the “barbarian Sculaveni were constantly laying concealed ambuscades there against travellers, thus making the whole district impassable.”

The evidence of the Buildings gives one the impression that Procopius perceived the challenge of the Sculaveni as the great military problem of his day and, at the same time, saw himself challenged to describe it. Procopius explains that the entire strategy underlying the building program in the Balkans was centered upon the Danube frontier and that the forts built by Justinian responded to a particular kind of warfare, being designed to resist sudden attacks from the north. The defense system was also designed to protect the countryside rather than the urban centers, for, according to Procopius, the first target of the barbarian raids was fields, not cities. According to Procopius, Justinian’s strategy was therefore not to close the frontier, but to build three successive lines, one along the Danube, the other along the Staro Planina range, and a third one along the Istranka Dağlar range, in the vicinity of Constantinople. All three were expected to slow down, if not stop, any barbarian raids. Book iv has therefore been viewed as a “codified” map of barbarian invasions into the Balkans, of their direction and impact. In any case, despite claims to the contrary, Procopius’ Buildings provides solid evidence that in the mid-500s, the Danube frontier together with the provinces in the interior received a level of fortification the Balkans had never witnessed before.55

Justinian’s concept of defense proved its efficiency, for no Sculaveni raid is known for a long period between 552 and 577. With the exception of Zabergan’s invasion of 558/9 and the Cutrigrad raid into Dalmatia in 568, there is no mention of raiding activity of any kind in the Balkans until the last quarter of the sixth century.56 It has been argued that this may be an indirect result of Justinian’s decisive victory against the Goths in Italy. However, Zabergan’s devastating invasion of 558/9 does not support this argument. According to Agathias of Myrina, Zabergan crossed the frozen river “as if it were land,” with a great number of horsemen. Victor of Tunnunna, writing in 565 in Constantinople, reported that the Huns captured and killed a magister militum named Sergios, the son of a certain priest named Bacchus. The same details appear in John Malalas, who also claimed that the invaders found parts of the Long Walls collapsed, as they indeed were after the earthquake of 557. Theophanes gave a slightly different account of the same attack. Sculaveni among Zabergan’s hordes appear in both John Malalas’ and Theophanes’ accounts, but are not mentioned by either Agathias or Victor of Tunnunna. It groups of Sculaveni warriors participated in Zabergan’s invasion, they certainly played a subordinate role. No independent raid of the Sculaveni is known for the entire period until 578, despite the fact that the period is covered by more than one source.57

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56 Whitby 1988:88; Sosultal 1991:711. For the Cutrigrad raid of 562, see Menander the Guardian 12:4; see also Bieckley 1985:268 with n. 160.

The making of the Slavs

The Avars and the Slavs: Raiding Activity in the 580s

As a consequence of the calamitous invasion of Zabergan’s Cutrigurs, the Avars became Justinian’s new allies. The newcomers were remarkably successful in establishing their suzerainty in the steppes north of the Black Sea. One by one, all nomadic tribes were forced to acknowledge their supremacy. Among them were also the Antes, for the Avars, in about 560, “ravaged and plundered the[ir] land”. Mezamer, the envoy sent by the Antes to ransom some of their tribesmen taken prisoner by the Avars, was killed at the orders of the qagan. Menander the Guardsman claims that the qagan’s decision was taken under the influence of “that Kutrigur who was a friend of the Avars and had very hostile designs against the Antae.” It is very likely that, in order to subdue the world of the steppe, the Avars took advantage of dissensions between various nomadic groups. In this case, Menander’s reference to the leaders of the Antes, who “had failed miserably and had been thwarted in their hopes,” may imply that, before the arrival of the Avars, the Antes had experienced some serious defeat at the hands of their Cutrigur neighbors.58 Following the defeat of the Antes, the Avars became the masters of the steppe, with no other rivals except the Göktürk Empire to the east.59 They felt indeed strong enough to send an embassy to Justinian asking for land south of the Danube, in Scythia Minor. Their request was rejected, although a later source, the Chronicle of Monemvasia, claims that Justinian granted the Avars the city of Durostorum.60 A few years, later, however, the Avars, in alliance with the Lombards, destroyed the Gepids in Pannonia and soon remained the only masters of the Hungarian plain.

