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END OF ANTIQUITY AND
BEGINNING OF THE
EARLY MIDDLE AGES
(4TH – 8TH CENTURY)
IN TODAY'S SLOVAKIA
AND MACEDONIA¹

Introduction

The distance between Bratislava, the metropolis of the Slovak Republic, and Skopje, the capital city of Macedonia, is more than thousand kilometres. Despite this fact, I decided to compare both regions as they were developing in the period around the half of the first millennium AD. When considered within the most decisive development era of medieval Europe, both regions are interesting sample areas worth comparing. In spite of the distance between them, both regions can be seen as example samples which may serve to analyse not only distinguishing features but also similar aspects of the development. In my analysis I will refer to available archaeological and historical sources.

The Goths, the Huns and the Roman Empire (4th – 5th century)

In the second half of the 4th century, prior to the Migration Period, the whole area of Macedonia was a part of the Roman Empire, unlike today's Slovakia. Only a small part of today's Slovakia on the right bank of the Danube, where the small Roman military camp (Lat.: *castellum*)

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Gerulata² was located, was a part of the Roman Empire. On the contrary, the Germanic tribe of Quadi people, later known as the Suebi³, were settled to the north of the Danube and in western and central part of Slovakia. There are records on two forward-located Roman settlements in the above-mentioned area. These were a *castellum* in Iža⁴, which was the forefield of the legion's camp (Lat.: *castrum*) at Brigetio, and the supporting fortified point at Devín⁵.

At the beginning of the Migration Period, in 375, the Huns crossed the Volga, but before doing so they undertook they way to plunder the Middle East up to Antiochia. As a result, tribes of the Alans, Goths, Tervings and Taifals settled further to the west found themselves under pressure. Following these events, the Goths tried to move to the land of the Roman Empire beyond the Danube known as the Balkans.⁶ Only the Tervings succeeded in this attempt and in 376 concluded federation agreement (Lat.: *foedus*) with Rome with regard to the area of Thrace and Moesia. One year later, the Goths revolted against Roman officers for bad treatment and lack of food. Later on, the related Goths' tribe of the Greutungs and groups of Alans and Huns, who presumably separated from main military tribes of the above-mentioned nations, joined the rebels. After a bloody battle at Adrianopole in 378, during which the Romans lost around ten thousand legion soldiers and the Roman Emperor Valens (364-378), plundering and marches of the Goths and allied tribes spread to almost whole eastern region of the Balkans. The Morava and Axios valley, and hence the area of today's Macedonia, were affected too.⁷ Eventually, on 3 October 395 the Roman Emperor Theodosius I (379-395) concluded peace

² Katarína Harmadyová, Ján Rajtár, and Jaroslava Schmidtová, "Slovakia. Frontiers of the Roman Empire," in *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, ed. David J. Breeze, Sonja Jilek, and Andreas Thiel (Nitra: Archeologický ústav SAV/Institute of Archaeology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and Múzeum mesta Bratislavy/Bratislava City Museum, 2008), 58-71.

³ Ján Beljak et al., "Osídlenie juhu stredného Slovenska v dobe rímskej," in *Archeológia na prahu histórie. K životnému jubileu Karola Pietu*, ed. Gertrúda Březinová and Vladimír Varsík (Nitra: Archeologický ústav SAV/Institute of Archaeology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, 2012), 44, Fig. 5; 6: 4.

⁴ Harmadyová, Rajtár, and Schmidtová, "Slovakia. Frontiers," 72-81.

⁵ Harmadyová, Rajtár, and Schmidtová, "Slovakia. Frontiers," 52-57. Veronika Plachá and Jana Hlavicová. *Devín. Slávny Svedok našej minulosti* (Bratislava: Perfekt, 2003), 22, 23.

⁶ Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire. A New History* (London: Pan Books, 2005), 145.

⁷ The Tervings, a tribe of Goths, led by Fritigern took the march through the Morava and Axios valley in 380AD. Heather, *The Fall of The Roman*, 183, 184.

treaty with the majority of the Goths who were subsequently given the region between the Danube and Balkan mountains.⁸

The destiny of another Goths' group lead by chieftains Alatheus and Saphrax⁹ might be related to the area of today's Slovakia. Supported by separated groups of the Alans and Huns, this group violently marched in the Roman territory in 376 and together with the Tervings joined the battle at Adrianople two years later. In 380 the Emperor Gratian (375-383) offered the group settlements in Pannonia after their campaign into the province together with federation agreement.¹⁰ This fact can be relatively well proved by archaeologically documented presence of the stated *foederati* alongside the ruined yet still persisting Danube *limes* of Pannonia and alongside the so called Amber Road leading to the north and, hence, through the area of today's Slovakia as well.¹¹

According to the current state of archaeological and historical research it is assumed that the centre of the Huns's power moved to the area of Carpathian Basin between the 4th century and 20's of the 5th century¹². The later reign of Attila (435-453)¹³ over Germanic and Indo-Iranian tribes of the given area demonstrated itself in Slovakia in a positive way. There were findings of luxury objects¹⁴ and parts of a tribute which was paid by

⁸ Michael Kulikowski, *Rome's Gothic Wars. From the Third Century to Alaric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 152, 153. Walter Pohl, *Die Völkerwanderung. Eroberung und Intergration. Zweite, erweiterte Auflage* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2005), 51.

⁹ These chieftains were ruling instead of infant Gothic King Vithericus/Vandalarius and the first mentioned chieftain was Greutung. Pohl, *Die Völkerwanderung. Eroberung*, 51.

¹⁰ Iordanes, "De origine actusque Getarum 27; 140, 141," in *Iordanis Romana et Getica*, ed. Theodorvs Mommsen, (Berolini: Societas Aperiendis Fontibus Rerum Germanicarum Medii Aevi, 1882), 95.

