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Nomadic courts as reflection of imperial ideology (Huns, Avars, Western Turks)

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Abstract: Taking into account the role of the court as bearer of state/imperial ideology, the paper considers the relevant development of the court in certain nomadic hegemonies after their transformation to temporary “empires” (Huns, Avars, Western Turks). Into this frame, actually an “imitatio imperii”, we remark reflections of the ideology of the sedentary Empires with whom these hegemonies had contacts and accepted their influences. Elements of the new nomadic “court culture” are the structured hierarchy of higher officials, luxury objects and buildings that changed the image of the former “wandering nomads”. Necessary conditions for the survival as well as the display of power in the new nomadic courts were the flow of annual tribute and luxury gifts from the sedentary Empires.

“In nearly all of the ‘Barbarian’ kingdoms which were created on formerly Roman soil during the Migration Period, the monarchs adopted certain elements of the ruling style employed by the Roman or Byzantine emperors”. With such a notion, Christian Scholl underlines the new reality of the Migration Period and the need of the new ‘barbarian’ polities to set up their power on stable institutional bases and use their former enemies as a “guide of state administration”. Into this frame, the paper attempts to shed light in certain Eurasian nomadic polities which, as Sebastian Kolditz notes, “still occupy a rather marginal position in Medieval Studies in general”.¹ Apart from the conflicts and the negative image for

¹ Christian Scholl, “Imitatio Imperii? Elements of Imperial Rule in the Barbarian Successor States of the Roman West,” in *Transcultural Approaches to the Concept of Imperial Rule in the Middle*

each other, the sedentary empires and the Eurasian nomads developed a wide spectrum of contacts considering the diplomacy, the trade, the warfare etc.² In our paper a brief overview of how the cultural contacts developed between the sedentary empires and certain nomadic people (Huns, Avars and western Turks) will be presented, led not only to the formation of nomadic courts but also to the adoption of imperial ideological features by them.

Having caused the beginning of the so-called Migration Period in 375, the Huns formed in c. 390 a temporary hegemony in modern Romania³ and in c. 422 they migrated to the Carpathian Basin.⁴ The Hunnic attacks in 441-442 and 447 directed to both border Byzantine cities and forts at the Lower Danube (e.g. Viminacium, Singidunum, Sirmium, Margus, Ratiaria, Iatrus and further in Scythia Minor), as well as the central and eastern Balkans (e.g. Naissus, Serdica, Marcianoupolis, Nicopolis ad Istrum, Drizipera, Philippopolis, Arcadiopolis), causing serious destructions to all the areas affected by their raids.⁵ During the reign of Theodosius II (408-450) the Byzantine *solidi* entered the Hunnic kingdom, mostly in the era of Attila (435-453 and up to 450), in form of annual tribute.⁶ Apart from the tribute, other official resources, found also in the bilateral treaties (434/35 and 447), where products and money through the trade activity and ransom (12 gold coins per capita) for Byzantine captives.⁷ However, the subsidies of Byzantium to the Huns was a small rate compared to the annual tribute since 574 (partially paid in kind) and the various gifts from Byzantium to the Avar khagans (cords worked with gold, couches, silken garments, belts, etc.).⁸

Ages, eds Christian Scholl, Torben R. Gebhardt and Jan Clauß (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Peter Lang Edition, 2017), 19. Ibidem, Sebastian Kolditz, "Barbarian Emperors? Aspects of the Byzantine Perception of the qaghan (chaganos) in the Earlier Middle Ages," 41.

