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## CRITICA

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Nomads North of the Danube Delta from the  
Tenth to the Mid-Thirteenth Century* [East Central and  
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## BYZANTINE-AVAR RELATIONS AFTER 626 AND THE POSSIBLE CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

GEORGIOS KARDARAS

Evidence from the Byzantine and, secondly, the oriental and Latin sources on Byzantine-Avar relations for the period between 558 and 626 is extensive. During this period, Byzantium and the Avars, involved in conflicts in the Balkans, concluded treaties and developed trade activity.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, evidence on their relations becomes rare after the siege of Constantinople in 626, with only two known Byzantine delegations to the Avars in 634/35 and an Avar one to Constantinople in 678. After their defeat in 626, the Avars were pushed out to the area north of the Danube and their subsequent presence in Central Europe is known mainly from the archaeological remains and from the Carolingian sources.<sup>2</sup>

The defeat at Constantinople caused also internal conflicts in the Avar Khaganate which weakened its political and military power. The first consequence of this inner crisis was the struggle between the Avars and the subjugated Slavs just after the catastrophe of the Slavic flotilla at the Bosphorus.<sup>3</sup> A few years later, in 631/32, the separatist movements within the Avar Khaganate become more intensive, as the strong Bulgar element, under Alciochus, rose up and asserted the power supremacy within the Khaganate, taking advantage of the Avars' weakening. Defeated by the

- 1 See W. Pohl, *Die Awaren. Ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa, 567-822 n. Chr.* (München, 1988), pp. 18-162, 205-215, 237-255; G. Kardaras, *Byzantium and the Avars (6th-9th c.). Political, diplomatic and cultural relations* [National Hellenic Research Foundation/Institute for Byzantine Research, Monographs 15] (Athens, 2010), pp. 37-136.
- 2 H. Ditten, "Zur Bedeutung der Einwanderung der Slawen" in F. Winkelmann and H. Köpstein (eds.), *Byzanz im 7. Jahrhundert. Untersuchungen zur Herausbildung des Feudalismus* [Berliner Byzantinistische Arbeiten 48] (Berlin, 1978), p. 127; A. Avenarius, "Die Konsolidierung des Awarenkhaganates und Byzanz im 7. Jahrhundert," *Byzantina* 13/2 (1985), p. 1021; Pohl, *Awaren*, p. 255; Kardaras, *Avars*, p. 137.
- 3 *Chronicon Paschale*, ed. L. Dindorf [Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae], (Bonn, 1832), p. 724 (*Chronicon Paschale 284-628 AD*, engl. transl. Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby, Liverpool 1989, p. 178): *A few other Slavs who had escaped by diving, and who came out in the region where the godless Chagan was positioned, were slain at his injunction*; Ibidem, p. 725 (Whitby - Whitby, *Chronicon Paschale*, p. 179); *Carmi di Giorgio di Pisidia (Versi improvvisati in occasione della lettura dell'ordinanza emanata per il ricollocamento dei venerati legni della croce)*, ed. L. Tartaglia (Torino, 1998), p. 244, 78-81; Ditten, "Einwanderung," p. 128; J. Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans* (Michigan, 1983), pp. 43, 49; Pohl, *Awaren*, pp. 254-255; F. Curta, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 500-1250* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 76.

Avars, the Bulgars fled from Pannonia to Bavaria (where they were slaughtered by king Dagobert I), and later to *marca Vinetorum* and Italy.<sup>4</sup>

The first mention of the Avars in Byzantine sources after 626 is dated to 634/35, when two delegations from Constantinople arrived in the Avar Khaganate in order to liberate with gifts and money three Byzantine noblemen, held hostage by the Avars since 623.<sup>5</sup> The Byzantine sources contain another reference to the Avars in 678, in the reign of Constantine IV (668-685), when an Avar delegation, along with other delegations from the West, arrived at Constantinople after the rebuff of the Arab attack on the Byzantine capital. On this occasion, the Avars presumably concluded a treaty with Constantine IV.<sup>6</sup> The last reference to the Avars in the Byzantine sources, dated to the early ninth century, is not related to the Avar Khaganate, but to a part of the Avars, subjugated by the Bulgars after the campaign of Krum east of the Tisza river in 803/04.<sup>7</sup> These Avars, already in decline before

- 4 *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii libri quattuor*, ed. and German transl. A. Kuster-nig [Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters 4a] (Darmstadt, 1982), IV, 72, p. 242; Paulus Diaconus: Pauli, *Historia Langobardorum*, eds. L. Bethmann and G. Weitz [Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum saec. VI-IX], (Hannover, 1878), V, 29, p. 154 (henceforth: Pauli, *Historia Langobardorum*); L. Waldmüller, *Die ersten Begegnungen der Slawen mit dem Christentum und den christlichen Völkern vom 6. bis 8. Jahrhundert. Die Slawen zwischen Byzanz und Abendland* (Amsterdam, 1976), pp. 282-283, 301-302; Ditten, "Einwanderung," p. 130, n. 2; I. Bóna, "Das erste Auftreten der Bulgaren im Karpatenbecken," *Studia Turco-Hungarica* 5 (1981), pp. 105-106; Pohl, *Awaren*, pp. 268-270. See also, Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 137-138.
- 5 Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Short History*, ed. and Engl. transl. C. Mango [Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 13, Dumbarton Oaks Texts 10] (Washington, 1990), 21, p. 70/1 (henceforth: Nikephoros, *Short History*): *At the same time Maria, the sister of Herakleios, sent money to the Chagan of the Avars and ransomed her son Stephen. Pleased with such gifts, the Avar <chief> urged Anianos the magister that he, too, should send gifts and ransom the other hostages he was holding; which, indeed, was done*; Pohl, *Awaren*, pp. 246, 272-273; Kardaras, *Avars*, p. 139.
- 6 Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1883), p. 356. (*The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284-813*, engl. transl. C. Mango and Roger Scott, Oxford 1997, p. 496): *When the inhabitants of the West had learnt of this, namely the Chagan of the Avars as well as the kings, chieftains, and castaldi who lived beyond them, and the princes of the western nations, they sent ambassadors and gifts to the emperor, requesting that peace and friendship should be confirmed with them. The emperor acceded to their demands and ratified an imperial peace with them also. Thus great security prevailed in both East and West*; (henceforth: Mango-Scott, *Theophanes*); Nikephoros, *Short History*, 34, p. 86/7; Ditten, "Einwanderung," pp. 127, 132; Avenarius, "Konsolidierung," p. 1022; Pohl, *Awaren*, p. 278; Christou, *Byzanz und die Langobarden. Von der Ansiedlung in Pannonien bis zur endgültigen Anerkennung (500-680)* [Historical Monographs 11] (Athens, 1991), pp. 220-222.
- 7 On the expedition of Krum against the Avars, see P. Váczy, "Der fränkische Krieg und das Volk der Awaren," *Acta Antiqua Hungarica* 20 (1972), pp. 395-397; V. Gjuselev,

their subjugation,<sup>8</sup> participated in the battle of 811 in Bulgaria, disastrous for the Byzantines,<sup>9</sup> as well as in Krum's campaign against Constantinople in 813.<sup>10</sup>

Few years after the episode of Alciochus, Patriarch Nikephoros notes that Kubrat revolted against the Avars and liberated the Onoghur Bulgars from their rule. The success of Kubrat (c. 635), led to the formation of "Great Bulgaria", which had as its center the area around the Sea of Azov and expanded to the steppes between the rivers Dnieper, Don and Kuban.<sup>11</sup> Heraclius, obviously to reinforce the position of the Empire in the South Russian steppes, had approached the Onoghurs since the first decade of his reign. In 619, the Onoghur ruler Orhan (Organas) visited Constantinople with his young nephew Kubrat and they were both baptized. Orhan was given the title of patrician and Kubrat remained in Constantinople for a longer

"La Bulgarie médiévale et l'Europe occidentale (IXe-XIe s.)," *Byzantinobulgarica* 8 (1986), p. 96.

- 8 *Suidae Lexicon*, vol. I, ed. A. Adler (Leipzig, 1928), B 423, p. 483-484; *Ibidem*, A 18, p. 4; Pohl, *Awaren*, p. 198; B. M. Szöke, "The Question of Continuity in the Carpathian Basin of the 9th Century A.D.," *Antaeus* 19-20 (1990-1991), p. 147.
- 9 *La chronique byzantine de l'an 811*, ed. and french transl. Duǰev, *Travaux et Mémoires* 1 (1965), p. 212/13: *Les Bulgares donc saisirent l'occasion; des hauteurs montagneuses ils avaient suivi du regard les soldats (byzantins) qui erraient çà et là; ils louèrent les services des Avars et des Slaviniés qui habitaient autour ...* Gjuzelev, "Bulgarie," p. 91.
- 10 Symeon Magister, *Chronography*, ed. I. Bekker, *Theophanes continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister, Georgius Monachus* [Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae] (Bonn, 1838), 11, p. 617; *Scriptor Incertus de Leone Bardae Armenii filio*, ed. I. Bekker [Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae] (Bonn, 1842), p. 347; Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 139-140.
- 11 Nikephoros, *Short History*, 22, p. 70/1: *At about the same time Koubratos, the nephew of Organas and lord of the Onogundurs, rose up against the Chagan of the Avars and, after abusing the army he had from the latter, drove them out of his land. He sent an embassy to Herakleios and concluded a peace treaty which they observed until the end of their lives. Herakleios sent him gifts and honored him with the title of patrician;* On the geographical location of Great Bulgaria and the date of Kubrat's revolt (in 630, 635 or between 635 and 641), see Ditten, "Einwanderung," p. 128; V. Beševliev, *Die Protobulgarische Periode der Bulgarische Geschichte* (Amsterdam, 1981), p. 149-150; K. Czeglédy, "From East to West: The Age of Nomadic Migrations in Eurasia," *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 3 (1983), pp. 39, 103, 109; J. Werner, "Kagan Kuvrat, der Begründer Grossbulgariens," *Südosteuropa-Mitteilungen* 24/3 (1984), p. 64; V. Gjuzelev, "Chan Asparuch und die Gründung des bulgarischen Reiches" in V. Gjuzelev (ed.), *Forschungen zur Geschichte Bulgariens im Mittelalter* [Miscellanea Bulgarica 3] (Wien, 1986), p. 3, 10-11; Pohl, *Awaren*, pp. 271-272; A. Róna-Tas, "Where was Khuvrat's Bulgharia?," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 15 (2000), p. 3-15. Some scholars consider Fanagoria, on the Taman peninsula, as the capital of Great Bulgaria. See D. Ovčarov, "Die Protobulgaren und ihre Wanderungen nach Südosteuropa" in B. Hänsel (ed.), *Die Völker Südosteuropas im 6. bis 8. Jahrhundert, Symposium Tutzing 1985 (Südosteuropa Jahrbuch 17)* (Wien, 1987), p. 175; S. A. Pletnewa, *Die Chasaren. Mittelalterliches Reich an Don und Wolga* (Leipzig, 1978), pp. 28-29.