¹¹ These were predominantly findings of eastern origin such as wheel-shaped pottery with polished decoration, Huns' cast cauldrons, three-bladed arrowheads, bone support of reflex bows or bones of mongoloid individuals. These artefacts were found alongside the Danube *limes* in originally Roman civil as well as military settlements in the region of today's Hungary, Austria and Slovakia, and within individual points of the so called Amber Road (Bratislava-Devín, Drslavice, Stráže etc.). Jaroslav Tejral, "Das Attilareich und die germanischen gentes im Mitteldonaunraum," in *Attila und die Hunnen. Begleitung zur Ausstellung*, ed. Bodo Anke and Heike Externbrink (Stuttgart: Historisches Museum der Pfalz and Konrad Theiss Verlag GmbH, 2007), 108.

¹² Heather, *The Fall of the Roman*, 203. Tejral, "Das Attilareich und die germanischen," 109.

¹³ Attila ruled together with his brother Bleda until 445. Pohl, *Die Völkerwanderung. Eroberung*, 111.

¹⁴ These constitute more or less to the material content of the Middle-Danube group "Untersiebenbrunn", a group of splendid graves dated back to the first quarter of the 5th century until the end of Attila's reign. It was a combination of Germanic, Ancient-Mediterranean as well as Alanian-Sarmatian elements from the Black Sea region and the circle of Bosphorus cities and North Caucasian foothills. For instance, there were big silver brooches with semi-circular head found in women's graves. In men's graves we may find

the Eastern Roman Empire.¹⁵ Another obvious proof hereof is the density of settlement in lower Hron region, alongside rivers Žitava and Nitra as well as in the middle and lower Váh region.¹⁶

The above-mentioned stabilisation of relations in the region of the Middle Danube had an opposite effect on the region of today's Macedonia. In 447 Attila began his second invasion beyond the Danube to the Eastern Roman Empire. Although he did not manage to conquer Constantinople during this invasion, he and his troops reached the southernmost territories up to Greek Thermopylae.¹⁷ It is assumed that 70 ancient cities in Balkan region were destroyed through this campaign. Destruction levels reveal that the campaigns did not leave the capital city of the Roman province Macedonia Secunda/Salutaris, Stobi untouched¹⁸. The same destiny could

sword handles lined with golden metal sheet with shielding crossbars or buckles decorated by cloisonné enamel technique. Tejral, "Das Attilareich und die germanischen," 107-113.

¹⁵ In connection to the above-stated we must mention, for instance, the hoard of 1439 solidi of Valentinian II (375-392) and Theodosius II (408-450) from Hungarian location Hódmezővásárhely-Szikáncs, or the hoard of 108 solidi of Valentinian III (425-455). Tejral, "Das Attilareich und die germanischen," 110-112.

¹⁶ Local Suebi people presumably moved to caves and refuge shelters in mountainous parts of western and central Slovakia at the end of unstable 4th century. From here they crossed the Rhine on New Year's Eve (?) 406 and raided Gallia. During the period of the Huns' domination the situation was first stabilised and the settlement in southern parts of Slovakia became dense again and reached its peak in the half of the 5th century. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman*, 194, 195. Karol Pieta and Matej Ruttkay, "Germanische Siedlung aus dem 4. und 5. Jh. in Nitra-Párovské Háje und Probleme der Siedlungskontinuität," in *Neue Beiträge zur Erforschung der Spätantike im mittleren Donauraum*, ed. Jaroslav Tejral, Herwig Friesinger, and Michel Kazanski (Brno: Archäologisches Institut der Akademie der Wissenschaften der Tschechischen Republik in Brno, 1997), 150, 151. Pohl, *Die Völkerwanderung. Eroberung*, s. 73.

¹⁷ Attila's appeal to the Western Roman Empire was his driving force. He requested the increase of tribute and return of deserters. He made good use of latest earthquakes in Anatolia and Constantinople. The earthquake in Constantinople of 27 January 447 ruined parts of city fortification including 57 towers which were reconstructed not earlier than within the following three months. During their invasive movements the Huns and their allied tribes, among which the king of the Gepids Ardaric and king of the Goths Valamir managed to conquer the Roman army in Dacia Ripensis and to conquer Marcianopolis. Right after this success they passed the bank of the Black Sea and from the Thracian Lowland set out to reach the Aegean coastline of today's Greece. Nic Fields, *The Hun. Scourge of God AD 375-565* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2006), 15. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman*, 309-312, map no. 11. J. Otto Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns. Studies in Their History and Culture* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1973), 119-125. Pohl, *Die Völkerwanderung. Eroberung*, 110, 111.

¹⁸ This was proved by the archaeological material from the above-mentioned layer which among other things revealed coins of the Emperor Theodosius II (408-450) and Valentinian III (425-455), the Huns' three-bladed arrowheads and bone linings of bows. Jelena Jarić, "The Barbarian Incursions on Macedonia in the Early Middle Ages: Defining Chronology,

be assumed for Scupi (today's Skopje)¹⁹ which was the capital city of the late-Roman province Dardania.

The next historical episode which influenced both areas under analysis was the move and following settlement of the Pannonia Ostrogoths in the Balkans after the termination of the Huns' power in the Middle Danube region in 454. Though prior to this move, the king Thiudimer shattered the kingdom of the Skirs (469) and the Sarmatians (472) between rivers Danube and Tisza and even managed to shatter the kingdom of the Suebi in winter 469/470, which was spreading in the north-western part of the Carpathian Basin, i.e. in the area of today's Slovakia too.²⁰ These events came after a battle between the coalition of the Suebi, Sarmatians, Skirs, Gepids, Rugi and Ostrogoths in 469, which ended with the loss of the coalition.

