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The attitude of Justinian I (527-565) towards the Eurasian nomads. Manipulations and aims

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Abstract: The paper tackles with the attitude of Justinian I (527-565) towards the steppe peoples, namely the Avars, the early Turks as well as Protobulgar and Hunnic tribes, having in mind either the protection of the northern borders of the empire along the Caucasus, the Black Sea and the Danube or the economic and trade dimension of the Eurasian space. In order to maintain the balance of power along the northern border, but also to achieve political, military and economic goals in the region, Justinian, created a system of alliances paying annual tribute to the local tribes but also he exercised cultural diplomacy through Christianization and developed trade relations. On the other hand, the emperor, avoiding the direct involvement of the Byzantine army, was inciting one people against another or, as in the case of the Turks, the trade agreement for the silk was accompanied by a military alliance. Linked to the concepts of the "other" in Byzantium, in that case the peoples living in *barbaricum*, the attitude of Justinian, who followed the traditions of the Byzantine policy towards the steppe nomads, is concentrated in the "divide and rule" doctrine and, on the hand, a systematic effort to replace the military involvement with

the power of annual subsidies and, when necessary, the concession of land for settlement (*foedus*).

In Byzantine sources, the steppe peoples are described with certain stereotypes such as unfaithful, greedy, ugly, cruel, malicious, etc., namely a negative portrait following a trope of the Greek and Roman ethnography. The Eurasian nomads were viewed in light of the opposition between the “civilized” world and the “barbarians” (called *ἔθνη* or *gentes/nationes*), the latter living outside the geographical and cultural boundaries of the Christian Roman world and being therefore different in language, customs, or religious beliefs.¹ However, these stereotypes did not prevent the Byzantine emperors, and mostly Justinian, to develop strong ties with them either for economic or for military reasons.

In order to maintain the balance of power along its northern border, but also to achieve its political, military and economic goals in the region, Byzantium had to seek allies on the Lower Volga and in the steppe lands north of the Caucasus Mountains. Those allies were to play the role of a “buffer zone” against raids of nomads, either living there or newcomers from Central Asia to Europe. For that purpose, the Byzantine diplomacy did not hesitate to use methods, such as Christianization, trade relations, as well as other means (e.g., inciting one people against another or preventing the formation of alliances against the Empire).² Regarding the Eurasian nomads, Justinian’s policy concerns Hunnic and Bulgar tribes such as the Crimean and the Sabirs Huns, the Kutrigurs and the Utigurs, living close to Caucasus and the Black Sea³ (the Iranian-speaking nomads Alans of Caucasus are not considered in the paper) and later the Avars and the Western Turks.

¹ Roger Batty, *Rome and the Nomads. The pontic danubian Realm in Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 264-283, 480-494. Georgios Kardaras, *Byzantium and the Avars, 6th-9th c. A. D. Political, diplomatic and cultural relations*, East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450-1450, 51 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2018), 7-8.

² Otto Mazal, *Justinian I und seine Zeit. Geschichte und Kultur des Byzantinischen Reiches im 6. Jahrhundert* (Köln/Weimar/Wien: Bohlau, 2001), 244-51. Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge Massachusetts/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2009), 293, 352. Kardaras, *Avars*, 21-22.

³ See, Otto Maenchen-Helfen, *Die Welt der Hunnen* (Wien/Köln/Graz: H. Bohlau Nachf. 1978), 272-273, 293-294, 299. Peter B. Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turcic Peoples. Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), 97. Sergei A. Romašov, “Bolgarskie plemena severnogo pricernomor’ja v V-VII vv.,” *AEMA* 8 (1992-1994), 209-213, 216-218, 221. Mazal, *Justinian I*, 182. Daniel Ziemann, *Vom Wandervolk zur Großmacht. Die Entstehung Bulgariens im frühen Mittelalter (7. bis 9. Jh.)* (Cologne/Weimar/Wien: Bohlau, 2007), 54, 65, 68-69, 95-97, 148.