time.<sup>12</sup> After his revolt, Kubrat sent a delegation to Byzantium. Heraclius agreed to conclude an alliance with Kubrat and offered him the title of patrician along with rich presents.<sup>13</sup> Another indication of Kubrat's contact with the Byzantine civilization are the finds from the treasure of Malaja Pereščepina in Ukraine, dated to the middle of the seventh century, especially, the two golden rings with the inscription *Kubratos patrikios*.<sup>14</sup>

The main question about Kubrat concerns the people against which he revolted. Having as the only source the *Short History* of Patriarch Nicephorus, it was generally accepted that Kubrat had shaken off the Avar supremacy and formed the Khaganate of "Great Bulgaria", supported by Constantinople. Nevertheless, this view has been disputed by some scholars who, scrutinizing the events in the South Russian steppes during the second half of the sixth and the early seventh century, drew the conclusion that Kubrat had revolted against the western Turks.<sup>15</sup>

After their victorious march between 558 and 562 the Avars moved westwards,<sup>16</sup> and in c. 567 the South Russian steppes came under the dominion of the western Turks, who subjugated the peoples living between the Volga, the Don and the Caucasus. Around 571, the Oghur ruler on the Lower Volga was already a tributary of the Turks<sup>17</sup> and in 576 Turxanthos, the khagan of the western Turks, with Anageus, the ruler of Utighurs (Unighurs, Onoghurs), occupied the Byzantine city of

12 *The Chronicle of John, Coptic Bishop of Nikiu, c. 690 A.D.*, Engl. transl. R. H. Charles (Oxford, 1916), 120. 47, p. 197 (henceforth: John of Nikiu, *Chronicle*); Nikephoros, *Short History*, 9, pp. 48/9-50/1; Werner, "Kagan Kuvrat," p. 64; Pohl, *Awaren*, pp. 215, 271 (in 620); Kardaras, *Avars*, p. 150.

13 See above, n. 11.

14 J. Werner, *Der Grabfund von Malaja Pereščepina und Kuvrat, Kagan der Bulgaren* [Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil-hist. Klasse, N. F. 91] (Munich, 1984); Idem, "Kagan Kuvrat," pp. 66-68; Róna-Tas, "Bulgharia," pp. 3-6; I. Gavrituhin, "La date du "trésor" de Pereščepina et la chronologie des antiquités de l'époque de formation du khaganat khazar" in C. Zuckerman, (ed.), *La Crimée entre Byzance et le Khaganat Khazar* (Paris, 2006), pp. 13-16. Against the identification: Cs. Bálint, "Zur Identifizierung des Grabes von Kuvrat," *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 36 (1984), pp. 263-268; A. Aibabin, "Early Khazar archaeological monuments in Crimea and to the north of the Black Sea" in Zuckerman, (ed.), *Crimée*, pp. 47-60 (Khazar treasure).

15 G. Moravcsik, "Zur Geschichte der Onoguren," *Ungarische Jahrbücher* 10/1-2 (1930), p. 74; Pletnewa, *Chasaren*, p. 28; Czeglédy, "Migrations," p. 39; Ovčarov, "Protobulgaren," p. 175; Gjuzelev, "Asparuch," p. 10; Pohl, *Awaren*, p. 273.

16 See Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 39-40.

17 *The History of Menander the Guardsman*, ed. and Engl. transl. R. C. Blockley (Liverpool, 1985), fr. 10. 4, p. 124 (henceforth: Menander, *History*): *Then they came to the Ugurs, who told them that in a wooden area by the river Kophen ... The leader of the Ugurs, who maintained Sizabul's authority there...*; Czeglédy, "Migrations," pp. 106-109.

Bosporus (nowadays Kerch) in Crimea.<sup>18</sup> Taking into account Menander's evidence, it seems plausible that after the flight of the Avars in 562, the western Turks gradually imposed their supremacy north of the Caucasus and very likely, between 567 and 576 subordinated the Oghurs, the Onoghurs and the Alans, who remained under Turkish domination until the revolt of Kubrat.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the military operation of the Avars against the Antes in 602<sup>20</sup> was related to the Byzantine-Avar conflicts on the Lower Danube and had no impact on the Bulgar tribes or the western Turks. Consequently, Kubrat's revolt lay outside of the framework of Byzantine-Avar relations, as Kubrat had liberated his people from the supremacy of the western Turks.

Another parameter to the Byzantine-Avar relations after 626 is the settlement of the Croats and the Serbs in the Balkans during the reign of Heraclius, in c. 628-634. Their migration also is related to the weakening of the Avar Khaganate after 626. It is quite probable that the two tribes had been freed from Avar domination before they moved southwards, while it is rather unlikely that Byzantium had incited a revolt against the Avars in their earlier homeland, north of the Carpathian Basin.<sup>21</sup> As to the migration of the Croats and Serbs to the Balkans, Constantine VII refers to the active role of Emperor Heraclius, while mentioning that the Croats were victorious in a war against the Avars. A significant number of researchers considers the

18 Menander, *History*, fr. 19. 1-2, p. 178; Pletnewa, *Chasaren*, p. 27; Pohl, *Awaren*, pp. 67, 273; Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 152-153.

19 Menander, *History*, fr. 19. 1, 174-176: *Consider, wretches, the Alan nation and also the tribe of the Unigurs. Full of confidence and trusting in their own strength they faced the invincible might of the Turks. But their hopes were dashed, and so they are our subjects and are numbered amongst our slaves*; Ovčarov, "Protobulgaren," p. 175; Gjuzelev, "Asparuch," p. 9; Pohl, *Awaren*, p. 66. On the march of the Turks see also, J. Harmatta, "The Struggle for the "Silk Route" between Iran, Byzantium and the Türk Empire from 560 to 630 A. D." in Cs. Bálint (ed.), *Kontakte zwischen Iran, Byzanz und der Steppe im 6.-7. Jahrhundert* [Varia Archaeologica Hungarica 9] (Budapest – Napoli – Rome, 2000), pp. 249-252.

20 See G. Kardaras, "The Byzantine-Avar treaty (545/56 A. D.) and the defence of Scythia Minor," *Byzantinoslavica* 68/1-2 (2010), pp. 83-84.

21 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio* ed. and engl. transl. G. Moravcsik and R. J. H. Jenkins [Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, Dumbarton Oaks Texts 1] (Washington, 1967), 31, pp. 146/47-148/49 (henceforth: DAI): *These same Croats arrived to claim the protection of the emperor of the Romans Heraclius before the Serbs claimed the protection of the same emperor Heraclius ...* Ibidem, 32, p. 152/53; Waldmüller, *Begegnungen*, pp. 306-307; Ditten, "Einwanderung," pp. 131-132; Fine, *Balkans*, pp. 49-56; R.-J. Lilie, "Kaiser Herakleios und die Ansiedlung der Serben. Überlegungen zum Kapitel 32 des De Administrando Imperio," *Südostforschungen* 44 (1985), pp. 23, 29-30; R. Katičić, "Die Anfänge des kroatischen Staates" in H. Wolfram and A. Schwarcz (eds.), *Die Bayern und ihre Nachbarn. Berichte des Symposiums der Kommission für Frühmittelalterforschung 25. bis 28. Oktober 1982, Stift Zwettl, Niederösterreich*, vol. 1 [Denkschriften der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Klasse 179] (Wien, 1985), p. 310, n. 49; Pohl, *Awaren*, pp. 261-263; Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 141-142.



information given by the Byzantine Emperor as a reflection of the true historical context of their settlement in the Balkans, which took place with the consent or permission of Heraclius and under the authority of Constantinople.<sup>22</sup>

In his narration on the Croatian settlement, Constantine VII presents two different versions, the origin of which has been attributed to two independent sources. Most probably, the information given in chapter 30 is based on the Croatian oral tradition, while that of chapter 31 reflects the “official” Byzantine version. According to ch. 30, when the Croats reached Dalmatia, they defeated the Avars and settled in the area without any involvement of the Byzantine Empire. In contrast, ch. 31 mentions that the Croats first came into contact with Heraclius, who ordered them to fight the Avars, and then to settle in the land they occupied.<sup>23</sup> To the description of the Croatian migration from *White Croatia* and the settlement in the Balkans, we have in addition, a mythological background connected to the popular oral tradition. This description, a Croatian *origo gentis* of sorts, attributes the Croatian settlement and ethnogenesis to the victory over the Avars, and the occupation of former Roman territory south of the Danube during the reign of Heraclius.<sup>24</sup>

The involvement of Constantinople in the settlement of the two peoples in the Balkans has been seriously disputed, mainly because of the ideological background and the political purpose of the information recorded by the Byzantine Emperor. It seems plausible that Constantine VII created a myth in order to consolidate Constantinople’s domination rights over the Croats and the Serbs, through the request for land, the permission to settle, the alliance against the Avars and the conversion

22 R.J.H. Jenkins, *De Administrando Imperio II. Commentary* (London, 1962), p. 124; Katičić, “Anfänge,” pp. 310-311; N. Budak, Die südslawischen Ethnogenesen an der östlichen Adriaküste im frühen Mittelalter in H. Wolfram and W. Pohl (eds.), *Typen der Ethnogenese unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Bayern. Berichte des Symposiums der Kommission für Frühmittelalterforschung, 27. bis 30. Oktober 1986, Stift Zwettl, Niederösterreich*, vol. 1 [Denkschriften der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Klasse 201] (Wien, 1990), p. 130.