Although the Ostrogoths received 300 pounds of gold²¹ from the Eastern Roman Emperor Leon I (457-474) since 459, the poor Pannonia did not seem to be a region worth any further influence. Hence, the king Thiudimer and his son, the associated king Theodoric²², decided to look for a better place for their people which would have been located in wealthier regions of the Western Roman Balkans where they stayed between 473 and 488/489²³ until the Emperor Zeno (474-491) redirected them to Italy.²⁴

Geography and Factors," *Macedonian Historical Review* 1 (2010): 50. Jelena Jarić, "The Barbarians and the Big Cities: Destruction, Renewal and Transformation of the urban settlements in Macedonia during the Early Middle Ages," *Macedonian Historical Review* 2 (2011): 34, 42.

¹⁹ An unusual group of 10 men's graves was found on a cemetery in the eastern part of the city. The buried men were originally wearing brooches with bulbous heads fixed to their cloths. These brooches are dated back to the second half of the 4th century and constituted an important military or clerical insignia which was a sign of an exceptional status of a person wearing it. Researchers identified these men as Germanic *foederati* who originally lived in the city of Scupi. It shall as well be noted that the construction works in the ancient city of Scupi during the unstable 5th century were considerably reduced if compared with the previous period. Jarić, "The Barbarian Incursions," 51. Jarić, "The Barbarians and the Big," 40, 42.

²⁰ Gabriel Fusek and Jozef Zábojník, "Príspevok do diskusie o počiatkoch slovanského osídlenia Slovenska," *Slovenská archeológia* 51 (2003): 327.

²¹ Attila, for instance, was receiving 2,100 pounds of gold since 447 according to an agreement with Theodosius II. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 124. Pohl, *Die Völkerwanderung. Eroberung*, 129.

²² They originated from royal family of the Amals. Peter Bystrický, *Sťahovanie národov (454 – 568). Ostrogóti, Gepidi, Longobardi a Slovania* (Bratislava: PRO HISTORIA, 2008), 35.

²³ Along with the Pannonia Ostrogoths, there was another group of more or less undirected Gothic *foederati* located in the Thracian Lowland until the 60's of the 5th century, until the death of their leader and magister militum Theodoric Strabo. After Theodoric Strabo's death in 481 this group joined the Amal Goths of Theodoric, who originated from Pannonia.

While passing through the valley of Morava and Axios as well as the Via Egnatia route they again affected ancient cities in the region of today's Macedonia, i.e. Stobi²⁵ and Heraclea Lyncestis (today's Bitola)²⁶.

Arrival of the Slavs (6th century)

The 6th century arrival and settlement of the Slavs is a common element of both territories subject to my analysis. With regard to Slovakia, the presence of the Slavs, more precisely the Sclavenes²⁷, can surely be dated back to the first half of the 6th century.²⁸ This earliest settlement was concentrated on fertile soils of lowlands, predominantly in the Middle and the Lower Váh regions. The settlers naturally avoided the last Germanic Suebi and Lombards or, in other words, there was a distance kept between the stated Germanic and Slavonic settlements. The Lombards were actually

Together they acted as even bigger danger for the Eastern Roman Emperor Zeno. Mark Humphries, "Italy, A. D. 425-605 (Chapter 19)," in *The Cambridge Ancient History. Volume XIV. Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors, A. D. 425-600*, ed. Averil Cameron, Bryan Ward-Perkins, and Michael Whitby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 529, 530. Pohl, *Die Völkerwanderung. Eroberung*, 129-133. Michael Whitby, "The Balkans and Greece 420-602 (Chapter 23)," in *The Cambridge Ancient History. Volume XIV. Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors, A. D. 425-600*, ed. Averil Cameron, Bryan Ward-Perkins, and Michael Whitby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 712-714.

²⁴ The aforementioned united Goths led by Theodoric spent winter in Pannonia and on 28 August 489 defeated for the first time the troops of Odoacer at the river Isontius. Out of 100,000 travelling Goths, 25,000 to 30,000 armed men might have marched to Italy from the Balkans. Pohl, *Die Völkerwanderung. Eroberung*, 132, 133. Whitby, "The Balkans and Greece," 712, 713.

²⁵ According to written sources, Stobi was raided twice during their invasive action, i.e. in 473 and 479. JARIĆ, Jelena. *The Barbarians and the Big*, s. 34. Ivan Mikulčić, *Stobi – antički grad (Stobi – an ancient city)* (Skopje: Magor, 2003), 103, 104.

²⁶ Roman historian Malchos most likely documented the burnout of the city of Heraclea Lyncestis in 479 by the Goths led by Theodoric. According to this historian, when the Goths arrived, they found the city and its surrounding untouched. The city bishop provided them with numerous gifts and supplies. However, when leaving the area, the Goths requested great supplies of corn and wine for their journey to Dyrrachium. Local citizens refused to fulfil such requirement, left the city and fled to a nearby standing fortress. Before leaving the area, the Goths could only burn Heraclea out. Jarić, "The Barbarians and the Big," 35. Malchos, "Fragmenta 20; 35-42, 94-100," in *The fragmentary classicising historians of the Later Roman Empire. Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchos. Volume II. Text, Translation and Historical Notes*, ed. R. C. Blockley (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1983), 436-439, 440, 441. Whitby, "The Balkans and Greece," 713, 714.

²⁷ They occur in various sources in Latin form as the Sclaveni or in Greek form as the Sklavenoi. Fusek and Zábajník, "Príspevok do diskusie/Contribution to discussion," 329.