In 528 Boa, queen of the Sabirs Huns, visited Constantinople and Justinian offered her rich gifts (gem stones and imperial vestments) as well as money, but there is no mention of Christianization. Boa defeated two philo-Persian Huns rulers, Glom and Tyranax slaughtering, the first in battle and sending the second prisoner to Justinian. In the same year, Grod, the *rex* of the Crimean Huns, came to Constantinople and was baptized. Grod tried to convert his people to Christianity and destroyed the pagan statues, but the reaction of the Hun priests led to the murder of Grod and the Byzantine guard of the city Bosporos.⁴ However, the great problem with the nomads (Kutrigurs and Utigurs), as during the reign of Anastasius I (491-518),⁵ continued to be the Balkan provinces. Both Procopius and Jordanes mention raids of nomads, along with the Slavs for the reign of Justinian.⁶ The recorded in the sources massive raids of the nomads cover

⁴ John Malalas, Chronicle, ed. Ioannes Thurn, *Ioannis Malalae Chronographia*, CFHB, Series Berolinensis 35 (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2000), 18. 13 and 14, 360-362. Maenchen-Helfen, *Hunnen*, 265-266, 280. Mazal, *Justinian I*, 107, 251. Georgios Th. Kardaras, "Christian symbols among the nomads, 5th-8th Century A.D.", in *Rome, Constantinople and Newly-Converted Europe. Archaeological and Historical Evidence (U źródeł Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej/Friihzeit Ostmitteleuropas)*, vol. I, ed. Maciej Salamon et al. (Krakow/Leipzig: GWZO / Rzeszow: Instytut Archeologii Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego / Warszawa: Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2012), 80.

⁵ See, Count Marcellinus, Chronicle, ed. Th. Mommsen, *Marcellini Comitis Chronicon*, MGH, AA 11 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1894), 94-96. Brian Croke, *Count Marcellinus and his Chronicle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 53, 68-70. Fiona K. Haarer, *Anastasius I. Politics and Empire in the Late Roman World*, ARCA. Classical and Medieval Texts, Papers and Monographs, 46 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2006), 104-105. Ziemann, *Entstehung*, 47-48, 70.

⁶ Procopius of Caesarea, *The Anecdota or Secret History*, ed. and transl. Henry B. Dewing (London: LBL, 1969), XVIII. 20-21, 217-19: "... and Illyricum and Thrace in its entirety, comprising the whole expanse of country from the Ionian Gulf to the outskirts of Byzantium, including Greece and the Thracian Chersonese, was overrun practically every year by Huns, Sclaveni and Antae, from the time when Justinian took over the Roman Empire, and they wrought frightful havoc among the inhabitants of that region. For in each invasion more than twenty myriads of Romans, I think, were destroyed or enslaved there, so that a veritable Scythian wilderness came to exist everywhere in this land". See also Procopius, *History of the Wars*, Edited and translated by H. B. Dewing (London: LCL 1961-1962), VII, 14. 2, 263. Jordanes, *Romana*, ed. Th. Mommsen, *Iordanis De summa temporum vel origine actibusque gentis Romanorum (Iordanis Romana et Getica)* MGH AA V/1, 1-52, 388, 52: "Hi sunt casus Romanae rei publicae preter instantia cotidiana Bulgarum, Antium et Sclavinorum". Florin Curta, *The Making of the Slavs: History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, c. 500-700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 78-79. Paul M. Barford, *The Early Slavs. Culture and Society in Early Medieval Eastern Europe* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), 50. Ziemann, *Entstehung*, 87, 95. Georgios Kardaras, "Byzantium and the Antes. Political and cultural relations," in *Od Bachorza do Światowida ze Zbrucz. Tworzenie się słowiańskiej Europy w ujęciu archeologicznym, historycznym i językoznawczym*, Studia źródłoznawcze dedykowane Profesorowi Michałowi Parczewskiemu w 70. rocznicę urodzin, ed. Michał Wojenka and Marcin Wołoszyn (Kraków/Uniwersytet Jagielloński – Rzeszów/Uniwersytet Rzeszowski: 2016), 41-55, 43-44.

