

indolence for war," he fell upon them and killed almost all of them. Friulan Lombards were annoyed by *latrunculi 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 Arnefrit, Lupus' son, and Duke Pemmo 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 Wechtari 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, Wechtari 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.<sup>78</sup>

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 *latrunculi Sclavorum*. Despite its animation, Paul's picture is thus a stereotypical one, probably rooted in ethnic stereotypes developed along the Friulan border by successive generations of Lombards.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>78</sup> *Historia Langobardorum* iv 28, iv 38, iv 44, vi 24, v 22, vi 45, v 23, and vi 51. Aio's death is also mentioned in the *Chronica Sancti Benedicti Casinensis*, ed. G. H. Pertz, *MGH: Scriptores Rerum Langobardorum* (Berlin, 1878), p. 202; see also Borodin 1983:56. For the hero raising his helmet, see Pizarro 1989:153 with n. 51.

<sup>79</sup> *Historia Langobardorum* vi 24. See Curta 1997:160–1. Boruth ruled between c. 740 and c. 750, followed by his son Cacatius (c. 750 to 752) and his nephew Cheitmar (752 to c. 769), then by Waltunc (c. 772 to c. 788), and Priwizlauga (c. 788 to c. 799). See *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum* c. 4–5.

Table 1 Sources of sources: origin of accounts

Eyewitness	Possible contact	Second-hand information
<i>Strategikon</i>	Procopius	Jordanes
George of Pisidia	Pseudo-Caesarius	Agathias
<i>Chronicon Paschale</i>	<i>Miracles of St Demetrius</i>	John Malalas
Theodore Syncellus		Menander the Guardsman
Theophylact Simocatta		John of Ephesus
( <i>Feldzugsjournal</i> )		John of Biclar
		Gregory the Great
		Isidore of Seville
		Fredegar

# 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 Sclavenes. 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 Slavene 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 with 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 Sclavenes and Antes to Venethi.<sup>80</sup> 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

<sup>80</sup> Marcellinus Comes, whose chronicle covered the period between 379 and 518, to which he later added a sequel down to 534 (a supplement to 548 being added by another author), had no knowledge of Sclavenes.

# The making of the Slavs

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

Years	500	525	550	575	600	625	650
Source							
Jordanes	-----						
Procopius	-----						
Agathias			---				
John Malalas	-----						
Menander the Guardsman				-----			
John of Ephesus	-----						
John of Biclar				-----			
Evagrius	-----						
Theophylact Simocatta					-----		
<i>Miracles</i> I					-----		
Isidore of Seville	-----						
<i>Chronicon Paschale</i>	-----						
Fredegar					-----		
<i>Miracles</i> II						-----	

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 Pisidia, Theodore Syncellus, 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 *Feldzugsjournal* 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 Fredegar 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

Date	Source	Emperor
550/1	Jordanes, <i>Getica</i> Jordanes, <i>Romana</i> Procopius, <i>Wars</i> I–VII Procopius, <i>Secret History</i>	Justinian
c. 554	Procopius, <i>Wars</i> VIII	
c. 560	Procopius, <i>Buildings</i> IV Pseudo-Caesarius	
c. 560–80	Agathias	Justin II
c. 565–74	John Malalas	
c. 570–9	Martin of Braga	
582–602	Menander the Guardsman	Tiberius II
c. 590	John of Ephesus John of Biclar	Maurice
c. 592–602	<i>Strategikon</i>	
c. 593	Evagrius	
599/600	Gregory the Great	
610–20	<i>Miracles of St Demetrius</i> I	Phocas
626	George of Pisidia, <i>Bellum Avaricum</i>	Heraclius
629	George of Pisidia, <i>Heraclius</i>	
630	<i>Chronicon Paschale</i>	
c. 630	Isidore of Seville, <i>Chronica Maiora</i>	
c. 630	Theophylact Simocatta	
c. 626–41	Theodore Syncellus	
639–42	Jonas of Bobbio, <i>Life of St Columbanus</i>	Constans II
c. 660	Fredegar	
c. 690	<i>Miracles of St Demetrius</i> II	Constantine IV Justinian II

## 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 *Völkerwanderung*. More recently, a linguist searching for the original homeland of the Slavs even spoke of *reconquista*.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> Noting, however, that such a *Landnahme* was completely invisible to early medieval sources, Lucien Musset called it an *obscure progression*, 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.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Trubachev 1985:204 and 1991:11. For the Slavic migration, see Schafarik 1844:111 and 42; Bogdan 1894:15. See also Lemerle 1980; Guillou 1973; Ditten 1978; Ivanova and Litavrin 1985; Pohl 1988:95. For *Völkerwanderung*, see Goffart 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Gimbutas 1971:14. Peaceful migration of the Slavs: Schafarik 1844:1, 42; Palacký 1868:74–89. Slavic *Landnahme*, see Evert-Kapessowa 1963; Zasterová 1976; Weithmann 1978:18; Braichevskii 1983:220. For the historiography of the *Landnahme*, see Schneider 1993.

<sup>3</sup> *Obscure progression*: Musset 1965:75, 81, and 85, and 1983:999. See also Pohl 1988:95. Infiltration: Comşa 1960:733; Cankova-Petkova 1968:44; Tăpkova-Zaimova 1974:201 and 205; Popović 1980:246; Velkov 1987. See also Cross 1948:7 and 28. Slavic “wave”: Skrzhinskaia 1957:9; Váňa

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 Sclavenes or Antes before Justinian, some have rightly concluded that these two *ethnies* were purely (early) medieval phenomena.<sup>4</sup>

In this chapter, I intend to examine the historical sources regarding the Sclavenes 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.