23 DAI, 30, p. 142/43: *After they have fought one another for some years, the Croats prevailed and killed some of the Avars and the remainder they compelled to be subject to them. And so from that time this land was possessed by the Croats, and there are still in Croatia some who are of Avar descent and are recognized as Avars; Ibidem, 31, p. 148/49: And so, by command of the emperor Heraclius these same Croats defeated and expelled the Avars from those parts, and by mandate of Heraclius the emperor they settled down in that same country of the Avars, where they now dwell; Jenkins, Commentary, pp. 114-115; Katičić, “Anfänge,” p. 309; Idem, “The Origins of the Croats” in I. Supićić (ed.), *Croatia in the Early Middle Ages. A Cultural Survey* (Zagreb, 1999), pp. 150-151; Fine, *Balkans*, p. 54; Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 145-146.*

24 Katičić, “Anfänge,” p. 308; Idem, “Croats,” p. 151; Fine, *Balkans*, pp. 53-54, 58; W. Pohl, “Grundlagen der kroatischen Ethnogenese: Awaren und Slawen” in N. Budak (ed.), *Ethnogeneza Hrvata, Symposium Zagreb 1989* (Zagreb, 1995), pp. 211-212, 218-220; Idem, “Das Awarenreich und die “kroatischen” Ethnogenesen” in H. Wolfram and A. Schwarcz (eds.), *Die Bayern und ihre Nachbarn* 1, pp. 293-296; Kardaras, *Avars*, p. 146.

to Christianity.<sup>25</sup> Taking also into account the geopolitical data during the reign of Heraclius, it has been argued additionally that there is no indication of an organized Balkan policy, neither before nor after the Persian wars,<sup>26</sup> or even, that the Byzantine Empire could not prevent the settlement of the Croats and Serbs, and was thus obliged to maintain good relations with them.<sup>27</sup>

The political and ideological dimension of the information given by Constantine VII renders ch. 31 doubtful as to its credibility when it mentions that Heraclius supported the Croats during their clash with the Avars. Although the clash between the Croats and the Avars, mentioned both in ch. 30 and 31, may be considered real, the version of ch. 30, where there is no mention of the empire's involvement, appears to be the more reliable. Therefore, there was no "permission" or "consent" of Heraclius for the settlement of the Croats, the Serbs and other tribes in the western Balkans, as Byzantium was in no position to prevent this at that specific moment, whether by diplomacy or war. Considering the Serbs, regardless of what is noted about the intervention of Heraclius, their peaceful settlement appears to be quite probable as they settled far from the Avar Khaganate, in contrast to the Croats, who occupied lands on the south-western borders of the Avars. On the other hand, there could only be a political dimension to the Byzantine emperor's effort to approach the two peoples only when their settlement had become an accomplished fact, which Heraclius had to "arrange" in the best interest of Constantinople. Despite the defeat of 626 and the serious crisis that followed within the Avar Khaganate, the threat of a possible future return of the Avars to the Balkans never ceased to exist. The approach and integration of the Croats and Serbs in the Byzantine sphere of influence would allow Constantinople to gain a buffer against possible Avar attacks in the western Balkans, and thus protect its dominions in Dalmatia.<sup>28</sup>

If for the Early Avar Period I (568-526) the archaeological finds are complementary to the written sources,<sup>29</sup> for all the other periods they are our principal base in reconstructing Byzantine-Avar relations. Byzantine objects continued to enter the Carpathian Basin after 626 and, next to them, we observe the imitation of Byzantine patterns by the Avars. Regarding the Early Avar Period II (626-665), many Byzantine objects occur in the Avar cemeteries and the most

25 Pohl, *Awaren*, p. 266.

26 Lilie, "Herakleios," p. 43.

27 Fine, *Balkans*, pp. 54-55; J. F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century. The Transformation of a Culture* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 47.

28 A. Stratos, "The Avars' Attack on Byzantium in the Year 626" in P. Wirth (ed.), *Polychordia. Festschrift Franz Dölger zum 75. Geburtstag* [Byzantinische Forschungen 2] (Amsterdam, 1967), p. 376; V. Tapkova-Zaimova, "Ethnische Schichten auf dem Balkan und die byzantinische Macht im 7. Jahrhundert" in H. Köpstein and F. Winkelmann (eds.), *Studien zum 7. Jahrhundert in Byzanz. Probleme der Herausbildung des Feudalismus* [Berliner Byzantinistische Arbeiten 47] (Berlin, 1976), p. 67; Kardaras, *Avars*, p. 148.

29 On these objects, attributed to trade relations, delegations, booty etc., see Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 127-136, with further literature.

important among them are the luxury belt-sets. In the grave of a horseman at Gyenesdiás, close to Keszthely, was found golden jewellery, a Byzantine buckle of Sucidava type, a belt with gilded sheet and a coin of Constans II, dated to between 654-659.<sup>30</sup> In the equestrian grave at Kunágota (eastern Hungary), next to the fragments of a Byzantine necklace, a gold belt fitting was found, suggesting links with Byzantine art, ornamented as it is with Christian symbols and the «dot-comma» motif.<sup>31</sup> Also interpreted as Byzantine in origin are fragments of a silver plate from the cemetery at Tépe (second half of seventh century), recognized as war booty.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the «Khagan's grave» at Kunbábony (eastern Hungary), dated to the second quarter of the seventh century, held a great Byzantine amphora, a gold Byzantine buckle of Keszthely-Pécs type, two gold earrings and a gold ring set with a semiprecious stone.<sup>33</sup> In some graves (Bocsa, Igar, Ozora Totipuszta), there were belt-sets with an ornamentation, mainly plant motifs, similar in appearance to Byzantine decorative patterns as well as with finds from the region north of the Caucasus and on the Dnieper.<sup>34</sup> Some female graves contained items probably of Byzantine origin, e.g., gold earrings, decorated with semi-precious stones, and necklaces either from glass beads or from gold, silver or bronze wire with a dot ornament.<sup>35</sup>

The Middle Avar Period (665-710), is characterised by changes in the population and the material culture, possibly linked to the settlement in Pannonia, around 670, of Onoghur Bulgars from the South Russian steppes.<sup>36</sup> In 660s, it seems that the

30 É. Garam, *Funde byzantinischer Herkunft in der Awarenzeit vom Ende des 6. bis zum Ende des 7. Jahrhunderts* [Monumenta Avarorum Archaeologica 5] (Budapest, 2001), pp. 30, 81, 94; F. Daim, "Avars and Avar Archaeology. An Introduction" in H. W. Goetz, J. Jarnut and W. Pohl (eds.), *Regna et Gentes. The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World* (Leiden – Boston, 2003), pp. 491-492, 551 (t. 25).

31 G. László, "Die byzantinischen Goldbleche des Fundes von Kunágota," *Archaeologiai Ertésítő* 51 (1938), pp. 131-148; Garam, *Awarenzeit*, pp. 43, 121-123; Daim, "Avar Archaeology," p. 533 (t. 7).

32 Garam, *Awarenzeit*, p. 173; Daim, "Avar Archaeology," p. 482.

33 V. Varsik, "Byzantinische Gürtelschnallen im mittleren und unteren Donauraum im 6.-7. Jahrhundert," *Slovenská Archeológia* 40/1 (1992), p. 86; Garam, *Awarenzeit*, pp. 84-89, 167-168; Daim, "Avar Archaeology," pp. 482, 545-548 (t. 19-22).

34 Gavrituhin, "Pereščepina," pp. 15-17.

35 É. Garam, "Der awarische Fundstoff im Karpatenbecken und seine zeitliche Gliederung" in Hänsel (ed.), *Symposion Tutzing*, p. 196; Cs. Bálint, *Die Archäologie der Steppe. Steppenvölker zwischen Wolga und Donau vom 6. bis zum 9. Jahrhundert* (Wien-Köln, 1989), pp. 159-160.