the period between 528 and 551.⁷ On the other hand, in the same period Eurasian nomads served as mercenaries in the Byzantine army.⁸

According to Agathias and Menander the Guardsman, Justinian, because of his old age, had lost his disposition to wage wars, and was now trying to ward off enemies by some other means.⁹ We may distinguish these “means” to three levels. The first, concerning also the Slavs, was the Justinianian fortifications on the Balkans. The second, the creation of a “buffer zone” by the integration of the Western Antes in the service of Constantinople with a treaty (*foedus*) in 545/46, clearly intended to form a barrier at the Lower Danube against the nomadic — or any other — raids into the Balkan provinces.¹⁰ The third, was the yearly payments to the Kutrigurs and the Utigurs as well as the inciting of conflicts between them. Regarding the Kutrigurs, Procopius quotes that “although they receive from the emperor many gifts every year, they still cross the Ister River continually and overrun the emperor’s land, being both at peace and at war with the Romans”¹¹ while the Utigurs “alone possessed the land, making no trouble at all for the Romans, because they do not even dwell near them, but, being separated by many nations which lie between, they are forced, by no will of their own, not to meddle with them”.¹² The yearly payments of Byzantium to the Kutrigurs and the Utigurs are also known by the speeches of the Avar envoys to Constantinople in 568 and 569, since the latter considered as “rightly their” the

⁷ See, Croke, *Count Marcellinus*, 70-71. Mazal, *Justinian I*, 167, 183, 185-188, 190-191. Ziemann, *Entstehung*, 89-92, 94, 98. Daniel Syrbe, “Reiternomaden des Schwarzmeerraums (Kutriguren und Utiguren) und byzantinische Diplomatie im 6. Jahrhundert”, *Acta Orientalia* 65/3 (2012): 291-316, 295-296.

⁸ See, Maenchen-Helfen, *Hunnen*, 264-266, 271, 274, 276, 278-281, 283-285, 299.

⁹ Menander, *History*, fr. 5. 1, 48. Walter Pohl, *Die Awaren. Ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa, 567-822 n. Chr.* (München: C.H. Beck, 1988), 19-20. Luttwak, *Grand Strategy*, 59-60. Syrbe, “Reiternomaden”, 292. Kardaras, *Avars* 20-21. See, *Agathias, The Histories*, tr. J. D. Frendo, CFHB, II A (Berlin /New York: Walter De Gruyter 1975): E, 14, 1, 149. *The History of Menander the Guardsman*, ed. and transl. Roger C. Blockley, ARCA: Classical and Medieval Texts 17 (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1985): fr. 5.1, 48. Syrbe, “Reiternomaden”, 292.

¹⁰ Procopius, *History of the Wars*, VII. 14. 32-33, 273-275: ...and he further agreed to give them all the assistance within his power while they were establishing themselves, and to pay them great sums of money, on condition that they should remain at peace with him thereafter and constantly block the way against the Huns, when these wished to overrun the Roman domain”. Curta, *Slavs*, 80-82, 331-332. Kardaras, *Byzantium and the Antes*, 44-45, with further literature.

¹¹ Procopius, *History of the Wars*, VIII, 5. 16, 93. See also, Procopius, *Anecdota*, II. 5-8, 133.