²⁸ The earliest possible period of colonisation to Slovakia through Carpathian passes can, however, be considered the beginning of the 70's of the 5th century. Fusek and Zábajník, "Príspevok do diskusie/Contribution to discussion," 327, 329. Jozef Zábajník, "Problematika včasného stredoveku na Slovensku," *Historický časopis* 58 (2010): 223.

located to the south of the Danube (cemetery Rusovce) or concentrated in a part of the land beyond the Little Carpathians (cemetery Devínske Jazero and Zohor), and Suebi²⁹ stayed concentrated to the south of the Slavonic settlements (cemetery Gáň), i.e. in brown-soil territories (cemetery Tesárske Mlyňany)³⁰ or in higher altitudes (hill-fort Kostol'any pod Tríbečom-Veľký Lysec and Rybník nad Hronom-Krivín)³¹.

In the 6th century, the Balkans³² including the territory of today's Macedonia became an invaded region and the place where various ethnic

²⁹ Their persisting presence in the territory of today's Slovakia could be proved by Cassiodorus' statement that the King of the Ostrogoths exempted people of the Venetian province from taxes related to years 536 and 537 as the Suebi rushed in here. Cassiodorus, "Epistvlae Theodericianae Variiae 12, 7," in *Cassiodori Senatoris Variiae*, ed. Theodorvs Mommsen (Berolini: Societas Aperiendis Fontibvs Rervm Germanicarvm Medii Aevi, 1894), 365, 366. Cassiodorus, "Epistvlae Theodericianae Variiae 12, 7," in *The Letters of Cassiodorus being a condensed translation of the Variiae Epistolae of Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator*, ed. Thomas Hodgkin (London: Henry Frowde, 1886), 495.

³⁰ There was a Roman coin, copper minimus (3-nummia) of Justin I (518-522) or Justinian I (527-565) found in the cemetery in a secondary damaged grave no. 66. This helped to date the cemetery back to the first half of the 6th century. An important finding was that the coin was found in an undamaged part of the grave, i.e. near the left foot. Matej Ruttkay, "Das völkerwanderungszeitliche Gräberfeld in Tesárske Mlyňany, Bez. Zlaté Moravce," in *Barbaren in Wandel. Beiträge zur Kultur Identitätsbildung in der Völkerwanderungszeit. Spisy Archeologického ústavu AV ČR Brno 26*, ed. Jaroslav Tejral (Brno: Archäologisches Institut der Akademie der Wissenschaften der Tschechischen Republik in Brno, 2007), 335, 336.

³¹ Gabriel Fusek and Jozef Zábojník, "Frühslawisches Siedlungsobjekt aus Suchohrad. Zur Problematik der langobardisch-slawischen Beziehungen," in *Archeológia Barbarov 2009: Hospodárstvo Germánov. Sídľiskové a ekonomické štruktúry od neskorej doby laténskej po časný stredovek*, ed. Ján Beljak, Gertrúda Březinová, and Vladimír Varsík (Nitra: Archeologický ústav SAV/Institute of Archaeology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, 2010), 174, 174. Ruttkay, "Das völkerwanderungszeitliche Gräberfeld," 336. Zábojník, "Problematika včasného," 220, 221.

³² As regards regeneration abilities of the ancient Balkans, although we can confirm that its northern part was ruined and abandoned after the Huns' invasions of 441/2 and 447, as can be stated according to fragments of the Priskos' work, archaeological findings as well as Prokopius in the document entitled *De aedificiis* prove that these territories were newly settled and became prosperous. Walter Pohl, "Transformation oder Bruch? Beobachtungen zur Rolle der Barbaren beim ‚Fall Roms‘," in *Altertumskunde - Altertumswissenschaft - Kulturwissenschaft: Erträge und Perspektiven nach 40 Jahren Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, ed. Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich, and Heiko Steuer (Berlin; Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 584. Priscus, "Fragmenta 11, 2," in *The fragmentary classicising historians of the Later Roman Empire. Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus. Volume II. Text, Translation and Historical Notes*, ed. R. C. Blockley (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1983), 246-279. Procopius, "De Aedificiis," in *Procopius. Buildings, General index to Procopius. Volume VII. Procopius in seven volumes*, ed. H. B. Dewing and Glanville Downey [London; Cambridge (Massachusetts, USA): William Heinemann Ltd; Harvard University Press, 1954].

groups originating from territories beyond the Danube borders of the Eastern Roman Empire settled. Among others, this referred to the Slavs as well, who started invading the Balkans since the first half of the 6th century to plunder³³, while their activity gained on intensity during repeated invasions of the western part of the Roman Empire by Justinian I.³⁴ Furthermore, it is known that the Kutrigurs' invasion to Illyricum in 539-540 was archaeologically proved in the territory of today's Macedonia through numismatic material.³⁵ During this time period the Mediterranean world, mainly its western part, suffered from natural disasters³⁶ which had a negative effect on its development even before the Slavs started settling in the Roman part of the Balkans. With respect to Barbarian invasions, the Emperor Justinian I commenced fortification³⁷ and building activity in the

³³ Prokopius in the work entitled *Historia Arcana* stated that the Huns (Proto-Bulgarians), Scлавenes and Antes (Latin Antae, Greek Antai), almost every year after Justinian I (527-565) succeeded his throne, penetrated in the suburbs of Constantinople, Greece or to Thracian Chersonese (today's Gallipoli peninsula). Procopius, "Historia arcana 18," in *Procopius. Volumen III. Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, ed. Guilielmi Dindorf (Bonnae: Ed. Weber, 1838), 108. Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth. Eastern Europe, 500-1453* (New York; Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 44.

³⁴ Due to Justinian's invasions to the west from 533 to 555 even the presence of military forces in the Danube limes of the empire was reduced. Jarić, "The Barbarian Incursions," 53. Zbigniew Kobylinski, "The Slavs. The seventh century. Part II," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History. Volume I: c. 500-c. 700*, ed. Paul Fouracre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 536.