36 A migration at this period is referred for the five sons of Kubrat. See Theophanes, *Chronography*, p. 357 (Mango – Scott, *Theophanes*, p. 498): ... *The fourth and fifth went over the river Istros, that is the Danube: the former became subject of the Chagan of the Avars in Avar Pannonia and remained there with his army, whereas the latter reached the Pentapolis, which is near Ravenna, and accepted allegiance to the Christian Empire;*

consequences of the crisis were overcome and the Avars resumed their military operations, like the attack on Friuli in 663.<sup>37</sup> A good example of imported Byzantine items or pieces produced in local workshops, decorated with Byzantine motifs, are the finds from the male and the female grave at Ozora-Totipuszta (c. 680). The male grave contained a gold belt fitting with dot-komma ornament and the female burial a great number of Byzantine forms, made of gold, jewellery, as e.g., a ring decorated with granulation, earrings with a pendant of semi-precious stones, a cross etc.<sup>38</sup> Important Byzantine objects of the Middle Avar Period were discovered in Slovakia, e.g., at Zemiansky-Vrbovok (a hoard of 18 silver byzantine coins, silver vessels and jewellery), Halič (a gold necklace and two pairs of gold earrings) and Želovce (a gold earring, silver vessels and a buckle of Keszthely-Pécs type).<sup>39</sup>

As regards the archeological material from the Late Avar Period (710-810), some scholars have emphasized the influence of Byzantine patterns on Avar art, tracing them to Greek and Hellenistic motifs (i. e. tendrils, the lion attacking a deer motif, Centaurs, Nereids and, most of all, the motif of the griffin).<sup>40</sup> Byzantine influence during the Late Avar Period is documented by finds from Komárno (imitation of Byzantine motifs, e.g., the symbol X, birds and rosettes on the belt-sets, buckles of Keszthely-Pécs type etc.),<sup>41</sup> and from some sites in Moravia (the so-called *Hercules*

Nikephoros, *Short History*, 35, p. 88/9; Beševliev, *Protobulgarische Periode*, pp. 150-154, 161; Bálint, *Steppe*, p. 169; Pohl, *Awaren*, pp. 270-271.

- 37 Pauli, *Historia Langobardorum*, V, 20, p. 152: *Ibi itaque Lupo duce perempto, reliqui qui remanserat sese per castella communiunt. Avars vero per omnes eorum fines discurrentes, cuncta rapinis invadunt vel subposito igni conburunt*; Avenarius, "Konsolidierung," p. 1022; Pohl, *Awaren*, p. 276; H. Krahwinkler, *Friaul im Frühmittelalter. Geschichte einer Region vom Ende des fünften bis zum Ende des zehnten Jahrhunderts* (Wien – Köln – Weimar, 1992), pp. 47-49; N. Christie, *The Lombards* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 97-98.
- 38 É. Garam, "Die münzdatierten Gräber der Avarzeit" in F. Daim (ed.), *Avarforschung*, vol. 1-2, [Archaeologia Austriaca Monographien 1-2, Studien zur Archäologie der Awaren 4] (Wien, 1992), vol. 1, pp. 145-146; Eadem, *Avarzeit*, pp. 30-86; Bálint, *Steppe*, p. 161; Daim, "Avar Archaeology," pp. 483, 554 (t. 28).
- 39 Varsik, "Gürtelschnallen," p. 87; Garam, *Avarzeit*, pp. 20-22, 47-48, 68, 101; J. Zábajník, "K problematike predmetov "byzantského pôvodu" z nálezísk obdobia avarského kaganátu na Slovensku" in J. Bartík (ed.), *Byzantská Kultúra a Slovensko, Zborník Štúdií* [Zborník Slovenského Národného múzea, Archeológia Supplementum 2] (Bratislava, 2007), pp. 16-21 (t. 4-6, 8); See also, Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 157-162.
- 40 J. Dekan, "Herkunft und Ethnizität der gegossenen Bronzeindustrie des VIII. Jahrhunderts," *Slovenská Archeológia* 20/2 (1972), pp. 329-402; B. M. Szöke, "Über die späthellenistischen Wirkungen in der spätawarischen Kunst des Karpatenbeckens. Eine kritische Untersuchung," *Dissertationes Archaeologicae*, Ser. 2/3 (1974), pp. 60-139; F. Daim, "Byzantine belts and Avar birds. Diplomacy, trade and cultural transfer in the eighth century" in W. Pohl, I. Wood and H. Reimitz (eds.), *The Transformation of Frontiers. From Late Antiquity to the Carolingians* (Leiden – Boston – Köln, 2001), pp. 143-188; Idem, *Avar Archaeology*, pp. 501-508.
- 41 A. Trugly, "Gräberfeld aus der Zeit des awarischen Reiches bei der Schiffswerft in Komárno," *Slovenská Archeológia* 35/2 (1987), pp. 251-344 and 41/2 (1993), pp. 191-

circle used in ornamenting the belt-sets, related to the Hellenistic tradition).<sup>42</sup> Other possibly Byzantine forms include belt-sets dated to the eighth century discovered on Slavic territory on the periphery of the Avar Khaganate (Hohenberg, Kanzianiberg, Micheldorf-Kremsdorf, Mikulčice, Biskupija etc.).<sup>43</sup> Some Byzantine inspirations were observed, next to other elements, in the hoard from Nagyszentmiklós, namely, some vessels decorated with Greek mythological motifs.<sup>44</sup>

Next to finds mentioned above, from the area of the Avar Khaganate we have a great number of Byzantine coin finds, dated to after 626. A treasure of Byzantine coins was discovered at Zemiansky Vrbovok (17 coins of Emperor Constans II and one of Constantine IV). Considering the Byzantine numismatic finds from the interruption of the annual tribute paid to the Avars in 626 until the subjugation of the Avar Khaganate by the Franks in 796, there is no break in the flow of coins until around 775/80. The finds after the reign of Heraclius, and from between 641-780 have the following distribution: Constans II 50 (17 gold/18 silver/15 copper), Constantine IV 7 (6 gold/1 silver), Justinian II 2 (gold), Tiberius II 1 (gold), Philippicus Bardanes 1 (gold), Anastasius II 2 (gold), Theodosius III 2 (gold), Leo III 3 (2 gold/1 copper), Constantine V 16 (10 gold/6 copper) and Leo IV 1 (copper).<sup>45</sup>

Among the numerous archaeological remnants of the Avar Khaganate there are many objects with Christian symbols. Although there are no written references to the missionary activity to the Avars until the Frankish wars led by Charlemagne, the presence of these symbols gave rise to various assumptions, e.g., on missionary activity within the Avar Khaganate and conversion of a part of the Avars to Christi-

307; Daim, "Avar Archaeology," pp. 511, 520, 563 (t. 37); Varsik, "Gürtelschnallen," pp. 86-87; Garam, *Awarenzeit*, pp. 102-104; Zábajník, "K problematice," p. 21 (t. 8).

42 I. Erdélyi, "Über die gegossenen Gürtelgarnituren der Spätawarenzeit östlich von Karpaten," *Settimane di studio del Centro Italiano di studi sull' Alto Medioevo* 35/1 (1988), pp. 359-360.

43 Daim, "Byzantine belts," pp. 155-158, 165; Idem, "Avar Archaeology," pp. 508-510.

44 G. László - I. Racz, *Der Goldschatz von Nagyszentmiklós* (Budapest, 1983); Bálint, *Steppe*, pp. 187-192; Idem, "A short essay on the Nagyszentmiklós treasure" in T. Kovács and É. Garam (eds.), *The Gold of the Avars. the Nagyszentmiklós treasure* (Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, Budapest 24 March-30 Juny 2002) (Budapest, 2002), pp. 57-80; Daim, "Avar Archaeology," pp. 515-516, 568-569 (t. 42-43); See also, Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 162-168.

45 P. Somogyi, *Byzantinische Fundmünzen der Awarenzeit* [Monographien zur Frühgeschichte und Mittelalterarchäologie 5/Studien zur Archäologie der Awaren 8] (Innsbruck, 1997); M. Kozub, "The Chronology of the Inflow of Byzantine Coins into the Avar Khaganate" in P. Urbańczyk (ed.), *Origins of Central Europe* (Warsaw, 1997), pp. 241-246; H. Winter, Die byzantinischen Fundmünzen aus dem österreichischen Bereich der Avaria in F. Daim (ed.), *Die Awaren am Rand der byzantinischen Welt. Studien zur Diplomatie, Handel und Technologietransfer im Frühmittelalter* [Monographien zur Frühgeschichte und Mittelalterarchäologie 7] (Innsbruck, 2000), pp. 45-66. See also the volume, M. Wołoszyn (ed.), *Byzantine Coins in Central Europe between the 5th and 10th century* (Kraków, 2009).

anity.<sup>46</sup> In addition, some of the Christian symbols are linked either to the presence in the Carpathian Basin of Germanic peoples, e.g., Lombards and Gepids<sup>47</sup> or the survival of local, subjugated Christian communities, mainly around Keszthely and Pécs.<sup>48</sup> The Christian symbols in the Avar Khaganate appear on a wide spectrum of objects. The most characteristic examples are pectoral pendant crosses, either repousse or cast, possibly, of Byzantine origin.<sup>49</sup> Some half-moon shaped earrings, dated to the sixth-seventh century, with depictions of crosses, monograms, pigeons or peacocks (symbols of immortality), etc., considered either as imports from Byzantium or local imitations made according to Byzantine models.<sup>50</sup> The small silver pendant (*capsulae*) from Balatonfüzfő with the inscription ΠΕΤΡΟΣ, is considered a Byzantine object. On the other hand, the lead pendants of the Avar period, which occur in poorly furnished female graves, are likely to be an imitation of small Byzantine golden pieces ornamented with crosses.<sup>51</sup> Also regarded as an expression of Christian faith is a peculiar find of Byzantine provenance, the disc fibulae of the Keszthely-Pécs group with depictions of Christ, angels, crosses etc.<sup>52</sup> The rich Christian finds from Keszthely, along with the presence there of a flourishing Christian community during the Early Avar Period have been interpreted in terms of survival of an ecclesiastical center linked with Rome.<sup>53</sup> There are also rings and belts ornamented with Christian symbols (crosses, birds, cypresses, fishes, etc.) or mono-

46 G. László, "Die Awaren und das Christentum im Donaunraum und im östlichen Mitteleuropa" in F. Zagiba (ed.), *Das heidnische und christliche Slaventum. Acta II Congressus internationalis historiae Slavicæ Salisburgo-Ratisbonensis anno 1967 celebrati* [Annales Instituti Slavici 5] (Wiesbaden, 1969), pp. 146-147; A. Kollautz, *Denkmäler Byzantinischen Christentums aus der Awarenzeit der Donauländer* (Amsterdam, 1970), pp. 24-27; T. Vida, Neue Beiträge zur Forschung der frühchristlichen Funde der Awarenzeit in N. Cambi and E. Marin (eds.), *Acta XIII Congressus Internationalis Archaeologiae Christianae, Split – Poreč, 1994* [Vjesnik za Arheologiju i Historiju Dalmatinsku, Suppl. Vol. 87-89] (Split, 1998), p. 536.