The direct consequences of this conquest were immediately visible. The Avars attacked Sirmium, and negotiations with the Romans failed to provide a peaceful solution to the conflict. The indirect consequences were, however, more important. Most likely encouraged by the success of the Avars, the Scalvenes resumed their raids. In 578, according to Menander the Guardsman, 100,000 Scalvene warriors “devastated Thrace and many other areas.”61 The number of the invading Scalvene warriors mentioned by Menander the Guardsman is certainly exaggerated. But his account is corroborated by others. John of Biclar probably referred to the same invasion when reporting Scalvene destruction in Thrace and Avar naval attacks on the Black Sea coast. Since Avars were never at ease on sea, in sharp contrast to Scalvenes, whose sailing abilities are mentioned by various other sources, John may have muddled Avars with Scalvenes. The scale of the raid seems to have been considerable, for according to Menander the Guardsman, the Scalvenes were still plundering in Greece (“Ελλάς”), when Qagan Bayan organized an expedition against their territories north of the Danube.62

Despite the omnipresence of the Avars, there is no reason to doubt that the raid of 578 was an independent one. The qagan himself seems to have taken very seriously the independent attitude of the Scalvene leaders. Indeed, Menander the Guardsman cites, for the first time, the name of a Scalvene chief, Daurentius (or Dauritas), to whom the qagan sent an embassy asking the Scalvenes to accept Avar suzerainty and to pay him tribute. The rationale behind the qagan’s claims was that the land of the Scalvenes was “full of gold, since the Roman Empire had long been plundered by the Slavs, whose own land had never been raided by any other people at all.” This could only mean that the arrival of the Avars to the Lower Danube, and their wars for the domination of the steppe north of the Danube Delta and the Black Sea, had no effect on the neighboring Scalvenes. The answer given by the independently minded Daurtis and his fellow chiefs to the Avar envoys may have been pure boasting designed to illustrate Menander’s idea of barbarians “with haughty and stubborn spirits.” It is nevertheless a plausible answer. In an episode apparently constructed as the opposite of that of Mezamer and Bayan, Menander tells us that the Scalvenes eventually slew the envoys of the qagan. Bayan now had a good reason for his long-awaited expedition. In addition, Emperor

59 The confusion of tribes known as the Göktürk Empire had formed in 552 when the Ashina clan had seized power from their Juan-Juan overlords in Mongolia. The Empire was divided into a senior eastern and a junior western qaganate. Envoys of the western qaganate came to Constantinople in 562 or 563 to complain about Justinian’s alliance with the Avars. See Mango 1997:731; Poli 1988:40–1; Whitto 1996:220–2. The Byzantine response was to send an embassy to Qagan Sizbud, in 569 (Menander the Guardsman, fr. 10, 2). By 569, Justin II was already using the Göktürk as a threat against the Avars (Poli 1988:49). In 576–7, Turhanhos, the qagan of the western division, conquered Bosporus (Panticapaeum). Chersonesus fell in 579. See Menander the Guardsman, fr. 19, 2 and 252; see also Gajdukevič 1971:158; Szádeczy-Kardoss 1986a:269–70; Poli 1988:67. The Avars took Göktürk threats very seriously. They immediately withdrew from the Balkans, when learning that Göktürk troops were advancing from the east.
61 Menander the Guardsman, fr. 20, 2. See Metcalf 1962b:135; Popović 1975:456; Whibley 1988:87. For the fall of Sirmium, see Menander the Guardsman, fr. 27, 2.
The making of the Slavs