³⁵ According to Prokopius and his document *De aedificiis*, Thessaloniki remained unconquered although the walls of Kassandreia located in the Chalkidiki peninsula were almost completely destroyed. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, 46. Procopius, "De Aedificiis IV; 3; 21-27," 244-247. Aikaterini Christophilopoulou, "Political history. Late 3rd-6th Centuries. The First Christian Years," in *Macedonia. 4000 years of Greek history and civilization*, ed. Michael B. Sakellariou (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon S. A., 1994), 229. Jarić, "The Barbarian Incursions," 54.

³⁶ This was mainly the bubonic plague of 541-544 which might have occurred in India or Eastern Africa. Until spring 542 it spread to majority of ports of the eastern Mediterranean region, among others to Alexandria, Antiochea and Constantinople. In Constantinople even the Emperor Justinian I got infected and together with him, supposedly, one half of its citizens, i.e. around 230,000 people. By the end of the year the bubonic plague spread to whole East including Africa and Dalmatia and possibly even to Italy. Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil, *Crisis Management in Late Antiquity (410-590 CE). A Survey Evidence from Episcopal Letters* (Leiden; Boston: Brill 2013), 85, 86. Pohl, "Transformation oder Bruch?," 585. Warren Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 196-207.

³⁷ At the end of the 5th and in the 6th century around 400 fortifications were built or reconstructed in the territory of today's Macedonia. Jarić, "The Barbarian Incursions," 53, 56, footnote. no. 47.

Balkans to prepare better for these invasions and to carry out administration activities³⁸.

Another common breakpoint for the study of the territory in question, this time with respect to the second half of the 6th century, seems to be the Avars'³⁹ arrival to the Low and later to Middle Danube region. Between 558/559 to 567⁴⁰ the Avars were still federation territories of the Eastern Roman Empire in the area around the Black Sea and the Low Danube region, however, after Justin II (565-578) refused the payment of fees, they joined the Lombards in a battle against the Gepids who were partly supported by Constantinople.⁴¹ Having defeated the Gepids, the Avars started to move to their territory in the Tisza region and took over Pannonia after the Lombards left for Italy in 568. Here in their new land in the Middle Danube area they came into contact with the already settled Slavs. They started with integration of the Slavs into their khaganate or subjected them to a different form of administration. The Slavs in the territory of today's Slovakia were no longer directly subjected to the khaganate territory until the half of the 7th century, except for some exceptional cases.⁴²

³⁸ The city of Justiniana Prima was built for administrative purposes within 10 years after the death of Theodoric, the King of the Ostrogoths in Ravenna. The city was located on a higher platform, nowadays called Caričin Grad, located 7 km away from Lebana in today's Serbia, between former cities of Naissus (today's Niš) and Scupi (today's Skopje). It was a fortified city with a citadel and it was built on the area of around 5 ha. We would find here Episcopal complex as well as a palace of the prefect of whole Illyricum. The city was presumably the birthplace of Justinian I. It was here where the emperor moved the prefecture seat of Illyricum from Thessaloniki and the archbishop's seat from Scupi too. Peter Heather, *The Restoration of Rome. The Barbarian Popes and Imperial Pretenders* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Aikaterini Christophilopoulou, "Political, economic and social development. From the sixth to the ninth century," in *Macedonia. 4000 years of Greek history and civilization*, ed. Michael B. Sakellariou (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon S. A., 1994), 258. Jarić, "The Barbarian Incursions," 51. Jarić, "The Barbarians and the Big," 40.

³⁹ It was rather a Turkish-Tatar-Mongolian union of Nomadic tribes with the fundamental core consisting of the Avar tribe itself. Jarmila Bednaříková, Aleš Homola, and Zdeněk Měřinský, *Stěhování národů a východ Evropy. Byzanc, Slované, Arabové* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2006), 42.

⁴⁰ Walter Pohl, *Die Awaren. Ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa 567 - 822 n. Chr.* (München: C.H.Beck, 1988), 496.

⁴¹ In 567 the Emperor Justin II tried to persuade the Lombards and Avars about his neutral standpoint, at the same time though he carried on supporting the Gepids. István Bóna, *The dawn of the dark ages. The Gepids and the Lombards in the Carpathian Basin* (Budapest: Corvina Press, 1976), 96.

⁴² We may assume that only the findings from the end of the Early Period of the Avar Khaganate, which were found in two cemeteries around the city of Komárno, cemetery in Holiary and within sacrificial finding (so called Opferfund) from Devínska Nová Ves-

The conflict between the Eastern Roman Empire and its new neighbour⁴³ in the area of the Middle Danube, the Avar Khaganate, reached its peak in the 70's and the 80's of the 6th century. Along with this conflict and within this conflict there were common invasions of the Slavs and Avars to the Balkans including the territory of today's Macedonia. Yet during the Avars' siege of Sirmium (579-582) in 581 the Slavs stormed into the Balkans again and seized control over Thrace, surrounding areas of Thessaloniki and even Greece where, according to John of Ephesus, they had already settled and did not leave the area even three years after the above-mentioned invasion.⁴⁴ In 584 the Avars managed to conquer Singidunum and two years later besieged Thessaloniki⁴⁵ again. The siege concerned the raids to the provinces of Dardania, Macedonia Prima, Macedonia Secunda which were related to today's Macedonia. As a result, destruction levels occurred in the city of Heraclea Lyncestis, Bargala, Stobi⁴⁶ as well as inside the city in the location called Markovi Kuli⁴⁷ or in two forts near Prilep⁴⁸.