47 László, "Christentum," pp. 143-144.

48 László, "Christentum," p. 144; Kollautz, *Denkmäler*, p. 19; E. Tóth, "Bemerkungen zur Kontinuität der römischen Provinzialbevölkerung in Transdanubien (Nordpannonien)" in Hänsel (ed.), *Symposion Tutzing*, pp. 253-261; Garam, *Awarenzeit*, p. 65. See also, P. F. Barton, *Die Frühzeit des Christentums in Österreich und Südostmitteleuropa bis 788* [Studien und Texte zur Kirchengeschichte und Geschichte, vol. 1] (Wien – Köln – Graz, 1975).

49 László, "Christentum," pp. 150-151; Kollautz, *Denkmäler*, pp. 22-24; Garam, *Awarenzeit*, pp. 57-65; I. Bugarski, "The meaning of the crosses in early Avar female graves: Three case studies from Vojvodina," *Acta Archaeologica Carpathica* 44 (2009), pp. 221-225, 229.

50 Garam, *Awarenzeit*, pp. 18-20.

51 László, "Christentum," p. 150; Kollautz, *Denkmäler*, p. 30; Garam, *Awarenzeit*, pp. 34-37.

52 László, "Christentum," pp. 148-150; Kollautz, *Denkmäler*, pp. 19-20, 24-27; Garam, *Awarenzeit*, pp. 51-57; "Daim, Avar Archaeology," p. 476.

53 Daim, "Avar Archaeology," pp. 476, 519.

grams<sup>54</sup> and buckles of *Sucidava* type with cross-shaped ornament.<sup>55</sup> Finally, we can distinguish Christian symbols (crosses or cross-shaped ornaments) on weights and assorted finds dating to the seventh century.<sup>56</sup>

The presence of the aforementioned symbols may be linked to the survival of Christian traditions within the Avar Khaganate, in the area of Pannonia Christianized before the Avar settlement.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, we need to take into account that, apart from the gifts of Byzantine envoys and trade, the Avars came in contact with Christian symbols during their short stay north of the Black Sea and later brought these motifs to the Carpathian Basin. From the same area some other nomadic tribes moved with the Avars, e.g., the Kutrighurs and the Onoghurs/Utighurs, who had already accepted the influence of Byzantine culture.<sup>58</sup>

Independently of various assumptions regarding the presence of Christian symbols in the Avar Khaganate, the main problem consists in the attribution of these symbols to the Avars as an indication of the adoption of Christianity by them. As regards Byzantine-Avar relations, there is no evidence on missionary activity directed towards the Avars. The gradual conversion of the Avars started after their subjugation by Charlemagne in 796, who had the support of the Catholic clergy during his military operations.<sup>59</sup> The Christianization of the last Avars was completed some years later, when the Franks resettled them from their territory between the Danube and the Tisza to northwestern Pannonia (*inter Sabariam et Carnuntum*) in 805. On this occasion, some of the western authors mention Avar rulers with Christian names, such as *Theodoros* and *Abraam*.<sup>60</sup> Basing on this evidence and despite the aforementioned finds, we could assume, as a general conclusion, that the Avars had not been converted to Christianity before the Frankish wars and had kept their own religion, e.g. shamanism. The presence of Christian symbols and motifs on finds from the Avar Khaganate do not necessarily mean that a part of the Avars had adopted Christianity. The Christian tradition and the relative symbols in the Avar Khaganate presumably are linked to the survival of small non-Avar Christian communities (mostly at Keszthely and the area of Pécs), while for the Avars they were only decorative motifs without religious content.<sup>61</sup> These symbols, as we will

54 László, "Christentum," p. 148; Kollautz, *Denkmäler*, pp. 32-37; Bálint, *Steppe*, p. 156; Vida, "Beiträge," pp. 534-535; Garam, *Awarenzeit*, pp. 74-81, 130-132, 139-150; Daim, "Avar Archaeology," p. 471.

55 Garam, *Awarenzeit*, pp. 95-97.

56 Garam, *Awarenzeit*, pp. 160-162, 173-176.

57 See above, n. 48.

58 László, "Christentum," p. 143; Kardaras, *Avars*, p. 173.

59 See Pohl, *Awaren*, pp. 204-205, 320; Szöke, "Continuity," pp. 145-149; H. Reimitz, "Conversion and Control: The Establishment of Liturgical Frontiers in Carolingian Pannonia" in Pohl, Wood and Reimitz (eds.), *The Transformation of Frontiers*, pp. 190, 199-203.

60 Pohl, *Awaren*, pp. 205, 302, 322; Szöke, "Continuity," p. 148.

61 Pohl, *Awaren*, pp. 200-204; Daim, "Avar Archaeology," pp. 520-521; Bugarski, "Crosses," pp. 225-229. See also, Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 171-175.

see, could partially be due to the transfer of Byzantine population north of the Danube.

Considering the above data we could attempt a historical interpretation, namely to identify the provenance of the finds and the possible channels of communication between Byzantium and the Avars. As was noticed, for the Early Avar Period II the only evidence we have for contacts of Byzantium with the Avars is the mission of two byzantine delegations in 634/35.<sup>62</sup> Consequently, the presence of elements of Byzantine culture within the Avar Khaganate during this period may not be attributed to long lasting political or trade relations. Very likely, the most important factor was the presence of Byzantine population in Pannonia, transferred there by the Avars. The first concrete mention of it comes from the time of the second occupation of Singidunum (Belgrade) in 595, when «*Priscus heard that the barbarian was razing the walls of Singidunum, and was forcing the population to abandon their home and to make settlements in enemy land*».<sup>63</sup> Also, John of Nikiu mentions that the Avars led the population into captivity during their raids on the Balkan provinces in 609/10.<sup>64</sup> A large number of people were said to have been transferred to Pannonia after the ambush against Emperor Heraclius in 623.<sup>65</sup>

On the survival of the aforesaid Byzantine population in Pannonia, we derive information from an hagiological source, the *Miracles of S. Demetrius*, in the so-called *episode of Kuver*, who is considered the fourth son of Kubrat.<sup>66</sup> As leader of the Pannonian Bulgars, and after a rather short time spent in Pannonia, Kuver clashed with the Avars and, presumably, between 678 and 685, moved south at the head of a mixed population, “Romans”, Bulgars, Avars etc. This population (the “Romans” were descendants of captives transferred from the Avars in Pannonia) maintained its “Roman” sense of identity, remained faithful to Christianity and desired to return to the land of their ancestors.<sup>67</sup> Kuver’s people settled under the

62 See above, n. 5.

63 *Theophylacti Simocattae Historiae*, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1887), VII, 10.1, p. 262; (*The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, engl. transl. Michael and Mary Whitby, Oxford 1986, p. 193); Waldmüller, *Begegnungen*, p. 153.

64 John of Nikiu, *Chronicle*, 109.18. pp. 175-176: *And in regard to Rome it is recounted that the kings of (this) epoch had by means of the barbarians and the nations and the Illyrians devastated Christian cities and carried off their inhabitants captive, ... But all the province was devastated and depopulated*; Lilie, “Herakleios,” p. 19; Pohl, *Awaren*, pp. 237; Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 104, 176.

65 Nikephoros, *Short History*, 10, p. 52/3: *After taking a great many captives, they carried them off to their own country: the total number amounted to 270.000 men and women, as was mutually confirmed by some of the prisoners who escaped*; *Georgii Monachi Chronicon*, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1904), p. 669 (70.000 captives); See also, A. Stratos, “Le guet-apens des Avars,” *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 30 (1981), p. 130; Waldmüller, *Begegnungen*, pp. 249, 263; Pohl, *Awaren*, 192, 246; Kardaras, *Avars*, p. 176.

66 See above, n. 36.

67 *Les plus anciens recueils des Miracles de Saint Démétrius et la pénétration des Slaves dans les Balkans*, ed. and French transl. P. Lemerle, vol. I (Le Texte) (Paris, 1979), 285,



Avars in the wider area around Sirmium (the author of the *Miracles* calls them *Sermesianoï*). The evidence on their stay in Lower Pannonia for about six decades could be considered as a proof of the spread of Byzantine cultural elements in the Avar Khaganate, mainly during the Early Avar Period II.<sup>68</sup>

For the short time of the Middle Avar Period, the provenance of Byzantine motifs in the Avar Khaganate may be attributed mainly to the migration from the South Russian steppes to Pannonia of Kuver's Onoghur Bulgars and, on the other hand, to the Avar delegation to Constantinople in 678. Some Byzantine elements, first seen in the area North of the Caucasus and the Dnieper during the reign of Heraclius (belt ornaments with impressed vegetal motifs, necklaces made in precious metal, crosses set with gemstones, etc.) seen later in the burials of the Middle Avar Period (Bocsa, Igar, Ozora-Totipuszta, Dunapentele, Dunapatai, Cibakháza, Kiskőrös) could be related to the Onoghur migration.<sup>69</sup> Part of the Christian symbols in the Avar Khaganate could also be attributed to Kuver's Bulgars, as Onoghur rulers had already been baptized in Constantinople.<sup>70</sup> Almost simultaneously with this migration, the expansion of the Avar cultural elements took place in Central Europe, as Avar populations were moved North and West, to the area of present-day Slovakia and Austria.<sup>71</sup>

The Avar delegation to Constantine IV in 678 is the last evidence on the diplomatic relations between Byzantium and the Avars. In this period, the Avar Khaganate had already recovered from the disaster of 626 and subsequent inner conflict. As F. Daim notes:

p. 228/22 (henceforth: Lemerle, *Miracles* I): *Dés lors ils se mêlèrent aux Bulgares, aux Avars et autres peuplades, ils eurent des enfants entre eux, et devinrent un peuple innombrable ... et chacun parlant à l'autre du pays ancestral, ils allumaient mutuellement dans leur coeur l'ardent désir du retour*; Ibidem, pp. 227-228; Beševliev, *Protobulgarische Periode*, pp. 162-170; Pohl, *Awaren*, pp. 193, 217; Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 177-178.