- 2 See, Anatoly M. Khazanov, "Nomads in the History of the Sedentary World," in *Nomads in the Sedentary World*, eds Anatoly M. Khazanov and Andre Wink (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), 1-23.
- 3 See Otto Maenchen-Helfen, *Die Welt der Hunnen* (Wien, Köln and Graz: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1978), 15-30, 44. Herwig Wolfram, *Das Reich und die Germanen. Zwischen Antike und Mittelalter* (Berlin: Siedler, 1998), 133, 184.
- 4 Maenchen-Helfen, *Hunnen*, 56. Wolfram, *Germanen*, 188.
- 5 Maenchen-Helfen, *Hunnen*, 81-83, 86-87, 89, 92. Constantin Scorpan, *Lines Scythiae. Topographical and stratigraphical research on the late Roman fortifications on the Lower Danube*. Oxford: BAR International Series 88, 1980), 133. Miloje Vasić, "Le limes protobyzantin dans la province de Mésie Première," *Starinar* 45-46 (1994-1995): 41-53.
- 6 Maenchen-Helfen, *Hunnen*, 137-141. Katalin Biró-Sey, "Beziehungen der Hunnen zu Byzanz im Spiegel der Funde von Münzen des 5. Jahrhunderts in Ungarn," *SCIAM* 35/2 (1988): 413-31. Walter Pohl, *The Avars: a steppe empire in Europe, 567-822* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2018), 232. The flow of annual tribute to the Huns (350 pounds of gold), started in the era of Roua. See Wolfram, *Germanen*, 189.
- 7 Priscus, *Fragments*, ed. Roger C. Blockley *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 2: *Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus* (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1983), 2, 224-226 and 9. 3, 236. Maenchen-Helfen, *Hunnen*, 66-67, 83-89, 92. Wolfram, *Germanen*, 190. Gerhard Wirth, *Attila. Das Hunnenreich und Europa* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1999), 50-51.
- 8 See Ekaterina Nechaeva, *Embassies – Negotiations – Gifts. Systems of East Roman Diplomacy in Late Antiquity* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2014), 171, 180-183. Georgios Kardaras, *Byzantium and the Avars, 6th-9th Century AD. Political, Diplomatic and Cultural Relations* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 20, 24, 30, 34-35, 110, 170. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 221, 231, 250.

On the other hand after the collapse of the Gepidic kingdom and the flight of the Lombards to Italy, the Avars established their khaganate in the Carpathian Basin in 568, centered between the rivers Danube and Tisza, which survived for more than two centuries.⁹ Though the hostilities with Byzantium lasted until 626, main aim of the Avars since their first embassy in 558 was to enter into alliance (*foedus*) with Constantinople. However, from the scrutiny of the relevant testimonies, it seems that this purpose was not achieved, as no simultaneous provision of regular annual payments, land for settlement, and presents, which would have turned the Avars into federates of Byzantium, took place.¹⁰

Likely the most important aspect of Byzantine influences (in the frame of the Byzantine “cultural diplomacy”) concerns the emergence in the Hunnic kingdom and the Avar khaganate of a “court culture”, imitating the Roman/Byzantine patterns and based on the annual tribute and the gifts of the Empire. These subsidies, along with the loot from raids, had a crucial role to the to the cohesion of the nomadic hegemonies and the prestige of their rulers (the so-called “prestige economy” or “economy of violence”).¹¹ Such a relation with Byzantium created simultaneously a fertile ground for the appearance of practises and mentality that turned the “wandering nomads” to organized hegemonies.

Giving the frame of a court, we may choose the case of a “barbarian” state developed gradually to Empire, namely the Carolingian one, and the conditions in such a court in the era of Charlemagne (late eight and early ninth centuries). Charlemagne’s capital in Aachen (a court in the broader sense) concentrated the treasures of his Empire and had large public buildings with prominent among them the king’s *aula*, bearing a bronze eagle with outspread wings. The hierarchy of the space is reflected e.g. by the houses of the nobility, the royal officers and the servants, members of a vivid court with *ministri*, *aulici*, *consilarii*, *comites*, *actores*, *mansionarii*, *camerarii*, etc. These court members (*palatini*, mostly young aristocrats belonging to the entourage and the household of the Emperor) were also subject to a king-centered hierarchy, reflected to the spaces, garb, gifts, meals, etc.). In the court was taking place various functions and events (banquets, court poetry, conversations for didactic purposes, imperial tribunal etc.) but its main role was the political training and the appropriate codes of behavior, connected to the ethic of royal service (and accompanied by punishments for political “crime” and disloyalty). The model of Charlemagne’s early medieval court culture, being a microcosm of the polity and a living social organism based on personal ties, “encouraged the diffusion of *mores* and models, thanks to the imitation of great officials by young aristocrats, and above all the example of