¹² Procopius, *History of the Wars*, VIII, 5. 22, 95. Romašov, *Bolgarskie plemena*, 209.

tribute that the empire used to pay to both tribes, being now under the Avar rule.¹³

The “divide and rule” policy of Justinian towards the two tribes took place in the 550’s. In 551 the emperor motivated an attack of the Utigurs on the Kutrigurs¹⁴ and also he paid the Kutrigurs in order to retreat from the Byzantine territory after attack.¹⁵ In 552 Justinian settled in Thrace 2.000 Kutrigurs with their families, who survived the Utiguric attack,¹⁶ causing the reaction of Sandilkh, leader of the Utigurs.¹⁷ In the winter 558/59 the Kutrigurs, led by Zabergan, and followed by Slavs, raided the Balkans as far as Constantinople and withdrew only upon promise that they be paid an annual tribute.¹⁸ After that, Justinian asked from Sandilkh, under the threat to interrupt the yearly payments and to conclude an alliance with the Kutrigurs, **to move against the latter. The circle of conflicts that followed, exhausted and destroyed the two peoples: “the scattered remnant of these Hunnic tribes has in fact been reduced to servitude in the lands of other peoples whose names they have assumed; ... And so since they were continually embroiled in internal troubles they no longer had any idea of attacking the domain of the Romans, indeed they sank into an almost total obscurity”.**¹⁹

In the late 550’s, Justinian had to handle a new power in the steppes, the Avars, who, defeated by the Turks between in 552 and 555, fled to Europe.²⁰ Relations between Byzantium and the Avars officially started in

¹³ See, Menander, *History*, fr. 12. 6, 138 and 12. 7, 142. Ibidem, 268, n. 161–162. Pohl, *Awaren*, 61–63. Ziemann, *Entstehung*, 101–102. Hrvoje Gračanin, “Avari, južna Panonija i pad Sirmija”, *Scrinia Slavonica* 9 (2009): 7–56. 9, Kardaras, *Avars*, 31–36.

¹⁴ Procopius, *History of the Wars*, VIII, 18. 18–24, 239–243. Mazal, *Justinian I*, 191. Ziemann, *Entstehung*, 98. Syrbe, *Reiternomaden*, 296.

¹⁵ Procopius, *History of the Wars*, VIII, 19. 3–5, 243, 245. Mazal, *Justinian I*, 191.

¹⁶ Procopius, *History of the Wars*, VIII, 19. 6–7, 245. Mazal, *Justinian I*, 191. Ziemann, *Entstehung*, 98.

¹⁷ Procopius, *History of the Wars*, VIII, 19. 8–22, 245–251. Mazal, *Justinian I*, 191. Ziemann, *Entstehung*, 98–99.

¹⁸ See, Agathias, *The Histories*, E, 11.6–23.8, 146–160. John Malalas, *Chronicle*, 18. 129, 421. John of Antiocheia, *History*, ed. Karol Müller, *Joannis Antiocheni Fragmenta*, *Fragmenta historicorum Graecorum* 4 (Paris, 1868), fr. 218, 622. Victor Tonennensis *Chronicle*, ed. Theodor Mommsen, *Victoris Episcopi Tonennensis Chronica* MGH, AA 11/1 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1894), 205 (560). Mazal, *Justinian I*, 192–193. Ziemann, *Entstehung*, 99–100. Luttwak, *Grand Strategy*, 93. Syrbe, “Reiternomaden”, 297–298.

¹⁹ Agathias, *The Histories*, E, 24.1–25.6, 160–162. John of Antiocheia, *History*, fr. 217, 621–622. Mazal, *Justinian I*, 193. Ziemann, *Entstehung*, 100–101. Syrbe, “Reiternomaden”, 298.

²⁰ Golden, *Introduction* 79. Luttwak, *Grand Strategy*, 97–98. Kardaras, *Avars*, 15–16.