Tiberius II also needed him to force the Scalvines raiding the Balkans to return home. Tiberius ordered the quaestor exercitus John, who was at the same time magister militum (or praetextus praetorio) per Illyricum and apparently commanded the Danube fleet, to transport 60,000 Avar horsemen on ships along the Danube, from Pannonia to Scythia Minor. Since the Avar horsemen landed in Scythia Minor, the Scalvene villages to which Bayan set fire must have been located on the left bank, not far from the river, in eastern Walachia or southern Moldavia. Bayan laid waste the fields, which may indicate that the expedition took place in the late summer or early fall of 578. No Scalvenes “dared to face” the qagan, and many took refuge into the nearby woods.63

Nevertheless, Qagan Bayan’s expedition against the Scalvenes did not fulfill Tiberius II’s expectations. That the situation in the northern Balkans remained confused is shown by the fact that, in 579, the Avar envoy himself, together with his small Roman escort, were ambushed by Scalvene marauders on their way back from Constantinople through Illyricum.64 According to John of Ephesus, two years later, “the accursed people of the Slavs” set out and plundered all of Greece, the regions surrounding Thessalonica (the Syrian word is ṭσλωνα), and Thrace, taking many towns and castles, laying waste, burning, pillaging, and seizing the whole country. On the double assumption that the first Scalvene attack on Thessalonica occurred in 586 and that John died shortly after 585, Theresa Olajos proposed an emendation of the text, replacing Thessalonica with Thessaly.65 To my knowledge, her point of view remains unchallenged. A closer examination of her assumptions, however, may lead to a different conclusion. First, John could not have died in about 585, for the last event recorded by his Ecclesiastical History is the acquittal of Gregory of Antioch in 588. As a consequence, he could well have had knowledge of a Scalvene raidreaching the environs of Thessalonica. Archbishop John of Thessalonica mentions an attack on the city by 5,000 Scalvene warriors attacking the city, but the currently accepted date for this event (604) is based on Paul Lemerle’s dubious interpretation of the text and his questionable chronology of the events narrated in chapters 12 through 15 of Book 1.66 According to Lemerle, the attack of the 5,000 warriors narrated in miracle 12 must have taken place after the siege of Thessalonica narrated in miracles 13 to 15, which he dated to 586. He pointed to a passage of miracle 13, in which Archbishop John claimed that it was for the first time that the citizens of Thessalonica, particularly those who had not served in the army, were seeing a barbarian army so close to them that they could examine it in great detail. By contrast, as the 5,000 Scalvene warriors attacked the city by surprise, the citizens of Thessalonica could hear from a distance “certain signs of that barbarian cry to which ears were accustomed.” This, Lemerle argued, was an indication that the attack of the 5,000 Scalvene warriors occurred some time after the siege of 586, for the inhabitants of the city could by now recognize the Scalvene battle cry.67 The evidence cited by Lemerle should be treated with great caution. First, an accurate translation of the passage referring to the Scalvene battle cry suggests a different interpretation. The ears accustomed to the barbarian cry are not necessarily those of the inhabitants of the city attacked by the 5,000 warriors. John may have referred to members of his audience, some of whom had indeed witnessed this event, as well as other, subsequent attacks. Moreover, what John says is not that the citizens of Thessalonica were able to recognize the battle cry because they had already heard it many times before, but simply that they were able to distinguish the cry from the general noise of the battle. Second, what John says about the citizens of Thessalonica seeing for the first time a barbarian army refers to the whole army of 586, including Scalvenes under the orders of the qagan, as well as other barbarians, all organized in companies of soldiers and in order of battle. What is new to the eyes of the inhabitants of the city is not the Scalvenes, but the spectacle of the Avar army.68 I therefore suggest that the attack of the 5,000 Scalvene warriors may as well be dated before the siege of 586. Indeed, despite claims to the


64 Menander the Guardman, fr. 35.2. For a later date, see Nystazopoulos-Pelekidou 1986:548. For Bayan and the expectations of Emperor Tiberius, see Waldmüller 1976:165; Baus 1978:124; Frądrycz 1984:34.