9 Kardaras, *Avars*, 27-29. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 60-68.

10 See Kardaras, *Avars*, 34-37. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 221-222. On the Byzantine coins in the Avar Khaganate, see Peter Somogyi, *Byzantinische Fundmünzen der Awarenzeit in ihrem europäischen Umfeld* (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd University, Institute of Archaeological Sciences, 2014), 237-61. Kardaras, *op. cit.*, 124. Pohl, *op. cit.*, 224, 231-233, 250-253, 336.

11 Nechaeva, *Embassies*, 171-72. Kardaras, *Avars*, 32. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 220-21, 224-26, 235-36, 254.

the king”, promoting ideals and right order values, such as wisdom, self-control, morality, discipline and restraint.¹²

To what concerns the nomads under consideration, though they had no permanent capital and different socio-economic structure (see below), they wished to developed similar courts following the example of their neighbouring Empires. Regarding the relevant information of the sources on the Huns and Avar higher officials (where is evident the elite formation and the interdependence of ruler and elite), we note for the first the term *logades* in Priscus’ *History*.¹³ To denote the members of the Avar elite, being around the khagan, the Byzantine authors use terms such as ἄρχοντες (leaders), δυνατότατοι (the most powerful) or ἑξαρχος (commander). The logades employed by Priscus were a model that Theophylact Simocatta followed (in addition to δυνατότατοι), much like Theodore Syncellus.¹⁴ This, in fact, became an important element in Simocatta’s narrative strategy.¹⁵ The wealth of Attila’s higher officials was completed by the money and the gifts, e.g. such as those the Byzantine embassy in 448 offered to Onegesius, to Edecon and Orestes (*silk garments and Indian pearls*), as well as to the Queen of a village, in turn for her hospitality (*silver bottles, red skins, Indian pepper and other exotic products*).¹⁶ Similar gifts (*Indian spices and perfumes*) offered the Byzantines to the Avar khagan in the spring of 598, during the siege of Tomis/Constanza.¹⁷ On the other hand, the term

12 See Janet L. Nelson, “Was Charlemagne’s Court a Courtly Society?,” in *Court Culture in the Early Middle Ages. The Proceedings of the First Alcuin Conference*, ed. Catherine Cubitt (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers n.v., 2003), 39-57. Ibidem, Matthew Innes, “‘A Place of Discipline’: Carolingian Courts and Aristocratic Youth,” 59-76. For the Byzantine court, see Ibidem, Rosemary Morris, “Beyond the *De Ceremoniis*,” 235-254. Lyn Rodley, “The Byzantine Court and Byzantine Art,” 255-273.

13 See in details, Maenchen-Helfen, *Hunnen*, 147-49. Klaus Tausend, “Die logades der Hunnen,” in *Ad fontes! Festschrift für Gerhard Dobesch zum 65. Geburtstag am 15. September 2004, dargebracht von Kollegen, Schülern und Freunden*, eds Herbert Heftner and Kurt Tomaschitz (Wien: Eigenverlag der Herausgeber, 2004), 819-28. See also, Hyun Jin Kim, “The Political Organization of Steppe Empires and their Contribution to Eurasian Interconnectivity: the Case of the Huns and Their Impact on the Frankish West,” in *Eurasian Empires in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages Contact and Exchange between the Graeco-Roman World, Inner Asia and China*, eds Hyun Jin Kim, Frederik Juliaan Vervaeke, Selim Ferruh Adali Cambridge University Press (2017), 20-22, n. 39. “These *logades* were clearly not random selections of men, but are probably identical with the ranked graded-officials of the Xiongnu. This is confirmed by the later East Roman/Byzantine usage of the same term to describe graded officials within the Avar Empire that succeeded the Huns.”