January 558, when the Avars, at that time stationed in the steppe lands north of the Caucasus Mountains, dispatched their first embassy to Justinian. The head envoy of the Avars, a man named Kandikh, presented to Justinian the requests of “the greatest and most powerful of tribes, the invincible Avars”: land for settlement, annual tribute, and presents. He also promised that the Avars would fight the enemies of the empire. Justinian accepted the idea of a formal alliance and, as a confirmation, sent imperial gifts to the Avar khagan in the form of cords “worked with gold, couches, and silken garments.” However, he did not offer them land for settlement and an annual tribute, namely the status of *foederati* and dispatched a *spatharius* named Valentinus to the Avars in order to turn them against tribes who lived north of the Caucasus Mountains and the Black Sea.²¹ According to the words of the Avars at a later stage, the various annual presents from Constantinople (gold, silver and silken garments) were welcomed by the khagan, who “would not abandon his attempt to obtain gifts, under threats or through any other pressure at all”²².

The main goal of the emperor, was likely not to “utterly destroy the Avars,” as Menander notes, but to use them in the interest of the Byzantines. After their alliance with Justinian, the Avars succeeded in a short time to subdue several tribes/peoples, the Onogurs, the Zaloi (of Hunnic origin), the Sabirs, and the Eastern Antes, and to create for a while a new balance of power in the lands north of the Caucasus, actually replacing them as a “buffer zone” in the southern Russian and Ukrainian steppes.²³ However, the Avar sojourn in these lands was short. Despite the fact that a huge area was already under their rule, they moved in 562 to the Lower Danube and they settled to the northeast of that river. Their move may have been

²¹ Menander, *History*, fr. 5. 1–2, 48–52. *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, transl. Michael Whitby (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000): E 1, 255. *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284–813*, transl. Cyril Mango and Roger Scott (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997): 239–240. Victor Tonennensis *Chronicle*, 205 (erroneous date in 563). Walter Pohl, *Die Awaren*, 18–19, 46, 49, 180. Ziemann, *Entstehung*, 103–104. Luttwak, *Grand Strategy*, 59. Kardaras, *Avars*, 20, 34–37, where also further testimonies on the gifts of Justinian to the Avars as well as the *foederati* topic in the Byzantine-Avar relations.

²² Menander, *History*, fr. 25.2, 226. Pohl, *Awaren*, 73, 212–213.

²³ Menander, *History*, fr. 5. 2–3, 50. *Ibidem*, 253, 276, n. 23–24, 225. Pohl, *Awaren*, 18–19, 39–40. Ziemann, *Entstehung*, 104. Luttwak, *Grand Strategy*, 60. Georgi N. Nikolov, “Bulgars in Central Europe and along the Lower Danube in the early Middle Ages (4th–9th C.) according to written historical Sources,” in *The Nagyszentmiklos Gold Treasure*, ed. *Metodi Daskalov et al.* (Sofia: National Archaeological Institute with Museum – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 2017), 58–76, 66–67. Kardaras, *Avars*, 22.

caused by the threat of the Western Turks.²⁴ An Avar attack, mentioned by Theophanes as a raid of the “Huns” into Thrace, took place in that same year.²⁵

After their raid, the Avars sent envoys demanding settlement within the Empire, namely the status of federates (*foederati*). The envoys initially negotiated with the general Justin, who offered a part of Pannonia II, the land in which in 512 Emperor Anastasius I had settled the Heruls as federates. The Avars refused Justin's offer, as they wanted to settle in Scythia Minor. During those fruitless negotiations, the Avar envoy Kunimon told Justin that Balian's ultimate target was to cross the Danube and to fight against Byzantium. Justin sent the embassy to Constantinople and ordered the general Bonus to take measures for the defense of the Lower Danube, as the river was the “shield” against attacks on Balkan provinces and Constantinople. As clearly indicated by the negotiations of 562, the Avars regarded the Lower Danube as a possible area of settlement under the pretext of defending the Balkan provinces from attacks by other peoples. However, they in fact sought to bring under control the area of the Byzantine frontier and the Slavic tribes living in that area, as well as to use the pressure on that frontier in order to secure annual tribute from Byzantium.²⁶