66 Minutes of St Demetrius i 11.107-13; Lemerle 1981:40, 69, and 72.

67 Minutes of St Demetrius i 11.112: καί των τῆς βαρβαρικῆς κρατοῦσας σημείων διά τῆς ιθάδος ἀκόης ἐπιχείρησαν. For the citizens of Thessalonica and the barbarian army, see Minutes of St Demetrius 11.13.124. On the assumption that it took place a later date than the siege of 586, Lemerle dated the raid of the 5,000 Scalvene warriors to 604, on the sole basis of his translation of τῆς διάφορα ἑμέρας τῆς κρίσεως ὑπέρ μοι τρόφου as "le lendemain de la fête, au milieu de la nuit" (i.410; Lemerle 1981:72). This is plainly and simply wrong. All that Archbishop John says is that the Scalvenes attacked on the night of the second day of the festival. See Whittington 1983:19-20; Speck 1993:423; Ivanova 1993c:182.

68 The army of 586: Minutes of St Demetrius i 13.117. See also Ivanova 1993c:188. For subsequent attacks on Thessalonica, see Minutes of St Demetrius i 12.101.
contrary, Archbishop John's narrative leaves the impression of a raid organized by "professional" warriors coming from afar, not by marauders living in the vicinity. The reaction of the inhabitants of Thessalonica is also instructive. There is no mention of any army within the city's walls. However, when an official of the prefecture gave the alarm, nobody panicked. Instead, everybody rushed home to bring his weapons and then took his assigned position on the walls. To judge from Archbishop John's evidence, the inhabitants of Thessalonica were already prepared for the attack, which they seem to have expected at any moment. I suspect this to be an indication of a serious and continuous threat on the city, of a kind which may be associated with the invasion referred to by John of Ephesus. The attack of the 5,000 Scalvene warriors occurred at a time of intense raiding, when the citizens of Thessalonica had become accustomed to barbarian onslaughts. Indeed, John of Ephesus, to whom the "accursed Slavs" were just the instrument of God for punishing the persecutors of the Monophysites, claims that they were still occupying Roman territory in 584, "as if it belonged to them." The Slavs had "become rich and possessed gold and silver, herds of horses and a lot of weapons, and learned to make war better than the Romans." I think, therefore, that Franjo Barišić was right when relating the attack of the 5,000 Scalvene warriors on Thessalonica to the events referred to by John of Ephesus.69

However, questions still remain. Both Archbishop John and John of Ephesus seem to describe an independent raid of the Scalvenses reaching Thessalonica and also, according to John of Ephesus, Greece. In distant Spain, John of Bicalar knew that in 581, Greece had been occupied by Avars. It is known, on the other hand, that at that time the major Avar forces were concentrated at Sirmium, which actually fell in 582. Is it possible that John muddled Avars with Slavs? Taking into consideration the considerable distance at which he wrote, it is not altogether impossible. But there is additional evidence to prove the contrary. Writing at the end of the sixth century, Evagrius recorded some information on Balkan events of the 580s, which he may have obtained in Constantinople, during his visit of 588. He reports that Avars conquered and plundered cities and strongholds in Greece. The date of this raid is not given, but there is no reason to accuse Evagrius of muddling Avars and Slavs.70

In addition, Michael the Syrian, in a passage most likely taken from John of Ephesus, records an attack of the Scalvenses (σκαλβενοὶ) on Corinth, but refers to their leader as qagan. He then attributes the attack on Anchialos not to Avars, but to Scalvenses. The reference to Anchialos could be used for dating the attack on Corinth in or shortly before 584.71 But it is very difficult to disentangle Michael's narrative and decide who exactly was raiding Greece in about 584. Michael the Syrian is a later source. He might have used John not directly, but through an intermediary (possibly the eighth-century chronicle attributed to Dionysius of Tell Māhere). As a consequence, he might have muddled Avars and Slavs. But neither the evidence of John of Bicalar, nor that of Evagrius, can be dismissed so easily on such grounds. There is good reason to suspect, therefore, that in the early 580s, Greece was raided by both Avars and Slavs. It is possible that some of the Slavs were under the orders of the Avars, while others, such as the 5,000 warriors storming Thessalonica, may have operated on their own.