### 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 *Getae equites* of 517, was related to Vitalianus' revolt.<sup>6</sup>

1983:39. The wave metaphor is still in use: Avramea 1997:79–80. For Slavic “invasions” and “raids,” see Ensslin 1929; Fine 1983:29; Ferjančić 1984; Whitby 1988:85–6 and 175; Pohl 1988:68; Fiedler 1992:6; Stavridou-Zafrika 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Procopius, *Secret History* 18.20–1. For *Getica* as genuine report, see Waldmüller 1976:19; Sedov 1978:9; Anfert'ev 1991:134–5. For Sclavenes and Antes as medieval *ethnies*, see Bačić 1983:21; Godłowski 1983:257; Váňa 1983:16.

<sup>5</sup> See Ensslin 1929; Stein 1968; Waldmüller 1976; Ditten 1978.

<sup>6</sup> Procopius, *Wars* vii 40.5–6. *Getae equites*: Marcellinus Comes, trans. B. Croke (Sydney, 1995), pp. 39 and 120. See also Nestor 1965:148; Comşa 1973:197 and 1974:301; Ditten 1978:86; Irmscher 1980:158. For Vitalianus' revolt, see Waldmüller 1976:34; Weithmann 1978:64; Velkov 1987:157; Soustal 1991:697. For Vitalianus' barbarian allies, see Schwarcz 1992.

The Sclavenes first appear in the context of Justinian's new, aggressive policies on the Danube frontier. In the early 530s, Chilbudius, a member of the imperial household, replaced Germanus as *magister militum per Thraciam*.<sup>7</sup> He gave up defending the Balkan provinces behind the Danube line and boldly attacked barbarians on the left bank of the river.<sup>8</sup> This was the first time the Romans had launched campaigns north of the Danube frontier since Valens' Gothic wars of 367–9. Chilbudius' campaigns also indicate that the Sclavenes 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.<sup>9</sup>

At the end of the episode of Chilbudius, 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.<sup>10</sup> It is true, however, that the death of Chilbudius, 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

<sup>7</sup> Procopius, *Wars* VII 14.1–6. For Procopius' confusion between Justinian and Justin, see Ensslin 1929:698; Rubin 1954:227; Ivanov, Gindin, and Cymburskii 1991:240–1. Misled by Procopius' story of Chilbudius' Antian namesake, many historians believe the *magister militum per Thraciam* was of Slavic origin. See Ditten 1978:78; Ferjančić 1984:88; Litavrin 1986; Whitby 1988:82; Soustal 1991:70; Moorhead 1994:150. See also Duichev 1960:34. For the origin of the name, see Strumins'kyj 1979–80:790.

<sup>8</sup> The terms used by Procopius to indicate that Chilbudius prevented barbarians from crossing the Danube (ὁ ποταμὸς διαβάτος, τὴν διάβασιν πολλὰκις, διαβῆναι), but allowed Romans to cross over the opposite side (ἐξ ἡπειρὸν τὴν ἀντιπέραν . . . ἰόντες ἐκτεινάν τε), show that, at least in his eyes, the Lower Danube was still an efficient barrier. See Chrysos 1987:27–8. For the date of Chilbudius' death, see Waldmüller 1976:36.

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

<sup>10</sup> Procopius, *Wars* VII 14.5; Ivanov, Gindin, and Cymburskii 1991:217 and 232.

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.<sup>11</sup> Important changes were also introduced at the other end of the Danube frontier. The novel 11 of 535, which created an archbishopric of Justiniana Prima, also intended to move the see of the Illyrian prefecture from Thessalonica to the northern provinces. The bishop of Aquis, 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.<sup>12</sup>

But this adjustment of policy in the Balkans did not prevent Justinian from boasting about Chilbudius' victories. In November 533, a law was issued with a new intitulation, in which Justinian was described as *Anticus*, along with titles such as *Vandalicus* and *Africanus* relating to Belisarius' success against the Vandals. The title *Anticus* occurs in Justinian's intitulation 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 *augustales* 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."<sup>13</sup>

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."<sup>14</sup> The capture of Sirmium by his old allies, the Gepids, and their subsequent hostile acts were hard for Justinian

<sup>11</sup> Novel 41 of May 18, 536 (*Corpus Iuris Civilis* III: 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" (II 29). For the *quaestura exercitus*, see also Stein 1968:474–5; Lemerle 1980:286; Hendy 1985:404; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1985; Whitby 1988:70. The *quaestor Iustinianus exercitus* was directly responsible for the *amona* of the army and also exercised supreme judiciary power. See Torbatov 1997.

<sup>12</sup> *Corpus Iuris Civilis* III: 94. It is unlikely that the see was ever transferred to Justiniana Prima. See Granić 1925:128; Maksimović 1984:149.

<sup>13</sup> *Codex Iustinianus*, edict 13 (*Corpus Iuris Civilis* I: 785). See Whitby 1988:166 with n. 34. For the epithet *Anticus*, see the introduction to *Institutiones* (*Corpus Iuris Civilis* II: xxiii) and novel 17 (*Corpus Iuris Civilis* III: 117). For inscriptions, see *CIG* IV 8636; *CIL* III 13673. See also Velkov 1987:159; Irmscher 1980:161; Ivanov 1991a:261; Günther 1992. Justinian's successors imitated his intitulation. The last emperor to do so was Heraclius (novel 22 of May 1, 612).

<sup>14</sup> Procopius, *Wars* V 3.15, V 11.5, and VII 33.8; *Secret History* 18.18. The first Gepid occupation of Sirmium dates back to 473. See Šašel 1979:750; Pohl 1980:299; Christou 1991:64–5. See also Wozniak 1979:144–7.