68 See Ditten, "Einwanderung," p. 130; Curta, *Southeastern Europe*, p. 106; Kardaras, *Avars*, p. 177-179.

69 E. Goldina, "Gürtelteile mit Pflanzenornamenten aus dem Kamagebiet" in *Awarenforschungen* 1, pp. 497-501; Garam, *Awarenzeit*, 28-53, 116-151; Gavrituhin, "Pereščepina," pp. 15-17; On the view against the connection of the Middle Avar material culture with the migration of Kuver, see Daim, "Avar Archaeology," p. 497; Cs. Bálint, "Der Beginn der Mittelawarenzeit und die Einwanderung Kubers," *Antaeus* 29-30 (2008), pp. 29-61.

70 See above, n. 12.

71 F. Daim, "Awarische Altfunde aus Wien und Niederösterreich," *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft* 109 (1979), pp. 55-101; Bálint, *Steppe*, pp. 161, 167; J. Zábajník, "On the Problems of Settlements of the Avar Khaganate Period in Slovakia," *Archeologické Rozhledy* 40 (1988), pp. 401-437; Idem, "Das Gebiet Mitteleuropas nordlich der Donau im 6.-8. Jahrhundert," *Acta Archaeologica Carpathica* 45 (2010), pp. 179-201.

the archaeological sources demonstrate that this diplomatic activity occur in a period during which Byzantine coins and luxury goods entered Avar territory, and the Avar elite almost exclusively followed Byzantine fashions (e. g. Ozora-Totipusza), while at the same time merchants and/or craftsmen must have also been crossing the western border of the Avar Empire. ... The process during which the Avar Empire had gradually re-gained its strength had now been more or less completed, and immediately before the foundation of the Bulgarian Empire in 680, Byzantium was looking for allies on its northern border.<sup>72</sup>

The investigation of the Byzantine influences on the culture of the Late Avar Period appears more complicated in comparison to the earlier periods. For the eighth century there is no written evidence on diplomatic relations or on trade activity between the Byzantine territory and the Avar Khaganate.<sup>73</sup> Although the archaeological finds of the Late Avar Period testify to the continuity of relations with Byzantium, the possible channels of communication between Byzantium and the Avars remain unclear. As to what these channels could have been there are some suggestions, e.g., northern Italy and the Balkans, but without closer details as to the period that they may have been in use. In any case, the reconstruction of the Byzantine-Avar relations during the eighth century should focus on the possibilities of communication between the Mediterranean world and Central Europe, possibilities directly linked to the geopolitical situation in Italy, the Balkans and, presumably, other areas.

A plausible communication link could be the Byzantine Exarchate of Ravenna, mainly, Venice and Istria, which formed a “bridge” between the Adriatic and Western and Central Europe.<sup>74</sup> The Byzantine province of Histria (part of the Late Roman province of Venetia et Histria), had its center in present-day Trieste and was administrated by a *magister militum*, under the jurisdiction of Ravenna. Since late sixth century, Trieste and its surroundings also formed a special political-military unit (*numerus*) meant to protect Histria from the attacks of the Avars, Longobards and Slavs.<sup>75</sup> After the fall of the Exarchate of Ravenna to the Lombards in 751, the

72 Avenarius, “Konsolidierung,” p. 1024; Daim, “Avar Archaeology,” pp. 489, 517. See also, Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 179-180.

73 D. Claude, *Der Handel im westlichen Mittelmeer während des Frühmittelalters* (Untersuchungen zu Handel und Verkehr der vor- und frühgeschichtlichen Zeit in Mittel- und Nordeuropa. Bericht über ein Kolloquium der Kommission für die Altertumskunde Mittel- und Nordeuropas im Jahre 1980, vol. 2) [Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, phil.-hist. Klasse, dritte Folge, 144] (Göttingen, 1985), pp. 138-140, 162; Daim, “Byzantine belts,” p. 161.

74 Daim, “Byzantine belts,” p. 165; Idem, “Avar Archaeology,” p. 522.

75 J. Ferluga, “Überlegungen zur Geschichte der byzantinischen Provinz Istrien” in J. Ferluga (ed.), *Untersuchungen zur byzantinischen Provinzverwaltung, VI-XIII Jahrhundert. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Amsterdam, 1992), pp. 391-394; Krahwinkler, *Friaul*, pp. 231-236, 243; Curta, *Southeastern Europe*, p. 98.

Byzantines reoccupied Histria from 774 until 788, when the Franks imposed their rule over the area. With the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen) of 811/12 Byzantium kept the Dalmatian coast and Venice.<sup>76</sup> In 799, when the Avars revolted against the Franks, the Duke of Friuli Eric was murdered in Tarsatica (today Trsat, close to Rijeka) before his march to Pannonia.<sup>77</sup> This event is considered as incited by the Byzantines in order to support the Avars.<sup>78</sup> This assumption is rather doubtful, as the Byzantines would not risk a conflict with Charlemagne in an area under Frankish control. Moreover, Byzantium had already lost the possibility of communication with the Avar Khaganate and could not dissuade the suppression of the Avar uprising (799-803).

Although the spread of Byzantine models to the Avars by way of Byzantine Italy is a logical assumption, it has not been investigated for how long after 626 this area could have served as a bridge between Byzantium and the Avars. The most important parameters for such communications were the relations of Byzantium with the Lombards, as in northeastern Italy there existed the Lombardic Duchy of Friuli. The duchy stretched from Julian Alps in the north, Roman Upper Pannonia in the east and the Byzantine Italian possessions (Venice and Histria) in the south.<sup>79</sup> Because of its geographical location, any Byzantine delegation, whether to the Avars or to the Slavs of Carinthia and Lower Austria, had to cross the territory of Friuli. The most important artery which linked Histria, Venice and Friuli with Carinthia and the Upper Drava was *Via Julia Augusta*. On the other hand, the way from Italy to Pannonia had as its main stations Aquileia/Venice, Emona/Ljubljana, Celeia, Poetovio/Ptuj, Savaria, Scarabantia and Carnuntum. The part between Aquileia and Emona (*Via Gemina*) connected the Po Valley and the Adriatic with Sava and the Lower Drava.<sup>80</sup> A great number of Lombard finds has come to light in present-day Slovenia, most importantly in the area on the Sava as well as along the *Via Gemina*,<sup>81</sup> testifying to the Lombard control of the communication routes

76 Ferluga, "Istrien," pp. 392, 396-397; Krahwinkler, *Friaul*, pp. 179-181, 199-200; Curta, *Southeastern Europe*, pp. 99-100; Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 181-182.

77 *Annales Fuldenses*, ed. G. H. Pertz [Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores 1] (Hannover, 1826), p. 352 (799): *Ehericus dux Foroiuliensis iuxta Tarsaticam Liburniae civitatem insidiis oppidanorum occisus est*; Krahwinkler, *Friaul*, pp. 152-153.

78 Katičić, "Anfänge," pp. 303, n. 18; H. Wolfram, "Ethnogenesisen im frühmittelalterlichen Donau- und Ostalpenraum (6.-10. Jahrhundert)" in H. Beumann and W. Schröder (eds.), *Frühmittelalterliche Ethnogenese im Alpenraum* (Nationes 5) (Sigmaringen, 1985), pp. 133-134, n. 193; Pohl, *Avars*, p. 321; Kardaras, *Avars*, p. 182.

79 Krahwinkler, *Friaul*, p. 11.

80 P. Csentes, "König Flaccitheus und die Alpenpässe," *Carinthia* I 155 (1965), pp. 291-292; Claude, *Handel*, pp. 136-137; Krahwinkler, *Friaul*, pp. 15-17; V. Vavřínek, "The Adriatic Sea as the Connecting Route between Byzantium and the Regions north of the Danube," *Graeco-Arabica* 9-10 (2004), p. 393.