That some Scalvenses groups were under the command of the Avar qagan is also suggested by Theophylact Simocattus's report of another raid across Thrace, which reached the Long Walls. In 584, "the Avars let loose the nation of the Scalvenses." The threat seems to have been so great that Emperor Maurice was forced to use circus factions in order to garrison the Long Walls. The imperial bodyguards were led out from the city, under the command of Comentiouls, and they soon intercepted a group of Scalvenses.72 One year later (585), Comentiouls encountered a larger group under the command of a certain Ardagastus, roaming in the vicinity of Adrianople. After crushing Ardagastus' warriors, Comentiouls

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69 Micales st Demetriun 12.1108. Εις το παυντος των Σκαλβενιων οι άγνωστοι το απιλεκτον άνθρωποι; see Lemerle 1981:71. Citizens on the walls: Micales st Demetriun 12.1107. Date of the siege: Barišić 1953:49-55; Ivanova 1995:182. The only chronological indication is the association of this episode with that of the destroyed cibrion of St Demetrius' church, which John attributes to the time of Bishop Eusebius (6.53). Eusebius is known from letters written by Pope Gregory the Great between 597 and 601 (Lemerle 1981:72-78). The date of his appointment is not known. It must have been a long episcopate, for he is mentioned as bishop in 586, as the army of the qagan besieged Thessalonica (1.14.131). For the "accursed Slav," see John of Ephesus VI 6.25. John of Ephesus' evidence is viewed by many as indicating the beginning of Slavic settlement in the Balkans. See Nestor 1963:50-1; Ferjanič 1984:95; Pohl 1988:82; Soustal 1991:72; ouda: Popović 1975:430. All that John says, however, is that after four years of raiding the Scalvenses were still on Roman territory. It is not clear whether they had established themselves temporarily or on a longer term.

70 John of Bicalar, p. 216; Evagrius VI 10. Avars in Greece: Weitmann 1978:88; Yanopoulos 1990:333; Attenea 1997:69-9. The date of the attack is indicated by John of Bicalar's mention of both Tiberius II's third regnal year and King Leuvidgild's eleventh year. According to Walter Pohl (1988:76 with n. 40), John of Bicalar may have indeed referred to Avar forces when mentioning Pannonia along with Greece. The raid mentioned by Evagrius may be that of 584, when Singidunum fell and the hinterland of Anchialos was ravaged; see Theophylact Simocatta 14.1-4; Pohl 1988:77-8 and 107; Whitby 1988:112. Unlike John of Bicalar, Evagrius also reports that cities and strongholds had been conquered by Avars "fighting on the parapet." (Ὑπερ των χώρων και των οχυρωτήτων πατησαν τον ηλικιακον).

71 Michael the Syrian x 11. See Yanopoulos 1980:166. The association between Anchialos and Greece also appears in Evagrius VI 10. There is no serious reason for accepting Zakythinos' emendation of Corinth into Perinthos. See Zakythinos 1943:37; Karayannopoulos 1990.

72 Theophylact Simocatta I 7.3-6; see Mango 1997:176. The threat is also indicated by the hasty appointment of Comentiouls as magister militum paesentalis (Theophylact Simocatta I 7.4).
The making of the Slavs

began clearing the entire region of Astike. Could Ardagastus have been under the orders of the qagan? In 584 and 585, the Avars were busy capturing cities and forts along the Danube frontier. Moreover, a few years later, as Priscus’ troops chased him across his territory north of the Danube river, Ardagastus appeared as an independent leader. On the other hand, there is no reason to believe that the group of Scalvenes intercepted by Comentiolus in 584 is the same as the one of 585, which was under Ardagastus’ command. The raid of 584, which was directed to Thrace, might have been part of, if not the same as, the invasion of 581 to 584, which is reported by John of Ephesus as having reached Greece, the region of Thessalonica, and Thrace.73