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 Sclavenes "became hostile to one another and engaged in battle," which ended with a victory of the Sclavenes over the Antes.<sup>15</sup> It is possible, though not demonstrable, that the conflict had been fueled by Justinian. In any case, as Antes and Sclavenes fought against each other, Romans recruited soldiers from both ethnic groups. In 537, 1,600 horsemen, most of whom were Sclavenes 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.<sup>16</sup>

But none of Justinian's attempts to solve the problems in the Danube area proved to be successful. In December 539, a numerous "Hunnish army" crossed the frozen Danube and fell as a scourge upon the eastern Balkan provinces. This, Procopius argued, "had happened many times before, but . . . never brought such a multitude of woes nor such dreadful ones to the people of that land."<sup>17</sup> 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 Sclavenes, and the Antes, in their daily inroads, wrought frightful havoc among the inhabitants of the Roman provinces.<sup>18</sup> As in the *Wars*, he argues that more than twenty myriads of

<sup>15</sup> Procopius, *Wars* VII 14.7–10; see Waldmüller 1976:36. On this occasion, according to Procopius, a young man of the Antes, named Chilbudius, was taken captive by a Slavene. The namesake of the former *magister militum per Thraciam* proved to be a vigorous warrior, thus distinguishing himself by his deeds of valor, "through which he succeeded in winning great renown" (*Wars* VII 14.8–9). Procopius prepares his audience for the story of how the Antes would obtain a *foedus* from Justinian, a story in which the *quiproquo* created by "phoney Chilbudius" would play a major role. For Herules in Singidunum, see *Wars* VI 15.30–40, VII 33.13. Around 539, the Gepids formed an alliance with the Franks and the Lombards (Agathias 1.4); see Pohl 1980:299. For Justinian's policy on the northern frontier, see Wozniak 1979:156; Patoura 1997.

<sup>16</sup> Procopius, *Wars* V 27.1: οἱ ὑπὲρ ποταμῶν Ἰστρον οὐ μακρὰν τῆς ἐκείνῃ ὁχθῆς ἴδρυνται. See also Teall 1965:302; Comşa 1973:197; Waldmüller 1976:60; Velkov 1987:154. The troop of 537 is remarkably numerous, especially when compared to Belisarius' entire army amounting to no more than 5,000 men. More important, this is a rare case of Procopius mentioning the place of origin for foreign mercenaries. Among thirteen ethnic groups in the Roman army, there are only two other cases (*Wars* I 15.1, VII 14.7).

<sup>17</sup> Procopius, *Wars* II 4.1 and 4–7. The date of the raid was established on the basis of the reference to a comet, "at first long as a tall man, but later much larger." See Rubin 1954:108. It is often assumed, perhaps wrongly, that the Huns of 539/40 were Bulgars. See Beshevliev 1981:84.

<sup>18</sup> Procopius, *Secret History* 23.6: σχεδόν τι ἀνὰ πᾶν καταθέοντες ἔτος; 18.20–1: τὴν Σκυθῶν ἐρημίαν ἀμέλει ταύτης πανταχόσε τῆς ξυμβαίνειν. For the date of Procopius' reference, see

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 Sclavenes. A sixth-century Midrashic homilist also complains about havoc brought to Jewish communities by Berbers and Antes.<sup>19</sup> Mistakenly applying John Malalas' account of Zabergan's invasion of 559 to the events of 540, some argued that the Sclavenes may have also participated in the Hunnic invasion of 540. Taking into account that Procopius describes in his *Wars* similar invasions of the Sclavenes, with a similar development, and clearly refers to Sclavenes, along with Huns and Antes, in his *Secret History*, it is a likely possibility.<sup>20</sup> 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 Sclavenes 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 Sclavenes 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."<sup>21</sup>

At this point in his narrative, Procopius introduces a young Antian prisoner of war, named Chilbudius, 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 Sclavenes were now on peaceful terms, "phoney Chilbudius" was redeemed from the Sclavenes 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 Sclavenes was Chilbudius, the Roman general, and that he would be richly recompensated by Justinian if he would bring

Ferjančić 1984:92. For the "Scythian wilderness" cliché, see Ivanov, Gindin, and Cymburskii 1991:247.

<sup>19</sup> Jordanes, *Romana* 388: *instantia cottidiana*; *Midrash Tehillim* 25.14, ed. S. Buber (Trier, 1892): *Anatim*. The reference to Berbers points to the Moorish revolts of 534 to 548, as Africa was raided by Berber tribes. See Sperber 1982:179–82; for Jordanes, see Pritsak 1983:367; Sostal 1991:70.

<sup>20</sup> John Malalas xviii 129. See Angelov 1981:8; Bonev 1983:113; Pritsak 1983:367; Velkov 1987:154; contra: Nestor 1963:58. See also Weithmann 1978:66.

<sup>21</sup> Procopius, *Wars* VII 14.11: οἵπερ ἐπαγόμενοι ἀπεκομίσθησαν εἰς τὰ πατρία ἦθη. In this passage, "Thrace" is the diocese, not the province known by the same name. In his *Secret History* (23.6), Procopius speaks of Huns, Sclavenes, and Antes plundering "the whole of Europe," levelling cities to the ground, and stripping others of their wealth "in very thorough fashion through levied contributions." He also claims the invaders enslaved the population "with all their property, making each region destitute of inhabitants by their daily inroads (ταῖς καθ' ἡμέραν ἐπιδρομαῖς)." Procopius associates these events to Medes and Saracens plundering "the greater part of the land of Asia." This may refer to the reopening of hostilities on the eastern front in 540, but the text is too vague to permit any conclusion.

Chilbudius back to “the land of the Romans.”<sup>22</sup> But as soon as he was brought back to his fellow tribesmen, “phoney Chilbudius” 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 Chilbudius” 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, Justinian 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. Justinian 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 (ἑσπονδοί) and constantly block the way against the Huns, “when these wished to overrun the Roman domain.”<sup>23</sup> The Antes accepted all conditions, provided that Chilbudius, 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.<sup>24</sup> The rationale behind their request, Procopius argues, was that they wanted and stoutly maintained that the man there among them was Chilbudius, the Roman general. In the end, the whole plot was unmasked by Narses, who captured “phoney Chilbudius” on his way to Constantinople.<sup>25</sup>

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 Chilbudius” by Narses, others that he might

<sup>22</sup> Procopius, *Wars* VII 14.11–16. See Bonev 1983:109–12. For comic influences, see Ivanov, Gindin, and Cymburskii 1991:231–2.