14 See Kardaras, *Avars*, 12. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 220, 240-43 and 479, n. 330.

15 See Michael and Mary Whitby, *The History of Theophylact Simocatta* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), xxv-xxx. Anna Kotłowska, Łukasz Różycki, “The Role and Place of Speeches in the Work of Theophylact Simocatta,” *Vox Patrum* 36 (66) (2016): 353-82, esp. 353-55.

16 Priscus, *Fragments*, 11, 2, 246-48, 262, 272-74. Maenchen-Helfen, *Hunnen*, 141, 143. Wirth, *Attila*, 82-83.

17 Simocatta, *Histories*, ed. Carl de Boor, Theophylacti Simocattae, *Historiae* (Leipzig: Teubner 1887), VII, 13. 1-6, 267-68. (trans. Michael and Mary Whitby, op.cit., n. 15). Theophanes Confessor, *Chronography*, ed. Carl de Boor, Theophanis abbas agri atque Confessoris, *Chronographia annorum DXXVIII* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1883). (trans. Cyril Mango and Roger Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284-813* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). Nechaeva, *Embassies*, 183. Kardaras, *Avars*, 57. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 188, 231, 250. See also, Szabolcs József Polgár, “The Character of the Trade between the Nomads and their Settled Neighbours in Eurasia in the Middle Ages,” in *Competing Narratives between Nomadic People and their*

wealth finance instead of *gifts* or *prestige economy*, is proposed to describe the inter-elite exchanges in the wider area of East Central and Central Europe during the Early Middle Ages, considering as such the above testimony of Simocatta.¹⁸ Considering Onegesius, a captive from Sirmium was working as architect for his luxurious lodges and baths, while a Greek in origin, formerly a wealthy merchant from Viminacium, was a higher official in his service.¹⁹ According to Priscus, the interior of Attila's palace, imitated the patterns of Greek and Roman architecture.²⁰ Worth mentioning too is the transfer of “know-how” from Byzantium to the Avars, as the khagan Baian asked Justin II to send him craftsmen to build a luxurious home and baths, but who were later used for the construction of a bridge over the Danube.²¹

Other aspects of the “cultural diplomacy”, which projected in the eyes of foreigners the wealth and the power of the Roman/Byzantine Empire, were the attribution of honorary titles to foreign rulers and the intermarriages. For the first case we know that Attila received from Valentinian III the title of *magister militum*²² while for the second a marriage was arranged for Attila's secretary Constantius by the Byzantine envoys in 448.²³ In the Far East, the marriage alliances between the Chinese emperor and the Huns (*Xiongnu*), as well as the sending of silk and other products to the latter was a Chinese practise since the Antiquity.²⁴ On the other hand, there is no evidence of intermarriages between the Avars and Byzantium, namely a continuity of a Roman-barbarian aristocracy in the Carpathian Basin.²⁵

Mostly from the Avar side, we observe the use of diplomatic rhetoric on a rather fictitious parental relationship between the Byzantine emperor and the Avar khagan. As W. Pohl points out, “the expression of international relationships through the use of kinship terminology was a Roman tradition as well as barbarian custom”, but such a relation, actually to legitimize Avar demands, is not testified in the sources.²⁶ Only being at war with Persia, emperor Heraclius

Sedentary Neighbours Papers of the 7th International Conference on the Medieval History of the Eurasian Steppe Nov. 9-12, 2018 Shanghai University, China, ed. Chen Hao [Studia uralo-altaica 53] (Szeged: Department of Altaic Studies, Department of Finno-Ugrian Philology, 2019), 253-263. On the other hand, , expresses doubts about the character of *gifts* in that case.

18 Florin Curta, *The Long Sixth Century in Eastern Europe* [East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450, 72] (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2021), 290-91.

19 Priscus, *Fragments*, 11, 2, 264 and 268-72, 385-86, n 59. Wirth, *Attila*, 83-84. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 239.