The situation in the years following Bayan’s expedition against Dauritas seems to have been as follows, to judge from the existing evidence. The campaign itself did not have immediate results, for only one year later the Avar envoy to Constantinople was attacked by Scalvene marauders somewhere in Illyricum. But as soon as the Avars began the siege of Sirmium in 579, they may have encouraged, if not ordered, massive Slavic raids to prevent the rapid access of Roman troops to the besieged city on the northern frontier. If we are to believe John of Ephesus, this diversion kept Roman troops in check for four years, even after Sirmium was conquered by the Avars. The evidence of John of Biclars, Evagrius, and Michael the Syrian suggests, on the other hand, that, at the same time, the Avars too raided some of those regions. The peace between Tiberius II and Bayan following the fall of Sirmium in 582, by which the emperor agreed to pay an annual stipend of 80,000 solidi to the Avars, did not prevent Scalvene raids. John of Ephesus claimed that the Scalvenes were still on Roman territory in 584. The 5,000 warriors storming Thessalonica at an unknown date before 586 were certainly not obeying Avar orders. On the other hand, the Avar policy seems to have experienced social and political turmoil during this period, as a new qagan was elected in 583. Bayan’s son followed his father’s aggressive policy and in 584, as Emperor Maurice denied his request of increased subsidies, he attacked and conquered Singidunum, Viminacium, Augusta, and plundered the region of Anchialos, on the Black Sea coast. At the same time, according to Theophylact Simocatta, the new qagan of the Avars ordered the Scalvenes to plunder Thrace, as far as the Long Walls. The next year (585), Maurice agreed to pay increased subsidies to the Avars, which now amounted to 100,000 solidi. The affair of the Avar shaman Bookolabra troubled again Roman-Avar relations, and the qagan’s troops plundered all major cities and forts along the Danube frontier, from Aquis to Marcianopolis. At the same time, Comentiolus was kept busy fighting Ardagastus’ Scalvenes near Adrianople.74

That in the eyes of the Roman emperor, the Scalvenes and the Avars were two different problems, also results from the different policies Maurice chose to tackle them. The Avars were paid considerable amounts of money, when Roman troops were lacking or were unable to resist. There is nothing comparable in the case of the Slavs. Instead, Maurice preferred to use Justinian’s old policies of inciting barbarian groups against each other. According to Michael the Syrian, the Romans paid the Antes for attacking and plundering the “land of the Scalvenes,” which the Antes did with great success.75 Maurice’s policy might indeed have produced visible results in the case of the Scalvenes operating on their own.

But the war with the Avars continued in Thrace in 586, with indecisive victories on both sides. At the same time, an army of 100,000 Scalvenes and other barbarians obeying the orders of the qagan appeared under the walls of Thessalonica. The number of soldiers in the army besieging Thessalonica is evidently exaggerated. The attack, however, may well have been associated with the war in Thrace. Its precise date could be established on the basis of Archbishop John’s reference to a Sunday, September 22, when the alarm was first given in Thessalonica. We are also told that the attack occurred at the time of the emperor Maurice. September 22 in the reign of Maurice could have fallen on a Sunday in either 586 or 597. A strong argument in favor of the latter date is the fact that Eusebius, the bishop of Thessalonica at the time of the attack, is mentioned by Pope Gregory the Great in three letters, the earliest of which is from 597. This is no indication, however, that Eusebius was appointed bishop in the 590s. He could have been bishop of Thessalonica since the 580s. Speros Vryonis has also argued that 597 should be preferred, because the polioecentric technology and the siege machines employed during the one-week attack on Thessalonica could not have been acquired before 587. In that year, the qagan’s army besieged and conquered Appiaia in Moesia Inferior, after being instructed by a certain Roman soldier named Busas as to how to build a siege engine. Theophylact Simocatta’s story, however, is no more than a cliche, designed to emphasize that barbarians could have had access to high-tech siegecraft only through traitors. More important, the story clearly refers

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74 Avar envoy attacked by Slavs: Menander the Guardian, fr. 25,2. Annual stipends for the Avars: Pohl 1988,73 and 82. New qagan: Pohl 1988,77-8 and 177. For the Bookolabra affair, see Theophylact Simocatta 1,8.2-11.