<sup>23</sup> Procopius, *Wars* VII 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 (ὑπὲρ ποταμὸν Ἰστροῦ) 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 ἀντιπέρασ ἡπείρῳ nor ἐπὶ θάτερα, however, there is no 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 strategically isolated and controllable. See Chrysos 1989:17. For Turris, see also Bolşacov-Ghimpu 1969; Madgearu 1992.

<sup>24</sup> Dewing’s unfortunate translation (“to give them all the assistance within his power while they were establishing themselves”) stands for καὶ σφίοι ξυνοικεῖν μὲν δυνάμει τῇ πάσῃ. But συνοικέω literally means “to settle,” as in *Wars* II 14.1: “Now Chosroes built a city in Assyria . . . and settled (συνοικίσεν) there all the captives from Antioch.” Note that the use of the prefix ξυν- implies that Justinian intended to bring together at least two different groups. See Ivanov, Gindin, and Cymburskii 1991:229.

<sup>25</sup> Procopius *Wars* VII 14.32–5; see also VII 13.24–6. “Phoney Chilbudius” fluently spoke Latin (which greatly contributed to his successful impersonation of the Roman general). This is remarkable, given that Gilacius, 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” (*Wars* VII 26.24).

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 ἑσπονδοί and would remain allies of the Empire until 602.<sup>26</sup> 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 Chilbudius” in order to explain how Justinian 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.” Barbarians ignorant of the benefits of monarchy may have understood “Chilbudius” 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.<sup>27</sup> 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 Sclavenes. In 602, the qagan dispatched Apsich, his general, to destroy the “nation of the Antes, which was in fact allied to the Romans.”<sup>28</sup>

From a Roman perspective, the treaty of 545 was meant to eliminate the problem of Hunnic raids, against which one of its stipulations was

<sup>26</sup> Ensslin 1929:698–9; Ditten 1978:82; *contra* Stein 1968:522. For the source of Procopius’ account, see Rubin 1954:198; Litavrin 1986:27. For ἑσπονδοί as *foederati* and σύμμαχοι as barbarian troops under their own commanders, see Christou 1991:32–5. Romans, too, could become ἑσπονδοί, for example in relation to Persia (*Wars* VIII 11.24; *Secret History* 11.12). Unlike σύμμαχοι, ἑσπονδοί were not only military allies, but also political partners. Other examples of ἑσπονδοί: Lombards (*Wars* VII 33.12), Gepids (*Wars* VII 34.10), Saginæ (*Wars* VIII 2.18), Goths (*Wars* VIII 5.13), Sabiri (*Wars* VIII 11.24), and Cutrigurs (*Wars* VIII 19.5). The majority were on the northern frontier of the Empire.

<sup>27</sup> Procopius, *Wars* VII 14.22: ἐν δημοκρατίᾳ ἐκ παλαιῶ βιοτεύουσι. For the concept of “democracy” derivatively applied to Slavic society, as the opposite of Byzantine monarchy, see Benedicty 1963:46–7; Havlik 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 Chilbudius, the Roman general, and his Antian namesake. This is a naive interpretation, for it takes Procopius’ account at its face value.

<sup>28</sup> Theophylact Simocatta VIII 5.13. For the 300 Antes in Italy, see Procopius, *Wars* VII 22.3–6; for Antes attacking the Sclavenes, see John of Ephesus VI 45. Dabragezas, 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 Lazike. See Agathias III 6.9 (Δαβραγέζας, Ἄντης ἀνὴρ, ταξιάρχος), III 7.2, III 21.6.



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.<sup>29</sup>

At this moment, a candidate to the Lombard throne, Hildigis, fled to the Sclavenes, 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 Sclavenes. He later returned to the Sclavenes, 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 Sclavenes. 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.<sup>30</sup>

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 Sclavenes 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 Sclavenes crossed the river Danube, plundered the adjoining country,

<sup>29</sup> Agathias I 4.1–3; Procopius, *Wars* VII 33.10–12, VIII 34.1–10, and VII 35.12–22; Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* I 21–2 and II 27. See Christou 1991:78–9, 82, and 91. For the date of the truce, see Pohl 1996:31–2.

<sup>30</sup> Procopius, *Wars* VII 35.16, 19, and 21–2, VIII 18.16–18). The use of the word "army" (στράτευμα) indicates horsemen. The *communis opinio* is that the Sclavenes to whom Hildigis fled lived in present-day Slovakia or Moravia. See Zeman 1966:164; Godłowski 1979:434; Szydlowski 1980:234; Pohl 1988:96–7; Tréštk 1996. For Hildigis' route, see Margetić 1992:169. Hildigis resurfaced in Constantinople in 552 (*Wars* VIII 27).

and enslaved a great number of Romans. The Herulian mercenaries under Narses' command intercepted and defeated them and released the prisoners. According to Procopius, this is the moment when Narses discovered "a certain man who was pretending to bear the name of Chilbudius."<sup>31</sup> 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 Sclavenes. Procopius has told us that "phoney Chilbudius" had spent some time with the Sclavenes, as a prisoner of war, and, according to the chronology of his narrative, the raid of the Sclavenes may have followed the assembly of the Antes, in which they had proclaimed their fellow tribesman as "Chilbudius."<sup>32</sup> It is very unlikely that the Antian envoys to Constantinople arrived there as Narses' 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.<sup>33</sup> 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 Sclavenes 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 Sclavenes 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 Sclavenes as completely faithless and having "no regard for treaties, which they agree to more out of fear than by gifts."<sup>34</sup> Here and there, individual Sclavenes may indeed appear as fighting for the Romans, as in the case of Souarounas, a Slavene soldier in the Roman army operating in the Caucasus region.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Procopius, *Wars* VII 13.26. See also Waldmüller 1976: 39 and 56; Irmscher 1980:162; Velkov 1987:155. The word "throng" (ὄμιλος) appears seventy times in Procopius' *Wars*, 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.