The fierce 7th century

The Emperor Maurikios (582-602) temporarily changed the situation, but not earlier than in the 90's of the 6th century after the Roman territories in Italy were stabilised and peace was concluded with Persia

Vlašičovo pole, can be dated back to this period. These were indeed only two Avar forefields not far from the Danube which were used to secure military control over the area above the Danube. Jozef Zábajník, "Das awarische Kaganat und die Slawen an seiner nördlichen Peripherie (Probleme der archäologischen Abrenzung)," *Slovenská archeológia* 47 (1999): 156-158, Karte 2.

⁴³ Having beaten the Eastern Roman comes excubitorum Tiberius, the Avars received from Constantinople 80,000 solids a year since winter 574/575. Pohl, *Die Awaren. Ein Steppenvolk*, 497.

⁴⁴ John of Ephesus, "Ecclesiastical History, VI, 25," in *The Third Part of the Ecclesiastical History of John Bishop of Ephesus*, ed. R. Payne Smith (Oxford: The University Press, 1860), 432, 433. John V. A. Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans. A critical Survey from the Sixth to the Late Twelfth Century* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1991), 31. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, 51.

⁴⁵ Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, 51.

⁴⁶ Jarić, "The Barbarian Incursions," 56. Jarić, "The Barbarians and the Big," 34-36, 38, 39, 41, 42.

⁴⁷ The city might have been established around the end of the 5th or in the 6th century on the hill called Vodno, close to the city of Scopi. At the same time, it was enriched by a strong fortification. Both cities existed side by side, but after devastating earthquake in 518 which affected the city of Scopi the central elements of urban life moved to this city. Its settlement ceased to exist around the 7th century, though new inhabitants arrived to the city in the 10th century. Jarić, "The Barbarians and the Big," 40-42.

⁴⁸ Jarić, "The Barbarian Incursions," 56.

(591). At the same time, he could detach numerous units to the Balkans including newly recruited Armenians, and start a counterattack against the Avars' khagan as well as the Slavs. He regained Singidunum and Sirmium and managed to recreate the Danube border of the empire in 600 although he had to increase the tribute to the Avars.⁴⁹ In 601 the Emperor's units run to Carpathian Basin. Commander Priscus in charge of four thousand soldiers even sent a unit of Roman army to the land beyond Tisza. Eventually, the Avars, the Gepidi and the Sclavenes⁵⁰ were defeated there. At the end, the revolt of Maurikios' soldiers finally ended his active policy, while he himself ordered the soldiers to spend winter beyond the Danube and after the revolt their commander Fokas (602-610) was appointed as a new emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire.⁵¹

Together with the last Roman forts at the Danube the border of the empire was torn down in 614 and again in 615 under the pressure of the Slavs. The Slavs began their permanent settlement in the Balkans since then.⁵² Around Thessaloniki, for instance, the Slavs besieging Thessaloniki in 616 and 618 settled there.⁵³ Regarding the siege of 616, some Slavonic tribes were mentioned in *Miracles of St. Demetrius*, i.e. the tribes which took part in the siege, namely the Draguvites, Sagudates, Velegezites, Vajonites and Verzites.⁵⁴ These were surely the tribes outside territory who

⁴⁹ Fine, *The Early Medieval*, 32, 33. Jarić, "The Barbarian Incursions," 57. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, 52.

⁵⁰ Theophylact Simocatta, "Historiae VIII, 3," in *Theophylacti Simocattae Historiarum*, ed. Immanuel Bekkerus (Bonnae: Ed. Weber, 1834), 317-319.

⁵¹ Fine, *The Early Medieval*, 33. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, 52.

⁵² Martin Hurbanič, *Posledná vojna antiky. Avarský útok na Konštantínopol roku 626 v historických súvislostiach* (Prešov: Vydavateľstvo Michala Vaška: 2009), 79.

⁵³ Hurbanič, *Posledná vojna*, 84, 85. Prior to surrounding Thessaloniki in 618, the Slavs offered alliance to the khagan of the Avars. This is a sign that they were politically independent of him. Michel Kazanski, "Barbarian Military Equipment and its Evolution in the Late Roman and Great Migration Periods (3rd-5th c. A. D.)," in *War and Warfare in Late Antiquity: Current Perspectives*, ed. Alexander Sarantis and Neil Christie (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013), 516. According to *Miracles of St. Demetrius*, even the Slavs, Bulgarians and other nations took part in the siege of Thessaloniki in 618. "Miracula Sancti Demetrii, 198," in *Pramene k vojenským dejinám Slovenska I/1. Od najstarších čias do konca 10. storočia*, ed. Vladimír Segeš and Božena Šed'ová (Bratislava: Vojenský historický ústav/Institute of Military History, 2010), 154. The destruction level of the ancient city of Bargala in today's Macedonia may be related to the last mentioned siege of Thessaloniki. Jarić, "The Barbarians and the Big," 39.

⁵⁴ "Miracula Sancti Demetrii, 179," 151. Alexandar Atanasovski, "Vizantija i Slovenite od Makedonija vo VII vek," *Annuaire de L' Universite de Sofia "St. Kliment Ohridski". Centre de recherches slavo-byzantines "Ivan Dujčev"* 95 (14) (2005): 2. Florin Curta, "Barbarians in Dark-Age Greece: Slavs or Avars?," in *Civitas Divino-Humana. In honorem annorum LX Georgii Bakalov*, ed. Tsvetelin Stepanov and Veselina Vachkova (Sofia: TANGRA TanNakRa, 2004), 522. Hurbanič, *Posledná vojna*, 81. Aikaterini Christophilopoulou,

were directly controlled by the empire and who enjoyed an autonomous reign. In Eastern Roman and Byzantine sources such defined units were called in Greek *sklaveniai*⁵⁵.