81 S. Ciglencéki, "Langobardische Präsenz im Südostalpenraum im Lichte neuer Forschungen" in W. Pohl and P. Erhart (eds.), *Die Langobarden. Herrschaft und Identität*, [DÖAW, phil.-hist. Klasse 329] (Wien, 2005), pp. 265-280.

between the Adriatic Sea and Pannonia. One more indication for the activity of merchants or craftsmen in this network, and, furthermore, for its importance, is that the finds of luxury belt-sets from the Avar Khaganate occur mainly along the Roman network in Pannonia.<sup>82</sup>

Examining whether these routes continued to be used by the Byzantines after 626, we cannot disregard the evolution of Byzantine-Lombard relations. After the Byzantine delegation to King Adaloald (616-626) of 623/24, there was peace until the rise to the Lombard throne of Rotharius (636-652), who occupied Byzantine Liguria in 643. New hostilities are mentioned in 663, when Emperor Constans II attacked the Duchy of Benevento and was defeated by the Lombard King Grimoald (662-671). Byzantine-Lombard relations improved during the reign of Perctarit (671-687), who concluded a treaty with Byzantium in 678, simultaneously with the Avar delegation to Constantinople. Peaceful relations were maintained during the reign of Cunipert (687-712) and until the reign of Liutprand (712-744) who pursued an offensive policy towards Byzantium and attacked on the Exarchate of Ravenna (713, 717, 727/28 and 740-743). The same policy was followed by his successors, Ratchis (744-749) and Aistulf, who subjugated the Exarchate in 751.<sup>83</sup> In addition, the possibility of communication with the Avar Khaganate through Friuli during the first half of the eighth century were made more difficult by the hostilities between the dukes of Friuli and the Slavic tribes east of the Duchy (706, 720 and 739).<sup>84</sup> The hostilities between Byzantium and the Lombards presumably did not allow Histria and Venice to serve as a long-term channel of communication with the Avar Khaganate. Thus, we may safely conclude that peaceful relations after the reign of Heraclius existed between 643 and 663 (from the Lombard attack on Liguria until the arrival of Constans II to Italy), and from 671/78 until 712. Consequently, a *terminus post quem* for the interruption of the communication with the Avars by way of the Byzantine possessions in Italy could be the rise of Liutprand to the Lombardian throne. Regarding the introduction of Byzantine motifs to Avar art, the peaceful relations with the Lombards coincide with the Early Avar Period II (626-665) and, later, with the Middle Avar Period (665-710). If we accept that Byzantine-Avar contacts by the way of the Duchy of Friuli continued until 712, we have to reject the transfer of iconoclastic motifs to the Avar Khaganate from the western Mediterranean sphere. Although in 732, Emperor Leo III gave the Patriarchate of Constantinople jurisdiction over Calabria, Sicily, Crete and the western Balkan provinces (Illyricum and Dalmatia),<sup>85</sup> it seems that because of the

82 Daim, "Byzantine belts," pp. 164-165. See also, Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 183-184.

83 Christou, *Byzanz*, pp. 190-191, 195, 204-210; Christie, *Lombards*, pp. 95-97, 100-105.

84 K. Bertels, "Carantania. Beobachtungen zur politisch-geographischen Terminologie und zur Geschichte des Landes und seiner Bevölkerung im frühen Mittelalter," *Carinthia I* 177 (1987), pp. 111-113.

85 I. Goldstein, "Byzantine Presence on the Eastern Adriatic Coast, 6th-12th Century," *Byzantinoslavica* 57/2 (1996), p. 258; Idem, "Between Byzantium, the Adriatic and Central Europe" in Supić (ed.), *Croatia*, p. 170; Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 184-186.

hostile relations with the Lombards the iconoclastic motifs did not find their way to Pannonia through the Exarchate of Ravenna.

After Kubrat's death, and during the reign of Emperor Constans II (641-668), the Khaganate of «Great Bulgaria», was subjugated by the Khazars.<sup>86</sup> The third son of Kubrat, Asparuh (635/640-c. 700), followed by a part of the people, moved towards the Balkans. In 681, he defeated the army of Emperor Constantine IV in Dobruja and formed a new hegemony between the Haemus and the Danube. With its capital at Pliska, the Proto-Bulgar Khaganate ("first Bulgarian state") included Bessarabia, parts of Walachia, Dobruja, and the former Roman province of Lower Moesia.<sup>87</sup> According to the evidence of the *Armenian Geography* (seventh century), Asparuh clashed with the Avars, possibly between 680 and 685. The Avars were driven out from the area south of the Lower Danube and the western boundaries of the Bulgars reached the Iron Gates, reducing the territories of the Avar Khaganate.<sup>88</sup> As to the Slavs of Moesia, Theophanes recorded that the Bulgars settled the Severeis on their frontiers with Byzantium, close to the mountain pass of Veregava (Rish Pass) and they moved the "Seven Slavic Tribes" to their frontiers with the Avar Khaganate.<sup>89</sup>

The establishment of the Proto-Bulgar Khaganate in the Balkans has led some scholars to the assumption that it caused the interruption of the contacts between Byzantium and the Avars, because the Bulgars cut off the communication routes with the Carpathian Basin.<sup>90</sup> Another explanation is that the Bulgarian settlement had no negative impact on the Byzantine-Avar relations.<sup>91</sup> Taking into consideration the space filled by the Proto-Bulgar settlement, and the Balkan network of the

86 Beševliev, *Protobulgarische Periode*, p. 153; Th. S. Noonan, "Byzantium and the Khazars: a special relationship?" in J. Shepard and S. Franklin (eds.), *Byzantine Diplomacy: Papers from the Twenty-fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, Cambridge, March 1990 (London, 1992), p. 124; Róna-Tas, "Bulgharia," pp. 6-7, 16-17.

87 E. Chrysos, "Zur Gründung des ersten bulgarischen Staates," *Cyrrilomethodianum* 2 (1972-1973), pp. 7-13; Fine, *Balkans*, pp. 67-69; Gjuzelev, "Asparuch," p. 12-19; Curta, *Southeastern Europe*, pp. 79-81.

88 B. Maricq, "Notes sur les Slaves dans le Péloponnèse et en Bithynie et sur l'emploi de "Slave" comme Appellatif," *Byzantion* 22 (1952), p. 343; *dans cette île a habité Asparhruk, le fils de Xubrat', qui fuit les Xazirk' (Khazars) depuis le Mont des Bulgares, refoula du côté de l'Occident la nation Avare et vint habiter ici*; Gjuzelev, "Asparuch," p. 20; Pohl, *Awaren*, p. 277.

89 Theophanes, *Chronography*, p. 359 (Mango-Scott, *Theophanes*, p. 499): *Having, furthermore, subjugated the so-called Seven Tribes of the neighbouring Sklavinian nations, they settled the Severeis from the forward mountain pass of Beregaba in the direction of the east, and the remaining six tribes, which were tributary to them, in the southern and western regions as far as the land of the Avars*; Nikephoros, *Short History*, 36, p. 90/1; Tapkova-Zaimova, "Ethnische Schichten," p. 67; Gjuzelev, "Asparuch," p. 18; Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 186-187.

90 Pohl, *Awaren*, p. 181; Vavřinek, "Connecting Route," pp. 400-401.

91 G. Féher, "Les relations avaro-byzantines et la fondation de l'état bulgare," *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 5 (1955), pp. 58-59; Bálint, *Steppe*, p. 172; Daim, "Avar Archaeology," p. 504; See also, Winter, "Avaria," pp. 46-47.

Roman and the Early Byzantine era, it seems clear that the Bulgars occupied a territory traversed by important routes running through the Balkans, linking Constantinople and Thrace with areas North of the Haemus and the Danube. The most important of these were the road from Nicopolis ad Istrum to Adrianople by way of Beroe, the "Trajan Way" (from Oescus to Filippoupolis), the roads linked Marcianoupolis to Anchialus and Odessus to Mesembria respectively, the coastal road from Odessus to Tomis, the road Noviodunum-Marcianoupolis, the "Danube road" (from Singidunum to Ad Stoma), and the road from Naissus to Ratiaria. Outside of the Bulgar settlement ran the most important road in the Balkans, the Roman *Via Militaris*, known later as *Vasiliki Odos*, which linked Singidunum to Constantinople by way of Viminacium, Nis, Serdica, Filippoupolis and Adrianoupolis.<sup>92</sup>

Independently from the location of these roads, it is most likely that the Byzantines could not use the network within the Balkan peninsula after the mass settlement of the Slavs in the first decades of the seventh century (during the reign of Phocas and Heraclius), when the Byzantines had lost their control over almost all of the Balkan provinces.<sup>93</sup> More than half a century before the settlement of the Proto-Bulgars, the Balkan network was out of Byzantine control and it is very ambiguous whether the founding of the Bulgar Khaganate had caused any problems to the communication with areas north of the Danube. From the peace treaty of 681 until the year 704, the written sources make reference only to the attacks of Emperor Justinian II on the Slavs of Strymon and the Bulgars in 688. In 705 the khagan Tervel helped Justinian II to regain the byzantine throne. Subsequently, there was conflict between them in 708/09, a Bulgar raid in Thrace in 712 and the military assistance given by the Bulgars to the Byzantines in 717/18 to repel the Arab attack on Constantinople.<sup>94</sup>

An important element in the investigation of the Byzantine-Avar relations of the eighth century is the treaty of 716 concluded between Emperor Theodosius III (715-717) and the Bulgar Khagan Kormesios/Kormisoš (716/21-738), which settled the question of the frontiers and trade relations between the Empire and the Bulgars, and, furthermore, was very important for the restoration of the Balkan internal communication.<sup>95</sup> The fourth term (... *and that those who traded in both countries*

92 V. Beševliev, "Bemerkungen über die antiken Heerstrassen im Ostteil der Balkanhalbinsel," *Klio* 51 (1969), pp. 484-492; G. Skrivanić, "Roman Roads and Settlements in the Balkans" in F. W. Carter (ed.), *A Historical Geography of the Balkans* (London-New York-San Francisco, 1977), pp. 120-122, 126-129; Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 187-188.

93 Waldmüller, *Begegnungen*, pp. 247-262; Kardaras, *Avars*, p. 188.

94 B. Head, *Justinian II of Byzantium* (Wisconsin, 1972), pp. 36, 41, 124; Gjuselev, "Bulgarie," p. 90; Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 188-189.