<sup>32</sup> Procopius, *Wars* VII 14.19–20. <sup>33</sup> *Secret History* 11.5–9.

<sup>34</sup> *Strategikon* XI 4.4. Unpredictable Sclavenes: Adsheed 1990:104.

<sup>35</sup> Agathias IV 20.4. Agathias also mentions Dabragezas, the Antian officer who commanded the Roman fleet in Crimea (III 6.9, III 7.2, III 21.6). See Werner 1980:590; Strumins'kyj 1979–80:792. In the same context (III 21.6), he mentions another officer, Leontios, whom many believed to be Dabragezas' son. This is further viewed as a case of a successful assimilation of the Slavs. See Ditten 1978:80; Waldmüller 1976:64. However, Λεόντιος ὁ Δαβραγέζου refers to Dabragezas' *bucellarius*, not son, for the phrase is obviously a counterpart to Ζύπερ ὁ Μαρκελλίνου δορυφόρος in the first part of the sentence.

Another Slavene mercenary proved himself useful to Belisarius during the siege of Auximum in 540. But unlike Antes, these soldiers seem to have been hired on an individual basis, due to their special skills.<sup>36</sup>

In 548, another army of Slavenes crossed the Danube, probably via the Iron Gates fords. 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."<sup>37</sup> 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 Slavene 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 city walls, nor had they dared to come down to the open plain."<sup>38</sup> But Procopius' narrative focuses more on those Slavenes who came closer to the capital city. He tells us that the commander of the cavalry cohorts stationed at Tzurullum (present-day Çorlu) was defeated, captured, and savagely executed. Procopius claims that the Slavenes of 549 "had never in all time crossed the Ister river with an army before."<sup>39</sup> It is hardly conceivable that Procopius forgot what he had reported about the invasions following Chilbudius' death, particularly about that of 545. Could he have implied that the Slavenes of 549 were not those of 545?<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Procopius, *Wars* vi 26.16–22. At Auximum, Belisarius is told that the Slavenes "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 Slavenes: "They make effective use of ambushes, sudden attacks, and raids, devising many different methods by night and by day" (xi 4.9).

<sup>37</sup> Procopius, *Wars* vii 29.2. The Slavenes of 548 were most probably horsemen, for Procopius calls them an "army" (στράτευμα), 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 Cymburskii 1991:234). This is also indicated by the fact that they raided deep into Roman territory, moving rapidly. Iron Gates fords: Maksimović 1980:33–4. Date: Ensslin 1929:221; Waldmüller 1976:39; Irmscher 1980:162; Bonev 1983:114; Velkov 1987:155.

<sup>38</sup> Procopius, *Wars* vii 38.7. For the commanders of Illyricum, see *Wars* vii 29.3. Slavenes of 549 as horsemen: Ivanov, Gindin, and Cymburskii 1991:236.

<sup>39</sup> *Wars* vii 38.10. See also Braičevskii 1953:24. Only Berthold Rubin (1954:226) seems to have noticed this difficulty. According to Rubin, Procopius' narrative of events taking place after Chilbudius' death is often contradictory.

<sup>40</sup> Procopius, *Wars* vii 13.24–6. Note also the difference in terms applied by Procopius to these two groups. The Slavenes of 545 were a "throng" (ὄμιλος), those of 549, an "army" (στράτευμα).

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 Slavenes, 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 Slavenes of the 580s: they "had never dared to leave the woods and the inaccessible areas."<sup>41</sup> The details of the account of the 549 raid look suspiciously like stereotypes. Procopius was certainly not an alert observer of the Slavenes and it is unlikely that he was able to distinguish between the two raids in minute details. He might, however, have had 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 Slavenes succeeded in conquering a city (Topeiros, near Abdera, in Rhodope). In a long passage, he also describes in detail how the Slavenes captured the city and what happened to the Roman captives. Procopius' description of the atrocities committed by Slavenes after conquering Topeiros matches not only contemporary historiographical clichés about barbarians, but also the appalling portrait of the Slavenes by Pseudo-Caesar.<sup>42</sup> 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."<sup>43</sup> After the bloodshed at Topeiros, as if they "were drunk with the great quantity of blood they had shed,"<sup>44</sup> the Slavenes 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,

<sup>41</sup> John of Ephesus vi 25. For the execution of the Roman prisoners by κατωμισμός, see Vergote 1972:139–40.

<sup>42</sup> Procopius, *Wars* vii 38.11–23. For Pseudo-Caesar, see Riedinger 1969:302. Topeiros captured by Slavenes is also mentioned in the *Buildings* (iv 11). For the location, see Soustal 1991:71 and 480–1; Kasapides 1991–2. According to Procopius, the Slavenes of 549 imprisoned their victims in their huts (ἐν τοῖς δωματίοις) together with their cattle and sheep, and then "set fire to the huts without mercy." This is remarkably similar to the episode of the *Getae equites* of 517, who burnt their prisoners alive, locked in their own houses (*inclusi suis cum domunculis captivi Romani incensi sunt*; Marcellinus Comes, pp. 39 and 120). For a comparable treatment of prisoners by Vidini and Gelones, see Ammianus Marcellinus 31.2.13–16. <sup>43</sup> *Wars* vii 38.19.

<sup>44</sup> *Wars* vii 38.23.



namely that in 545, the Sclavenes 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 Serdica under the command of Germanus in order to be sent to Italy against Totila, a great throng of Sclavenes, "such as never before was known," crossed the Danube and easily came close to Naissus (present-day Niš).<sup>45</sup> The attack of the Sclavenes 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 Philippopolis (present-day Plovdiv).<sup>46</sup> According to Procopius, the Sclavenes 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 Sclavenes 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 Sclavenes did not represent any major threat to southern Macedonia. He would soon die, before being able to advance on Italy. As for the Sclavenes, the Romans did nothing to make them leave Dalmatia. Despite their great number, therefore, the Sclavenes 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 Sclavenes spent the winter of 550 and most of the following year in Dalmatia, "as if in their own land."<sup>47</sup> 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 Slavene raid, but there is no reason to believe that the Slavene marauders intended to settle. They seem to have recrossed the mountains to the east in the spring of 551 and joined another group of Slavene warriors

<sup>45</sup> *Wars* VII 40.4–5 and 7–8. It is possible that the Sclavenes of 550, like those of 549, crossed the river by the Iron Gates fords. See Popović 1978:608; Maksimović 1980:35; Janković 1981:197. For the date of this raid, see Teall 1965:311.