20 Priscus, *Fragments*, 13.1, 284. Maenchen-Helfen, *Hunnen*, 137. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 231.

21 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. Ernest Walter Brooks, Ioannis Ephesini, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae pars tertia* (CSCO 106, Scriptorum Syri 55) (Louvain: Ex officina Orientali et Scientifica, 1964), VI, 24, 247-48. Kardaras, *Avars*, 110. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 248.

22 Priscus, *Fragments*, 11.2, 278. Maenchen-Helfen, *Hunnen*, 79. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 229.

23 Priscus, *Fragments*, 14, 15.2 and 4, 290-93, 296-99.

24 Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 225.

25 Ibidem, 203, 229.

26 For the Avars' claims on a 'father – son' relation, see Menander, *History*, ed. and trans. Roger C. Blockley, *The History of Menander the Guardsman* (ARCA: Classical and Medieval Texts 17) (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1985), fr. 12.6, 138-39 (embassy in 568). Theodore Syncellus, *Homily*,

“appointed” the khagan as “protector of his son”.²⁷ Unlike other nomad or German rulers, the khagans of the Avars never received from the Byzantines titles such as *patrician* or *magister militum*. Furthermore, despite the decorative motifs with Christian symbols in the Avar khaganate, no evidence exists either of a missionary activity from Constantinople to the Avars or any conversion of the latter to Christianity prior to their subjugation to Charlemagne.²⁸

Considering Simocatta’s account for the year 594, part of the Avar higher officials, with Targitius at their head, favored peaceful relations with Byzantium in sharp contrast to the hostile attitude of the khagan along with another group of officials, who incited the latter to wage war. The case of Targitius (an experienced envoy and a respected person among the Avars) leaves no room to doubt the existence of rival aristocratic factions inside *Avaria* (for and against peaceful relations with Byzantium respectively), especially after the fall of Sirmium in 582.²⁹ Another explanation maybe a possible in time-depth byzantinisation of the Avar khaganate. At this perspective, we note that in some cases the Avars rejected the Byzantine gifts under the pretext, among others, that they could lead to loose of power and their subjection to the suzerainty of Constantinople, as with certain peoples in the past.³⁰ However, the Byzantine emperor seems to have a prestigious impression among the Avars, if we believe the testimony of John of Ephesus that after the fall of Anchialus to the Avars in 585, the khagan appeared in the baths of the city in the robe of the empress Anastasia.³¹

Byzantium was the main source of prestige goods for the Avars and a huge amount of finds, namely Byzantine imports, either by trade or diplomatic gifts (possibly also loot from raids), or other local artefacts produced by indigenous or Byzantine craftsmen, came to light in the territory of the Avar khaganate.³²

ed. Ferenc Makk, *Traduction et commentaire de l’homélie écrite probablement par Théodore le Syncelle sur le siège de Constantinople en 626* (Acta universitatis de Attila Jozsef nominatae, Opuscula Byzantina 3/Acta antiqua et archaeologica 19) (Szeged: University of Szeged, 1975), XI, 16 (78). Kolditz, “Byzantine Perception,” 47. Kardaras, *Avars*, 13. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 229.

27 Theophanes Confessor, *Chronography*, 303; Theodore Syncellus, *Homily*, XI, 16 (78), 51 (n. 57) (letter in 626). Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 229.

28 Tivadar Vida, “Heidnische und christliche Elemente der awarenzeitlichen Glaubenswelt, Amulette in der Awarzeit,” *Zalai Múzeum* 11 (2002), 179-209. Kardaras, *Avars*, 12-13, 127-34. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 261-62.

29 Menander, *History*, fr. 25.2, 224. Simocatta, *Histories*, VI, 11. 4-6, 242. Nechaeva, *Embassies*, 129. Kardaras, *Avars*, 51-52. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 219-20, 241.

30 See Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 89-90, 226-28.

31 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI, 49, 260: *Et tandem muro disiecto purpuras ibi inveniunt quas Anastasia uxor Tiberii, cum ad thermas iret, ecclesiae loci oblatas donavit. Has chaganus adsumptas induit, dicens: “Si vult rex Romanorum sive non vult, regnum mihi datum est”*. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 230.