95 Theophanes, *Chronography*, p. 497 (Mango-Scott, *Theophanes*, p. 681); J. Ferluga, "Der byzantinische Handel nach dem Norden im 9. und 10. Jahrhundert" in K. Düwel (ed.), *Untersuchungen zu Handel und Verkehr der vor- und frühgeschichtlichen Zeit in Mittel- und Nordeuropa. vol. 4, Der Handel der Karolinger- und Wikingerzeit* [Abhandlungen

*should be certified by means of diplomas and seals. Anyone not having seals would lose his assets which would be confiscated by the Treasury*) determined the development of trade relations between Byzantium and Bulgaria. Except for the regulations on the activity of merchants between the two states and the official character of their trade relations, the Byzantines possibly obtained the right to transport goods through Bulgaria to other areas, either north of the Danube or even to the West. We may assume that the settlement of the Proto-Bulgars, with the imposition of a state power on the northeastern part of the Balkans, facilitated the re-establishment of the trade relations of Byzantium with areas north of the Danube through the ancient network (when the Byzantine-Bulgarian relations were good), as the merchants could move with certified documents and defrayed dues.<sup>96</sup>

Regardless of the attribution of the court garments to the Bulgar khagan according to the second term of the treaty (*a tribute of vestments and dyed red hides to the value of 30 lbs. of gold*), it seems that such official garments continued to be sent from Byzantium to the Avar khaganate, as before 626.<sup>97</sup> On the other hand, we know that the Avar treasure that fell into the hands of the Franks in 795/96, contained gold, silver as well as silk garments.<sup>98</sup> The garments found in Pannonia are related probably either to trade exchange or may be interpreted as gifts sent to the Avar khagans by the Byzantine Emperors or other leaders. The treaty of 716 re-established trade activity in the Balkans, interrupted after the destruction of many urban centers on the Danube and the Balkan interior during the first quarter of the seventh century.<sup>99</sup> Now with the Bulgarian territory in between, the Byzantines renewed their trade relations with the Avars for the next four decades, until 756, when the twenty years' war of Emperor Constantine V (741-775) against the Bulgars broke out. Also plausible is a temporary restoration of Byzantine-Boulgar trade relations during the reign of Leo IV and Eirene (775-788) when no hostilities with Bulgaria are mentioned.<sup>100</sup> In the period between 716 and 756 it seems that many of the Byzantine ornamental motifs, iconoclastic in particular, entered the Avar Khaganate, through the inter-Balkan network. The depictions of animals and plants which dominate the ornamentation of the Late Avar Period, are linked to Byzantine art, since after 726 the iconoclast emperors forbade the worship of images, including representations of humans.<sup>101</sup>

Still another possible way of the transfer of Byzantine motifs to the Avar Khaganate during the Late Avar Period, could be the trade network leading from the

der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, phil.-hist. Klasse, dritte Folge, 156] (Göttingen, 1987), pp. 620-621; Curta, *Southeastern Europe*, p. 83.

96 Féher, "Relations avaro-byzantines," p. 59; Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 189-191.

97 Pohl, *Awaren*, pp. 180, 212; See also, Kardaras, *Avars*, p. 135.

98 Claude, *Handel*, p. 162; Pohl, *Awaren*, p. 181; M. Hardt, *Gold und Herrschaft. Die Schätze europäischer Könige und Fürsten im ersten Jahrtausend* (Berlin, 2004), pp. 42-44; Kardaras, *Avars*, p. 191.

99 Claude, *Handel*, pp. 162-164.

100 See Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 191-192.

101 A. Grabar, *L'Iconoclasme Byzantin* (Paris, 1984), pp. 180-181.

area of the Black Sea to Central Europe. In this case, the activity of the Byzantine merchants would have as its base the Byzantine possessions in Crimea, which served as a bridge for carrying out Byzantine foreign policy with the peoples of the Black Sea and the Caucasus.<sup>102</sup> As regards the Early and the Middle Avar Period, we note that the Black Sea region was of special importance for the transfer of Byzantine elements to the Middle Danube because of the migration of nomadic peoples who had already come into contact with the Byzantine civilisation. During the Late Avar Period, a migration of this sort is not mentioned in the sources. During the eighth century the areas north of the Black Sea came under the control of the Khazars. Their Khaganate occupied initially the northeastern Caucasus and the steppes between Azov and the Lower Volga, and after the subjugation of «Great Bulgaria» was expanded to the Dnieper and Crimea.<sup>103</sup>

The use by the Byzantines of the trade network north of the Black Sea depended on their relations with the Khazars who raided the Crimea and in the early eighth century had local governors on the peninsula. After the Khazar involvement in the overthrow of Justinian II (711) Leo III gradually approached the Khazars as both parties had to deal with the Arab attacks. In 733 the successor to the Byzantine throne, Constantine V, married Tzitzak/Eirene, daughter of the Khazar khagan. On the other hand, after 760 the Byzantine-Khazar relations were again on bad terms, given that the Khazars were then either allies of the Arabs or raiders in Crimea.<sup>104</sup>

As regards trade activity, the Khazar Khaganate occupied the western part of the “northern silk road”. The archaeological finds discovered along this route prove that during the seventh and the eighth century the silk road remained the main artery for the transfer of products and motifs to the West through the Eurasian space.<sup>105</sup> Linked to the transport of merchandise are some Chinese and Iranian motifs encountered within the Avar Khaganate and the ornamentation of belt-sets of cast bronze which has analogies in finds in northern Caucasus.<sup>106</sup> If we consider the Byzantine cities of Crimea, the leading position in the trade activity in the region seems to be occupied by some of the flourishing trade centers as Cherson and Sudak,<sup>107</sup> while the city of Doros is mentioned (c. 733-746), as the seat of the bishopric

102 Noonan, “Khazars,” pp. 117-123; Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 38-39, 193.

103 H.W. Haussig, *Die Geschichte Zentralasiens und der Seidenstrasse in islamischer Zeit* (Darmstadt, 1988), pp. 43-45; Noonan, “Khazars,” pp. 123-124.

104 Noonan, “Khazars,” pp. 112-114, 126, 129-130; C. Zuckerman, “The Khazars and Byzantium – The first Encounter” in P. B. Golden, H. Ben-Shammai and A. Róna-Tas (eds.), *The World of the Khazars. New Perspectives Selected Papers from the Jerusalem 1999 International Khazar Colloquium hosted by the Ben Zvi Institute* (Leiden-Boston, 2007), pp. 431-432.

105 Haussig, *Die Geschichte Zentralasiens und der Seidenstrasse*, pp. 154-155; Idem, *Islamischer Zeit*, p. 43; Noonan, “Khazars,” p. 122.

106 Kollautz, *Denkmäler*, p. 37; Erdélyi, “Karpaten,” pp. 355-356; Gavrituhin, “Pereščepina,” p. 17.

107 V. Šandrovskaja, “Die Funde der byzantinischen Bleisiegel in Sudak,” *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography* 3 (1993), pp. 85-90; Ibidem, I.V. Sokolova, “Les sceaux byzantins de



of *Gothia*.<sup>108</sup> The trade relations of Byzantium with the Khazars are attested to by Byzantine coins found on the territory of the Khazar Khaganate.<sup>109</sup> Although we could not distinguish precisely the period of their peaceful relations during the eighth century it seems plausible that they lasted for approximately 40 years, between 720-760. During this age, the activity of the Byzantine merchants from Crimea was feasible along the network running north of the Black Sea linking the Eurasian steppe with Central Europe.

Taking into account the earlier remarks on the possible channels of communication between Byzantium and the Avars after 626, we can, next to noting Byzantine influence on the art of the Avar Khaganate, assess the numismatic finds. The great number of Constans II coins is attributable to the good relations of Byzantium with the Lombards between 643-663 and, with time, to contacts between Byzantine Italy with Central Europe. The coins of Constantine IV may be linked partly to the Avar delegation of 678, while those of Theodosius III, Leo III and Constantine V are likely to be related to the trade activity of the eighth century which flourished during the peaceful relations of Byzantium with the Bulgars (716-756) and the Khazars (720-760). The copper coin of Leo IV coincides with the temporary restoration of the Byzantine-Bulgar relations between 775 and 788. We may assume that for the two first cases (Constans II and Constantine IV) the contact point with the Avars was the northern Adriatic while for the other finds Bulgaria and Crimea. Moreover, the few coins of Justinian II, Tiberius II and Philippicus Bardanes (685-713) coincide with good Byzantine-Lombard relations in the period of rule of Perctarit and Cunipert (671-712), consequently they belong to the western channel of communication. For their part, the coins of Anastasius II (713-715) are more likely to be related to the inter-balkan network.

Summarizing the reconstruction of the Byzantine-Avar relations after 626, we note that, despite the limited evidence offered by the written sources, the Byzantine forms and motifs observed in the Avar art and numismatic finds too testify to the continuity of contact almost until the end of the Avar Khaganate, with channels of communication running through the north Adriatic region, Bulgar territory and, possibly, the Byzantine Crimea. Consequently, we may assume that until 775/80 there was no interruption in the relations and the contacts of Byzantium with the Avars. These contacts were primarily cultural, due mainly to commercial activity and the presence of Byzantine craftsmen and population within the Avar Khaganate. Byzantium's relations with the Avars during the seventh and eighth centuries mainly had the nature of exchange between two worlds, two different civilizations, the Byzantine-Mediterranean and the Avar-Central European and not, in a more narrow sense, of communication and relations between two royal courts.

Cherson," p. 106; A. I. Romančuk, *Studien zur Geschichte und Archäologie des byzantinischen Cherson* (Leiden – Boston, 2005), pp. 35-38, 61-63.

108 C. Zuckerman, "Byzantium's pontic policy in the *Notitiae Episcopatum*" in Zuckermann (ed.), *Crimée*, pp. 214-215.

109 Pletnewa, *Chasaren*, p. 69. See also, Kardaras, *Avars*, pp. 193-197.