<sup>46</sup> Procopius, *Wars* VIII 21.20–1. Some interpreted this coincidence as an indication that the Slavene attack had been instigated by Totila. See Ensslin 1929:699; Weithmann 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).

<sup>47</sup> Procopius, *Wars* VII 40.31–2: ὥσπερ ἐν χώρᾳ οἰκείᾳ διαχειμάζοντες. 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 535, 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.

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.<sup>48</sup>

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 Sclavenes 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 Sclavenes 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 Slavene 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 Sclavenes, however, "departed on the homeward way with the other booty."<sup>49</sup>

The year 551 was not yet over, when a great throng of Sclavenes (Σκλαβηνῶν δὲ πολὺς ὄμιλος) descended upon Illyricum 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 Sclavenes 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 Sclavenes "under their protection and ferried them across," receiving one solidus per head as payment for their labor.<sup>50</sup>

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 Amalafridas, 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.<sup>51</sup>

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

<sup>48</sup> See Procopius, *Wars* VII 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 1963:47–8; Cankova-Petkova 1970:221; Waldmüller 1976:44; Velkov 1987:161. The Slavs of 550/1 as settlers: Ditten 1978:87.

<sup>49</sup> Procopius, *Wars* VII 40.31–45. See also Ensslin 1929:699. <sup>50</sup> Procopius, *Wars* VIII 25.1–6.

<sup>51</sup> Jordanes, *Romana* 386–7; Procopius, *Wars* VIII 25.1–10 and 13–15, VIII 27.1–5 and 7–29; Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* I 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 Slavene raids of 549–551, for the Slavenes 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 Dobruja) had come to be wholly deserted and "nothing of it was left except the name," for the Slavenes had been making their ambushes there for a great length of time and had been tarrying there very long (διατρίβην τε αὐτόθι ἐπὶ μακρότατον ἐσχηκότων). The fort was built all up from the foundations.<sup>52</sup> Justinian also built a new fort named Adina, because the "barbarian Slavene were constantly laying concealed ambushes there against travellers, thus making the whole district impassable."<sup>53</sup>

The evidence of the *Buildings* gives one the impression that Procopius perceived the challenge of the Slavenes 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.<sup>54</sup> The defense system was also designed to protect the countryside rather than the urban

<sup>52</sup> Procopius, *Buildings* IV 7. See Nestor 1961:429 and 1963:45; Shuvalov 1991:40. Albanian inscription: Feissel 1988. <sup>53</sup> Procopius, *Buildings* IV 7.

<sup>54</sup> Procopius, *Buildings* IV 1: "Indeed it was the custom of these peoples [barbarians, in general] to rise and make war upon their enemies [the Romans] for no particular cause, and open hostilities without sending an embassy, and they did not bring their struggle to an end through any treaty, or cease operations for any specified period, but they made their attacks without provocation and reached a decision by the sword alone." See Adshead 1990:107.

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 Stara Planina range, and a third one along the Istranca 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.<sup>55</sup>

Justinian's concept of defense proved its efficiency, for no Slavene raid is known for a long period between 552 and 577. With the exception of Zabergan's invasion of 558/9 and the Cutrigur 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.<sup>56</sup> 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. Slavene among Zabergan's hordes appear in both John Malalas' and Theophanes' accounts, but are not mentioned by either Agathias or Victor of Tunnunna. If groups of Slavene warriors participated in Zabergan's invasion, they certainly played a subordinate role. No independent raid of the Slavene is known for the entire period until 578, despite the fact that the period is covered by more than one source.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Procopius, *Buildings* IV 1. See also Velkov 1987:155. "Codified" map of barbarian invasions: Ivanov 1984. For the defense system in the Balkans, see Ovcharov 1977:468 and 1982:19.

<sup>56</sup> Whitby 1988:88; Soustal 1991:71. For the Cutrigur raid of 562, see Menander the Guardsman 12.5. See also Blockley 1985:268 with n. 160.

<sup>57</sup> Agathias V 11.6; Victor of Tunnunna, *Chronica*, ed. Mommsen, *MGH: AA* 11:205; John Malalas XVIII 129; Mango 1997:341. Justinian's victory over the Goths: Shuvalov 1989. Cutrigur invasion: Bakalov 1974:206; Waldmüller 1976:48 and 50; Irmscher 1980:163; Pohl 1988:19; Fiedler 1992:8. I am not persuaded by Vladislav Popović's attempt to reconstruct a Slavene raid not recorded by historical sources on the basis of the numismatic evidence. See Popović 1978:617 and 1981.

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.<sup>58</sup> Following the defeat of the Antes, the Avars became the masters of the steppe, with no other rivals except the Gök Türk Empire to the east.<sup>59</sup> 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.<sup>60</sup> 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

<sup>58</sup> Menander the Guardsman, fr. 3. Avars as Justinian's allies: Szádeczky-Kardoss 1986a:267-8; Soustal 1991:71. Location of the Antian polity: Ditten 1978:89 and 93. Date of the Avar attack: Litavrin 1991b:8; Levinskaia and Tokhtas'ev 1991b:327-8. For Mezamer's name, see Wiita 1977:262; Werner 1980:590; Strumins'kyj 1979-80:792-3.