Understanding the long-term goals of the Avars were if allowed to settle in Scythia Minor, Justinian rejected the Avar claims. Following the negotiations, the Avar envoys extended their stay in Constantinople in order to buy weapons and clothes. However, Justinian ordered Justin to confiscate the weapons that the envoys had bought, a decision that caused the displeasure of the Avars.²⁷ Justinian's rejection of the Avar request for settlement on imperial soil temporarily removed the Avar threat from the

²⁴ Karoly Czeglédy, “From East to West: The Age of Nomadic Migrations in Eurasia”, *AEMA* 3 (1983): 25–125. 39, 105, where a hypothesis about the possible Avar remnants in the north Caucasus area. Pohl, *Awaren*, 40, 43. Kardaras, *Avars*, 23.

²⁵ Theophanes Confessor, *Chronicle*, 347: In the same year Obaisipolis? was captured by the Huns ... In April Anastasioupolis in Thrace was also captured by the same Huns; Pohl, *Awaren*, 62. Wolfgang Liebeschuetz, “The Lower Danube Region under Pressure: From Valens to Heraclius”, in *East and West in Late Antiquity: Invasion, Settlement, Ethnogenesis and Conflicts of Religion*, ed. Wolfgang Liebeschuetz (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015): 425–464, 437. Kardaras, *Avars*, 23.

²⁶ Menander, *History*, fr. 5. 4, 50–52. Ibidem, 253–254, n. 26–29. Pohl, *Awaren*, 44–45. Mazal, *Justinian I*, 193–194. Ecaterina Lung, “Barbarian Envoys at Byzantium in the 6th Century”, *Hiperboreea Journal* 2/1 (2015), 35–52, 43. Alexandros Sarantis, “Military Encounters and Diplomatic Affairs in the North Balkans during the Reigns of Anastasius and Justinian”, in *War and Warfare in Late Antiquity*, ed. A. Sarantis and Neil Christie (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013): 759–808, 770, 774. Kardaras, *Avars*, 23–24.

²⁷ Menander, *History*, fr. 5. 4, 52. Pohl, *Awaren*, 45, 195. Lung, “Barbarian Envoys”, 45. Kardaras, *Avars*, 24.

Lower Danube. The Avars turned their interest to the West and in that same year (562), during a raid into Thuringia, they clashed for the first time with the Franks. The Avar attack on the West has been associated by W. Fritze with Justinian's foreign policy in Italy, as the king of Austrasia, Sigibert I had threatened the Byzantine possessions in the peninsula.²⁸ After their defeat in Thuringia, the Avars returned to the Lower Danube. Their activity in the next three years is unknown, as sources do not provide any information about them until the ascension of Justin II to the throne (November 14, 565).²⁹

After the victorious march of the Avars between 558 and 562, Constantinople had hopes about a powerful ally in order to protect its interests in the East European steppes. But their move in 562 created a split to the Justinianian system of alliances, which the emperor tried to cover by approaching the Western Turks. The rapprochement between the Byzantines and Khagan Sizabul (or Silzibul) is dated to 562/63, when the first envoys of the Turks showed up in Constantinople. 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 because of the frequent conflicts with Persia, the Byzantines wanted to secure access to Chinese silk via trade routes across the Turkic khaganate. Justinian's alliance with Sizabul was, according to Theophanes of Byzantium, the reason for which the Avar demands were rejected by Justin II after his accession to the throne in 565. From the rapprochement of the Byzantines with the Western Turks it is evident that the orientation of the empire to defend its interests in the East European steppes had turned towards Sizabul. The Avars, as enemies of the Western Turks, had no place in the geopolitical plans of Byzantium in that area.³⁰ Emperor Justin II developed even more the relations of Byzantium with the Turkic khaganate and many embassies

²⁸ See, Wolfgang Fritze, *Untersuchungen zur frühslawischen und frühfränkischen Geschichte bis ins 7. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1994): 73–74. Pohl, *Awaren*, 45–46. Kardaras, *Avars*, 24.