32 Eva Garam, *Funde byzantinischer Herkunft in der Awarzeit vom Ende des 6. bis zum Ende des 7. Jahrhunderts* (MMA 5) (Budapest: Hungarian National Museum and Institute of Archaeology HAS 2001). Orsolya Heinrich-Tamaska, “Byzantine Goldsmithing in Avaria? Exchange and Transfer at the Edge of the Empire During the Seventh Century AD,” in *Grenz/übergänge: Spätromisch, frühchristlich, frühbyzantinisch als Kategorien der historisch-archäologischen Forschung an der mittleren Donau*, eds Orsolya Heinrich-Tamaska and Daniel Syrbe (Remshalden: Verlag Bernhard Albert Greiner, 2016), 280-85, 289-90. Kardaras, *Avars*, 105-107, 110, 170.

Further, important parameter for the import of certain products in the Carpathian Basin, (given the rather limited market-based exchanges), was the “international” non-commercial exchange networks of that era. Such products were e.g. female dress accessories (fibulae, buckles, and bracelets), gemstone or amber beads, furs and generally products of “wealth finance”, exchanged between elite groups for their needs and in order to negotiate and maintain social, marital, and political alliances.³³

To what concerns the Turkish khaganate, the first contact between the Byzantines and the khagan of the Western Turks Sizabul/Silzibil (or Istemi) is linked with the coming of a Turkish embassy to Constantinople, in 562/63. The intention of the Turks, who at that time lived to the east of the river Don, was not only to strengthen their ties to the Empire, but also to prevent the rapprochement between the Byzantines and the Avars. Furthermore, there was an economic and trade dimension to that policy, since being in frequent conflicts with Persia, the Byzantines wished to secure access to Chinese and Sogdian silk via trade routes across the Turkic khaganate. On the other hand, the bad relations with Persia turned the Turks towards Byzantium. The momentum was also favourable, as the Avars were a common enemy and Byzantium was ready to trust the defence of its interests in the East European steppes to the Turks. Justinian’s alliance with Sizabul was, according to Theophanes Byzantius, the reason for which the Avar demands were rejected by Justin II (565–578) just after his accession to the throne.³⁴ Emperor Justin II developed even more the relations of Byzantium with the Turkic khaganate and many embassies both to Constantinople and Central Asia are recorded through the northern Silk Road.³⁵ A crisis to bilateral relations came in 576, since khagan Turxanthus reacted to the treaty between Byzantium and his “slaves”, the Avars, in 574.³⁶ The Byzantine-Turk relations developed again in the era of emperor Maurice (582–602)³⁷ and later in Heraclius’s reign (610–641) during his campaign against the Persians in 625.³⁸

In the case of the Turks, the Byzantine influences were likely more limited compared to the Huns and the Avars, since the early Turkish khaganates,

Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 231, 253.

33 See in details, Curta, *Long Sixth Century*, 273–92.

34 Theophanes Byzantius, *Fragments*, ed. Karol Müller, Theophanis Byzantii, *Fragments* [FHG 4] (Paris: Ambrosio Firmin Didot, 1885), 2, 270. Theophanes Confessor, *Chronography*, 351. Kardaras, *Avars*, 25–27. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 50–52.

35 See, Menander, *History*, fr. 10.1–5, 110–27 and 262–63 (n. 110, 126). Theophanes Byzantius, *Fragments*, 3, 270–271. Theophanes Confessor, *Chronography*, 362. John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI. 23, 244–46. Sören Stark, *Die Alturkenzeit in Mittel – und Zentralasien. Archäologische und historische Studien* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert, 2008), 296–97. Nechaeva, *Embassies*, 136–140, 144–151. Kolditz, “Byzantine Perception,” 48. Kardaras, *Avars*, 26–27. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 52–53.

36 Menander, fr. 19.1, 172–74. Kolditz, “Byzantine Perception,” 48, 50. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 227.