<sup>59</sup> The confederation of tribes known as the Gök Türk 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 1997:351; Pohl 1988:40-1; Whitton 1996:220-2. The Byzantine response was to send an embassy to Qagan Sizabul, in 569 (Menander the Guardsman, fr. 10,2). By 565, Justin II was already using the Gök Türk as a threat against the Avars (Pohl 1988:49). In 576/7, Turxanthos, the qagan of the western division, conquered Bosphorus (Panticapaeum). Chersonesus fell in 579. See Menander the Guardsman, fr. 19,2 and 25,2; see also Gajdukević 1971:518; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1986a:269-70; Pohl 1988:67. The Avars took Gök Türk threats very seriously. They immediately withdrew from the Balkans, when learning that Gök Türk troops were advancing from the east. See Michael the Syrian x 21; Pohl 1988:40; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1986a:267-8.

<sup>60</sup> *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, p. 9; see Pohl 1988:47.

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 Sclavenes resumed their raids. In 578, according to Menander the Guardsman, 100,000 Sclavene warriors "devastated Thrace and many other areas."<sup>61</sup> The number of the invading Sclavene warriors mentioned by Menander the Guardsman is certainly exaggerated. But his account is corroborated by others. John of Biclar probably referred to this same invasion when reporting Sclavene destruction in Thrace and Avar naval attacks on the Black Sea coast. Since Avars were never at ease on sea, in sharp contrast to Sclavenes, whose sailing abilities are often mentioned by various other sources, John may have muddled Avars with Sclavenes. The scale of the raid seems to have been considerable, for according to Menander the Guardsman, the Sclavenes were still plundering in Greece ("Ελλάς), when Qagan Bayan organized an expedition against their territories north of the Danube.<sup>62</sup>

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 Sclavene leaders. Indeed, Menander the Guardsman cites, for the first time, the name of a Sclavene chieftain, Daurentius (or Dauritas), to whom the qagan sent an embassy asking the Sclavenes to accept Avar suzerainty and to pay him tribute. The rationale behind the qagan's claims was that the land of the Sclavenes 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 Sclavenes. The answer given by the independently minded Dauritas 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 Sclavenes eventually slew the envoys of the qagan. Bayan now had a good reason for his long-awaited expedition. In addition, Emperor

<sup>61</sup> Menander the Guardsman, fr. 20,2. See Metcalf 1962b:135; Popović 1975:450; Whitby 1988:87. For the fall of Sirmium, see Menander the Guardsman, fr. 27,2.

<sup>62</sup> John of Biclar, p. 214: "Αvares litora maris captiose obsident et navibus litora Thraciae navigantibus satis infesti sunt"; Menander the Guardsman, fr. 21. See also Waldmüller 1976:106; Weithmann 1978:78; Popović 1980:231; Yannopoulos 1980:332; Pohl 1988:68; Whitby 1988:87; Levinskaia and Tokhtas'ev 1991b:343; Cherniak 1991:398; Chiriac 1993:193. The exact meaning of "Ελλάς is a controversial issue. Despite its vague territorial content, it is clear that Menander refers here to the southern regions of the Balkans, as an indicator for the magnitude of the Slavic raid.

Tiberius II also needed him to force the Sclavenes raiding the Balkans to return home. Tiberius ordered the *quaestor exercitus* John, who was at the same time *magister militum* (or *praefectus 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 Slavene 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 Sclavenes “dared to face” the qagan, and many took refuge into the nearby woods.<sup>63</sup>

Nevertheless, Qagan Bayan’s expedition against the Sclavenes 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 Slavene marauders on their way back from Constantinople through Illyricum.<sup>64</sup> 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 *tslunyq*), and Thrace, taking many towns and castles, laying waste, burning, pillaging, and seizing the whole country. On the double assumption that the first Slavene 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.<sup>65</sup> 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 Slavene raid reaching the environs of Thessalonica. Archbishop John of Thessalonica mentions an attack on the city by 5,000 Slavene 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.<sup>66</sup> 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 Slavene 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 Slavene warriors occurred some time after the siege of 586, for the inhabitants of the city could by now recognize the Slavene battle cry.<sup>67</sup>

The evidence cited by Lemerle should be treated with great caution. First, an accurate translation of the passage referring to the Slavene 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 Sclavenes 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 Sclavenes, but the spectacle of the Avar army.<sup>68</sup>

I therefore suggest that the attack of the 5,000 Slavene warriors may as well be dated before the siege of 586. Indeed, despite claims to the

<sup>63</sup> Menander the Guardsman, fr. 21. Date of the Avar embassy: Litavrin 1991b:13. For Dauritas’ speech, see Baldwin 1978:118. For the *quaestor exercitus* John, see Jones 1964:307; Hendy 1985:653; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1985:64; Pohl 1988:68; Levinskaia and Tokhtas’ev 1991b:346; Torbatov 1997:84–5. The use of λέγεται suggests the number of Avar horsemen may be exaggerated. For ships transporting the Avar army, see Bounegru 1983:276–7. For the probable location of the Danube fords the Avar horsemen used to cross over into Walachia, see Nestor 1965:148; Chiriac 1980:255 and 1993:198–9; Pohl 1988:68–9. For Sclavenes fleeing to the woods, see also Theophylact Simocatta vi 7.10 and *Strategikon* xi 4.38.

<sup>64</sup> Menander the Guardsman, fr. 25.2. For a later date, see Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1986:348. For Bayan and the expectations of Emperor Tiberius, see Waldmüller 1976:165; Rusu 1978:123; Ferjančić 1984:94.

<sup>65</sup> John of Ephesus vi 6.25; Olajos 1985:514–5. See also Grégoire 1944–5:109. Date of the invasion: Waldmüller 1976:110. John’s notion of “Hellas”: Weithmann 1978:88.

<sup>66</sup> *Miracles of St Demetrius* i 12.107–13; Lemerle 1981:40, 69, and 72.