Regarding both analysing territories during the 7th century, there are sources available which reveal chieftains or kings who were directly or indirectly leading the Slavonic tribes⁵⁶ either against the Avars and Franks or against the reign powers in Constantinople, or they cooperated with these neighbours. The presence of the Avar army in Thrace from 623 to 624⁵⁷ probably allowed the uprising of the Slavs in the territory of the Avar Khaganate at the same time. The Frankish merchant Samo became the leader of the rebels. Later on he ruled the Slavs in the region of the Middle Danube for 35 years as their king.⁵⁸ It could be stated that the rise of his kingdom matches the period of internal crisis of the Avar Khaganate.⁵⁹

“Political history. From the sixth to the ninth century,” in *Macedonia. 4000 years of Greek history and civilization*, ed. Michael B. Sakellariou (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon S. A., 1994), 252.

⁵⁵ The Eastern Roman and Byzantine Empire respected the above-mentioned settlements which were close to its borders as long as they did not intervene into their external policy and paid taxes – Greek *pakta*. Theodoros Korres, “IV. Byzantine Macedonia (324-1025),” in *The History of Macedonia*, ed. Ioannis Koliopoulos (Thessaloniki: Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, 2007), 92, 93.

⁵⁶ Considering the territory of Slovakia, no titles of individual Slavonic tribes remained from this period. As regards the territory of today’s Macedonia, one might be thinking of the Draguvites according to Eastern Roman or Byzantine written sources. They lived to the north of Thessaloniki. The Strymonites were settled in the river basin of Strymonia in Bregalnicka Basin, the Smolines were settled around the river Nestos, the Velegezites were located predominantly in Thessaly, the Vajonites had their seat in Epirus and the Verzites’ settlements were spreading around Ochrid and in western part of today’s Macedonia. Zvonko Beldedovski, “Najrani slovenski artefakti od bregalničkiot region,” in *Archeološkite otritija na počvata na Makedonija. Prilozi za istražuvañeto na istorijata na kulturata na počvata na Makedonija. Kniga 19*, ed. Vera Bitrakova-Grozdanova (Skopje: Makedonska akademija na naukite i umetnostite, 2008), 943.

⁵⁷ Hurbanič, *Posledná vojna*, 111.

⁵⁸ Fredegarius, “Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii Scholastici IV, 48,” in *Magnae Moraviae Fontes Historici. Prameny I. Annales et chronicae*, ed. Dagmar Bartoňková et al. (Brno: Ústav klasických studií and Ústav archeologie a muzeologie, Masarykova univerzita v Brně/Institute of Classical Studies and Institute of Archaeology and Museology of Masaryk University in Brno, 2008), 16, 17. Ján Steinhübel, *Nitrianske kniežatstvo. Rozprávanie o dejinách nášho územia a okolitých krajín od sťahovania národov do začiatku 12. storočia* (Bratislava: Veda; Rak, 2004), 31. Along with the theory of Samo’s “reigning” (as a king) between 623-658 a discussion can be established concerning years 626-661 since the opportunity to establish such politically independent unit came not earlier than after unsuccessful siege of Constantinople by the Avars and to them subjected tribes in 626. Bednaříková, Homola, and Měřinský, *Stěhování národů*, 50.

⁵⁹ Apart from the the uprising of the Slavs, an unsuccessful invasion to Constantinople by the Avars (together with the Slavs, the Bulgarians and the Gepids) in 626 can be considered

Although borders of that kingdom, or the Samo's tribal union, cannot be precisely reconstructed, the main role in its establishment must have been played by the contact area between the Slavs and the Avar Khaganate to which the Southern Moravia, Lower Austria and a part of south-eastern Slovakia belonged.⁶⁰

During the 7th century the way in which the Slavs acted against the Eastern Roman and Byzantine Empire was not as decisive and common as it seems in case of the Middle Danube Slavs. Their relation to the empire had different forms which now become obvious thanks to *Miracles of St. Demetrius*, such as the last attempt to conquer Thessaloniki in 676-677 by Slavs. Some Perbund, the chieftain of the Rynchines located between the lake Bolbe and Strymonian Gulf was accused of plotting against Thessaloniki by a city prefect who arrested him and sent him chained to Constantinople which, at the same time, was being besieged by an Arab fleet in 674-678. Since he spoke Greek fluently, was wearing Byzantine-style cloths and lived in Thessaloniki rather than among his fellows and established a number of contacts with important citizens of the city, not only the Slavonic Strymonites and Rynchines but the citizens of Thessaloniki as well asked the Emperor Constantine IV (668-685) for his release. The emperor released him under condition that he would stay in the city until the end of the Arab siege. Perbund fled from the city and was finally killed what caused a two-years-long blockade and plundering of Thessaloniki's surroundings by the Rynchines, Strymonites and Sagudates. However, feeling endangered and for starvation a lot of city inhabitants fled to the Slavonic Velegezites in Thessaly which provided the city with corn and legumes by sea. Finally, three Slavonic tribes did not succeed in besieging the city even if they used siege engines and within the last three-days-long attack the siege was over (25 – 27 June 677)⁶¹. Despite this fact, the Rynchines and Strymonites remained pirates at Hellespont, though after

here as well as the struggle between the Avars' and the Bulgarians' candidate for the position of the khagan in 630/631. Hurbanič, *Posledná vojna*, 131-234. Jozef Zábojník, *Slovensko a avarský kaganát* (Bratislava: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Komenského v Bratislave/Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava, 2009), 18.