37 Kolditz, “Byzantine Perception,” 51–53.

38 Kolditz, “Byzantine Perception,” 56–60. On the identification of the Western Turks with the Khazars, see also, László Balogh, “Notes on the Western Turks in the Work of the Theophanes Confessor,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 58/2 (2005), 190–93.

despite the often conflicts, had established more intensive contacts with the Chinese realms and the subsequent strong influences from the latter paved the way for the development of imperial ideology in the Turkish courts. According to the narrative of the *Tschou-schu*, T'umen (Bumin), grandson of the mythical founder of the Turkish Ashina dynasty, came to the frontiers of China to sell silk as "he wished to develop relations with China"³⁹ while the coming of the first Chinese embassy to the Turks in 545 was considered as a matter of good fortune and flourishing for the future.⁴⁰ Regarding the relevant testimonies, the Chinese silk was particularly wellcome and was obtained mostly as annual tribute.⁴¹ Further, a long list of goods (probably a cas of "wealth finance") from the Chinese emperors to the Turks (mirrors, carriages, horses, banners, golden vases, dresses, bedding etc.) along with the luxury belts, obviously contributed to the emergence of a "court culture" to the latter.⁴² Important parameter for the flow of goods was the trade and the establishment of frontier markets between the two powers.⁴³

The Turks exploited for their purposes the intermarriages with imperial courts. Looking for a military alliance during his campaign against the Persians in 625, emperor Heraclius promised to the khagan his daughter Eudokia, offering also rich gifts and crowned him with his own crown.⁴⁴ On the other hand, a number of intermarriages between Turkish khagans and Chinese princesses is recorded for the sixth century.⁴⁵ Considering the practice of "adoption", though the case of Heraclius, who called the Turk khagan his "son", is obviously fictional,⁴⁶ between the Turks and the Chinese seems to be more substantial that practice.⁴⁷ The strong influence of Chinese patterns to the Turks are observed since the late sixth century when khagan Taspar (T'a-po, ca. 572–581), converted to Buddhism and "he regretted keenly that he had not been born in China"⁴⁸ while two Turkish elite graves in

39 Liu Mau-Tsai, *Die chinesischen Nachrichten zur Geschichte der Ost-Turken (Tu-küe)*, (Göttinger Asiatische Forschungen 10), vol. I, *Texte*, vol. II, *Anmerkungen-Anhänge-Index* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1958), I, 6.. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 220.

40 Liu Mau-Tsai, *Die chinesischen Nachrichten*, I, 6-7 (*Tschou-schu*). Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 222.

41 Liu Mau-Tsai, *Die chinesischen Nachrichten*, I, 13 (*Tschou-schu*) and 43, 63 (*Sui-shu*). Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 51, 232.

42 Liu Mau-Tsai, *Die chinesischen Nachrichten*, I, 64 (*Sui-shu*). Stark, *Alttürkenzeit*, 69-70, 171, 189. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 231, 236-37. On the Turkish cultural elements in China, see Stark, op. cit., 264. Pohl, op. cit., 228, 473 (n. 209).

43 Liu Mau-Tsai, *Die chinesischen Nachrichten*, I, 56 (*Sui-shu*). Stark, *Alttürkenzeit*, 191. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 250. See also, Khazanov, "Nomads," 13.

44 Nikephoros Patriarch of Constantinople, *Short History*, ed. and trans. Cyril Mango (CFHB 13, DOT 10) (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1990), ch. 12, 54-57. Theophanes Confessor, *Chronography*, 316 (mentioning the Chazars and certain Ziebel, the second to hierarchy after the khagan, and nothing about Eudokia). Kolditz, "Byzantine Perception," 57-58. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 229.

45 See Liu Mau-Tsai, *Die chinesischen Nachrichten* I, 19-20 (*Tschou-schu*) and 56-57 (*Sui-shu*). Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 228-29.

46 See above, n. 44.

47 Liu Mau-Tsai, *Die chinesischen Nachrichten*, I, 43 (*Sui-shu*). Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 229.