<sup>67</sup> *Miracles of St Demetrius* i 12.112: καὶ τινὰ τῆς βαρβαρικῆς κραυγῆς σημεῖα διὰ τῆς ἐθάρδος ἀκοῆς ἐπεγίνωσκον. For the citizens of Thessalonica and the barbarian army, see *Miracles of St Demetrius* i 13.124. On the assumption that it took place at a later date than the siege of 586, Lemerle dated the raid of the 5,000 Slavene warriors to 604, on the sole basis of his translation of τῇ δευτέρᾳ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς ἑορτῆς ἀφωσ μέσης νυκτὸς as “le lundi jour de la fête, au milieu de la nuit” (i 12.102; Lemerle 1981:72). This is plainly and simply wrong. All that Archbishop John says is that the Sclavenes attacked on the night of the second day of the festival. See Whitby 1988:119–20; Speck 1993:423; Ivanova 1995a:182.

<sup>68</sup> The army of 586: *Miracles of St Demetrius* i 13.117. See also Ivanova 1995a:188. For subsequent attacks on Thessalonica, see *Miracles 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 Slavene 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 Slavene warriors on Thessalonica to the events referred to by John of Ephesus.<sup>69</sup>

However, questions still remain. Both Archbishop John and John of Ephesus seem to describe an independent raid of the Sclavenes reaching Thessalonica and also, according to John of Ephesus, Greece. In distant Spain, John of Biclar 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

<sup>69</sup> *Miracles of St Demetrius* 1 12.108: διὰ τὸ παντὸς τοῦ τῶν Σκλαβίνων ἔθνους τὸ ἀπίλεκτον ἄνθος; see Lemerle 1981:71. Citizens on the walls: *Miracles of St Demetrius* 1 12.107. Date of the siege: Barišić 1953:49–55; Ivanova 1995a:182. The only chronological indication is the association of this episode with that of the destroyed *aborium* of St Demetrius' church, which John attributes to the time of Bishop Eusebius (1 6.55). Eusebius is known from letters written by Pope Gregory the Great between 597 and 603 (Lemerle 1981:27–8). 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 Slavs," 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; Ferjančić 1984:95; Pohl 1988:82; Soustal 1991:72; *contra*: Popović 1975:450. All that John says, however, is that after four years of raiding the Sclavenes were still on Roman territory. It is not clear whether they had established themselves temporarily or on a longer term.

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.<sup>70</sup>

In addition, Michael the Syrian, in a passage most likely taken from John of Ephesus, records an attack of the Sclavenes (*sqwlyn*) on Corinth, but refers to their leader as qagan. He then attributes the attack on Anchialos not to Avars, but to Sclavenes. The reference to Anchialos could be used for dating the attack on Corinth in or shortly before 584.<sup>71</sup> 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 Mahre). As a consequence, he might have muddled Avars and Slavs. But neither the evidence of John of Biclar, 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 Slavene groups were under the command of the Avar qagan is also suggested by Theophylact Simocatta's report of another raid across Thrace, which reached the Long Walls. In 584, "the Avars let loose the nation of the Sclavenes." 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 Comentiolus, and they soon intercepted a group of Sclavenes.<sup>72</sup> One year later (585), Comentiolus encountered a larger group under the command of a certain Ardagastus, roaming in the vicinity of Adrianople. After crushing Ardagastus' warriors, Comentiolus

<sup>70</sup> John of Biclar, p. 216; Evagrius vi 10. Avars in Greece: Weithmann 1978:88; Yannopoulos 1980:333; Avramea 1997:68–9. The date of the attack is indicated by John of Biclar's mention of both Tiberius II's third regnal year and King Leuvigild's eleventh year. According to Walter Pohl (1988:76 with n. 40), John of Biclar 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 1 4.1–4; Pohl 1988:77–8 and 107; Whitby 1988:110. Unlike John of Biclar, Evagrius also reports that cities and strongholds had been conquered by Avars "fighting on the parapets" (ἐξεπολιόρκησαν).

<sup>71</sup> Michael the Syrian x 21. See Yannopoulos 1980:366. The association between Anchialos and Greece also appears in Evagrius vi 10. There is no serious reason for accepting Zakythinos' emendation of Corinth into Perinthus. See Zakythinos 1945:37; Karayannopoulos 1990.

<sup>72</sup> Theophylact Simocatta 1 7.3–6; see Mango 1997:376. The threat is also indicated by the hasty appointment of Comentiolus as *magister militum praesentalis* (Theophylact Simocatta 1 7.4).

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 Sclavenes 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.<sup>73</sup>

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 Slavene 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 Biclar, 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 Slavene raids. John of Ephesus claimed that the Sclavenes 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 polity 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 Sclavenes 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

<sup>73</sup> Date: Waldmüller 1976:128; Whitby and Whitby 1986:29 with n. 37. Avars in 584/5: Pohl 1988:77–8 and 85. Priscus' attack against Ardagastus: Theophylact Simocatta VI 7.1–5.

the Danube frontier, from Aquis to Marcianopolis. At the same time, Comentiolus was kept busy fighting Ardagastus' Sclavenes near Adrianople.<sup>74</sup>

That in the eyes of the Roman emperor, the Sclavenes 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 Sclavenes," which the Antes did with great success.<sup>75</sup> Maurice's policy might indeed have produced visible results in the case of the Sclavenes 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 Sclavenes 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 poliorcetic 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 Appiaria 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 cliché, designed to emphasize that barbarians could have had access to high-tech siegecraft only through traitors. More important, the story clearly refers

<sup>74</sup> Avar envoy attacked by Slavs: Menander the Guardsman, fr. 25,2. Annual stipends for the Avars: Pohl 1988:75 and 82. New qagan: Pohl 1988:77–8 and 177. For the Bookolabra affair, see Theophylact Simocatta I 8.2–11.

<sup>75</sup> Michael the Syrian X 21. For the probable location of the "land of the Sclavenes," see Nestor 1963:53–4; Pigulevskaia 1970:214; Waldmüller 1976:123; Szydlowski 1980:234; Serikov 1991:279–80 and 289.