⁶⁰ Zábojník, *Slovensko a avarský*, 19. Logically, to the Samo's tribal union belonged Bohemia and Moravia which was the place where clashes between Samo's army and the army of the King of the Franks Dagobert I (623-638/639) took place. Dervan's Polabian Serbs finally joined the aforementioned union in 631. Steinhübel, *Nitrianske kniežatstvo*, 31. Zábojník, *Slovensko a avarský*, 19.

⁶¹ Christophilopoulou, "Political history, From the sixth," 254, 255. Almeni Stavridou-Zafraka, *Byzantine Thessaloniki* (Thessaloniki), accessed April 22, 2014, http://www.lpth.gr/en/texts/Zafraka_en.pdf. Bohumila Zástěrová, "Zrod středověké Byzance," in *Dějiny Byzance*, ed. Bohumila Zástěrová et al. (Praha: Academia, 1992), 100, 101.

the Arab danger faded (678) the emperor sent an army to face their settlements and considered them rebelling subjects rather than external enemies.⁶²

Two worlds drifting apart (8th century)

Since the second half of the 7th and the 8th century, both territories under analysis began their gradual integration into neighbouring geographical and political units, concretely the Avar Khaganate and Byzantine Empire, or became a firm element of their foreign policy. The Avar power in the region of the Middle Danube during last ca 150 years was focused on the strengthening of its influence within the Carpathian Basin rather than on active influence far beyond its borders, as it was the case in the previous period. Byzantine historiography practically ceased to keep trace of Avar affairs. Western sources, mainly the Frankish sources, paid an intense attention to these affairs only in relation to the first Frank-Avar war (788-790) and an overall elimination of the Avar Khaganate (791-803/804). Within these unsettled times it should be noted that the khagan had to share a part of his power with three other high officials: jugur, tudun and kapkan.⁶³ Considering the archaeological outcomes it is obvious that a considerable part of southern Slovakia was included in the territory of the Avar Khaganate during its Middle and Late Period.⁶⁴

Since 80's of the 7th as well as the 8th century the Byzantine emperors focused on *sklaveniai* located in former territory of the empire, because they could be seized by Asparukh's Bulgarians who settled between the Danube and the Balkan Mountains since 681 where they

⁶² Christophilopoulou, "Political history, From the sixth," 255.

⁶³ Steinhübel, *Nitrianske kniežatstvo*, 43.

⁶⁴ In the Middle Period (second half of the 7th century) of the Avar Khaganate the khagan's territory was extended by the area of the Vienna Basin in north-western direction and by strips of land alongside the river Danube and Ipel' in Slovakia. Finally, in the Late Period of the Avar Khaganate (8th century), a wider territory in south-western and south-eastern Slovakia was occupied. In Austria the occupied territories were located to the north of the Danube and in southern part of Moravia up to the river Thaya. Alongside with the biggest enlargement of the khaganate territory in the Carpathian Basin, cast fittings of belt hardware sets or the so called yellow ceramics were produced as a part of material culture of the Avar ethnic substrate. Considering previous periods of the Avar Khaganate, i.e. the Early Period (568 – first half of the 7th century) and the Middle Period, typical for the khaganate territory were wrought fittings of belt hardware sets or the so called grey ceramics. Jozef Zábajník, "Soziale Problematik der Gräberfelder des nördlichen und nordwestlichen Randgebietes des awarischen Kaganats," *Slovenská archeológia* 43 (1995): 277-279. Zábajník, "Das awarische Kaganat," 158-163, Karte 4, 14. Zábajník, *Slovensko a avarský*, 42-47, 67-69, 74, 76, obr. 10-12, 35, 43.

already took over seven local Slavonic tribes.⁶⁵ Following their own objectives, the Byzantine rulers from the Emperor Constantine IV to the Empress Irena (797-802) were always trying to lead military campaigns into *sklaveniai*, suppress “rebellions” within these territories, impose taxes on the Slavs, move the inhabitants to Anatolia, or establish themes⁶⁶ in their territories. It is most unlikely that the last measure affected the region of today’s Macedonia within the period under analysis⁶⁷.

⁶⁵ Fine, *The Early Medieval*, 69.

⁶⁶ Themes became a part of a new administration system of the empire until the second half of the 7th century. All of them were usually led by a *strategos* who was the highest officer and commander in chief of the army located in this area. Individual members of the army were recruited from local inhabitants. Korres, “IV. Byzantine Macedonia,” 93. Warren Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army, 284-1081* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 21-23.

⁶⁷ Theme Helladikoi (since the end of the 7th century) and theme Makedonia (established between 789 and 802) were closest to the territory of today’s Macedonia. The first mentioned was surely located in northern part of today’s Greece and the second mentioned had its centre in Adrianople at the river Haimos. Fine, *The Early Medieval*, 71, 79, 80. Christophilopoulou, “Political, economic,” 258. Korres, “IV. Byzantine Macedonia,” 93.

Martin Husár

END OF ANTIQUITY AND BEGINNING OF THE EARLY MIDDLE
AGES (4TH – 8TH CENTURY) IN TODAY'S SLOVAKIA AND
MACEDONIA⁶⁸

– *s u m m a r y* –

The author of this paper has undertaken a comparison of regional development of today's Slovakia and Macedonia from the perspective of time period from the 4th to the 8th century. The analysis relies on archaeological and historical sources. In the late Roman period the whole area of today's Macedonia was located in the area of the Roman Empire. As regards Slovakia, only Roman military camp in Gerulata was a steady part of the empire. The every-day life in these areas was affected by the Goths and Huns at the end of the 4th century and in the course of the 5th century. The influence of the Slavs and Avars, on the other hand, was present there in the 6th century and during the first half of the 7th century. In the second half of the 7th century and during the 8th century both areas interacted to minimum extent and local Slavonic settlement was the only common feature.

⁶⁸ This article was written within the project KEGA no. 014UKF-4/2012.