²⁹ Pohl, *Awaren*, 48. Kardaras, *Avars*, 24–25.

³⁰ Theophanes Byzantius, *Fragments*, ed. Karol Müller, *Theophanis Byzantii Fragmenta*, FHG 4 (Paris: A. Firmin-Didot, 1851): 2, 270. Theophanes Confessor, *Chronicle*, 351. Pohl, *Awaren*, 40–41. Stephanos Kordoses, “Byzantine-Turkic Relations and the wider Eurasian Alliances during the Perso-Byzantine Wars”, *International Journal of Eurasian Studies* (2011), 296–312, 298, who assumes that the first contact of the two sides is dated in 553 when, according to an inscription in Kul Tegin, the Byzantines (Purum) had sent a delegation on the occasion of the death of the Bou-min, the khagan of the Turks. Kardaras, *Avars*, 25–27.

between the two sides are recorded using the northern Silk Road.³¹

Justinian was another emperor who had to deal with the nomad “greed for gold”, The Byzantine gold was crucial for the survival and the internal coherence of the nomadic societies, as it was secured the loyalty to the khagan through the distribution of the prestige goods and the booty to his subjects (the so-called “prestige economy”). Apart from the tribute, various luxury goods entered took they for them mostly as gifts. The greed for gold or any profit from negotiations is often emphasized in the Byzantine sources as part of the negative image of the nomads, who used threats and tricks in order to impose their conditions. Agathias clearly describes the policy of Justinian towards the Kutrigurs and the Utigurs: “The barbarians were destroying one another whilst he without resorting to arms was, thanks to his brilliant diplomacy, the ultimate victor and was bound to profit whatever the outcome of the fighting”³². Menander Protector, describing the first Avar delegation, praises the policy of Justinian, who turned the Avars against Onogurs, Sabirs Huns, Zaloi and Antes: “This, in my view, was a very wise move, since whether the Avars prevailed or were defeated, both eventualities would be to the Romans’ advantage”³³.

We may conclude that Justinian followed a *Realpolitik* based on the “divide and rule” doctrine³⁴ which followed the traditions of the Byzantine policies towards the steppe nomads, but was also able to combine it with a more flexible establishment of alliances, as in the case of the Avars and the Turks, exploiting either the situation in the Ukrainian and south Russian steppes or the conflict between the Avars and the Turks. Even with heavy payments, Justinian managed to avoid long-term military operations on the Balkans and to turn with more safety his efforts both to the East and West until the end of his reign.

³¹ See, Menander, *History*, fr. 10. 1–3, 110–122. Ibidem, 262–263, n. 110, 126). Theophanes Byzantius, *Fragments*, 3, 270–271. Theophanes Confessor, *Chronicle*, 362. Czegledy, “Nomadic Migrations”, 106. Pohl, *Awaren*, 42–43, 179. Sören Stark, *Die Alturkenzeit in Mittel – und Zentralasien. Archäologische und historische Studien* (Wiesbaden: Dr. L. Reichert, 2008): 296–297. Luttwak, *Grand Strategy*, 97–100, 104. Kordoses, “Byzantine-Turkic Relations”, 296–298. Ekaterina Nechaeva, *Embassies – Negotiations – Gifts. Systems of East Roman Diplomacy in Late Antiquity* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2014), 136–140, 144–151. Kardaras, *Avars*, 26–27.

³² Agathias, *Histories*, E 25. 6, 162.

³³ Menander, *History*, fr. 5.2, 50. Syrbe, “Reiternomaden”, 292.

³⁴ That policy (*divide et impera*), along with other methods, is also noted by many scholars. See Ștefan-Ioan Cianga, “A structural realist approach to the context of Justinianic policy at the Danubian limes”, in *Identity and Dialogue in the Era of Globalization. History, Political Sciences, International Relations*, ed. Iulian Boldea and Cornel Sigmirean, 357–63 (Bucharest: Arhipleag XXI Press, 2019), 360–361.