48 Liu Mau-Tsai, *Die chinesischen Nachrichten*, I, 43 (*Sui-shu*). Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 228.

Shoroon Bumbagar in central Mongolia (second half of the seventh century), followed the patterns of Chinese funerary architecture and wall paintings.⁴⁹

Such contacts and relations formed the necessary frame for the development of imperial ideology to the Turks, even stronger compared to that of the Huns and the Avars, which is primarily reflected through the display of power and wealth. Describing the embassy of Zemarchus in 569–571 in Central Asia, Menander the Guardsman records interesting details, such as the silken tents and the golden throne with two wheels of the Turk khagan Sizabul, able to be drawn by one horse, his golden couch and various impressive objects in his court (golden urns, water fountains, golden pitchers, gilded wooden pillars, golden peacocks and many silver objects).⁵⁰ A similar account on the wealth of khagan of the Western Turks (silken garments and adornment of the tent with dazzling flowers of gold) comes from Xuanzang, a Buddhist pilgrim of the seventh century.⁵¹ Further, contrary to his Avar counterpart,⁵² the khagan of the Turks raised claims to universal rule. Such cases are recorded for the year 576, when Turxanthus referred to the limits of his power⁵³ and c. 597, when the khagan, in a letter addressed to emperor Maurice, appears himself as “the great lord of the seven generations and ruler of the seven climates of the Oikumene”.⁵⁴ Coincidentally however, as the Avars did with Byzantium, a Turkish khagan was also worried about the Chinese “methodology” to subdue the others with “sweet words and soft materials”.⁵⁵

Summarizing the presentation of our topic, the contacts of nomadic polities under consideration (Huns, Avars and Western Turks) with their neighbouring sedentary Empires, after their emergence to middle powers, resulted not only to the flow of wealth, which allowed them to survive, but also to influences that led to the development of a new court structure and “court culture” which imitated

49 Sergey A. Yatsenko, “Images of the Early Turks in Chinese Murals and Figurines from the Recently-Discovered Tomb in Mongolia,” *Silk Road Foundation Newsletter* 12 (2014): 13-24. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 228.

50 Menander, fr. 10.3, 120. Stark, *Alltürkenzeit*, 192. Kolditz, “Byzantine Perception,” 48-49. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 230-31, where also a suggestion for Iranian influences regarding the thrones supported by bird figures on certain Turkish bronze coins.

51 Stark, *Alltürkenzeit*, 192-95. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 231.

52 See Kolditz, “Byzantine Perception,” 47-48, 53.

53 Menander, *History*, fr. 19.1, 174-177: *For the whole world is open to me from the farthest East to the very western edge. 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.* Kolditz, “Byzantine Perception,” 50.

54 Simokatta, *Histories*, VII, 7.8, 257 (Whitby, 188: *The letter's salutation was as follows, word for word: 'To the king of the Romans, the Chagan, the great lord of seven races and master of seven zones of the world.' For this very Chagan had in fact outfought the leader of the nation of the Abdeli (I mean indeed, of the Hephthalites, as they are called), conquered him, and assumed the rule of the nation*). János Harmatta, “The Letter Sent by the Turk Qayan to the Emperor Mauricius.” *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 41 (2001): 109-118. Kolditz, “Byzantine Perception,” 51-52: “This *intitulatio* does not correspond to the usual style of Türk rulers – in contrast to the Orkhon inscriptions from the Second Eastern qaghanate, references to heaven as the source of legitimate rule are curiously absent – but it seems to reflect the Persian royal title.”

55 Vilhelm Thomsen, “Altürkische Inschriften in der Mongolei,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 78 (1924–1925): 141-42. Pohl, *Steppe Empire*, 227.

the hegemonic ideology of the latter. The *imitatio imperii* is obvious as strategy and reflects a new mentality in the nomadic “courts” (the ruler and the elite around him), not only through the display of the material wealth but, mostly, though combined with native concepts and practices, by the claims of supremacy over other peoples.