



The Price of Empire? Justinian I's Use of Cash Subsidies in Foreign Policy, 527–565

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
School of History, Philosophy and Digital Humanities,
Faculty of Arts and Humanities,
The University of Sheffield

April 2026

I, the author, confirm that the thesis is my own work.

I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means
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This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.



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This work was funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (grant number
AH/L503848/1) through the White Rose College of the Arts and Humanities.

Abstract

Modern historians typically present the Emperor Justinian I (527–65) as successfully continuing the longstanding Roman practice of paying ‘subsides’ to foreign powers when war was undesirable or unfeasible. Other perspectives explain the demand for Roman money in terms of cultural contexts such as Sasanian ideology or nomadic life. Neither approach satisfactorily explains both the dynamics of Justinian’s payments and the trenchant criticism from his subjects. In response, this thesis presents a comprehensive re-evaluation of primary evidence, including original Greek, Latin and Syriac texts. By considering a full range of examples with an approach informed by substantivist economic theory, it develops a synoptic account which demonstrates Justinian’s cash payments were situational, iterative and often demand-led. While our sources provide positive proof of rational calculation, such evidence is insufficient to explain subsidies through the concept of ‘grand strategy’. More significant was the tension generated by competition between the moralised discourses of ‘gift’, ‘tribute’ and ‘pay’. Historians have often sought to separate these discourses from the discussion, but ought to treat them as integral features of the phenomenon. Six case studies demonstrate this argument. Justinian’s approach to his rival ‘great power’, Sasanian Persia, was too complex to be explained by the narratives of ‘western reconquest’ or the ‘Caspian Gates’. The treatment of Eastern client states varied: Justinian introduced new payments to compete with Persia for influence over Arab and Caucasian kings but moved away from previous subsidy arrangements in Asia Minor and Nubia. Justinian often paid nomadic polities of the Eurasian steppe, but revisionist historiography wrongly doubts the existence of his annual subsidy to the Avars. Finally, it demonstrates that examples from Africa, Italy and the Danube frontier are too often discounted from discussion of foreign payments. Together these cases show the complexity, limits and nuance of how Justinian used cash payments.

Keywords: Byzantine Empire—Foreign relations— 527-1081; Byzantine Empire— History— 527-1081; Byzantine Empire— History— Justinian I, 527-565; Italy—History—Gothic War, 535-555

Dedication

*meae uxori, Oliviae,
sapiientissimae, pulcherrimae, patientissimae*

In memory of two men who shared their love of history,
William ‘Bill’ Dagnall and James ‘Jim’ Wallman.
I hope they would have enjoyed reading this.

Acknowledgements

Diocletian decided the Late Roman Empire could only be managed by four emperors; I have had the honour of preparing this thesis under five supervisors. A heartfelt thank you to Rev. Dr Casey Strine, Dr Mirela Ivanova, Prof. Charles West, Prof. Julia Hillner, and Prof. Simon Loseby. Your knowledge and encouragement have been essential. Thank you also to Dr Chris Millard for your guidance during the final submission.

Languages are integral to this thesis, and I am grateful to all those who have taught me. In particular, a warm thank you to Dr Carrie Sawtell for Greek tuition, Dr Silvio Roggo for encouragement with Syriac, and to Anna Ferrarese, magistra optima, for the gift of Latin.

Thank you to the team within the Department of History for your support over the many years since I began my undergraduate degree in 2011. I want to especially thank Beky Hasnip for her support and advice during my PhD. Thank you also to the dozens of undergraduate students in the department whom I have taught and from whom I have learned.

Thank you to the White Rose College of the Arts and Humanities and the Arts and Humanities Research Council for the funding that allowed me to complete this thesis.

Thank you to my family: Louise, Simon, Naomi, and Matthew Dagnall. Thank you to Judith, Baroness Blake, and the entire clan: Emily and Chris, Eddie and Alex, and Florence and Joe. A special mention to my nieces and nephews (Bethany, Evelyn, Finn, Joey, Frank, Silas, Oona, and Maizie), who have been such good company visiting ancient and medieval sites across Yorkshire. Thank you to Christopher Blake for the encouragement to take up Latin and Greek, and for the patient proofreading.

Thank you for the support and constant encouragement of many comrades including Jane Monach, Jenny Prideaux, Sharon Jowitt, Jayne Hawley, Jayne Dunne, Arline Kersey, Ruth and David Milsom, and Liz and Bob Pemberton. Thank you for the friendship and support of Nabeela, Minesh, Bethany and Sam, Jude and Chloe, Sam S., Sam B., and Huwy.

An important thank you is due to Dr Rosie Smith. Without your steadfast encouragement, this simply would never have been completed.

Two fine friends joined me for untold hours exploring the landscapes of Yorkshire, Derbyshire, and Cymru in between writing. Thank you Arthur and Willow, *canes fidelissimi*.

Finally, thank you to my wife, Olivia. It was your idea for me to undertake this PhD, and your belief in me has been unwavering. I hope you are pleased with the end result.

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Notes for the Reader

Personal Names and Prosopography

Personal names follow the conventions established in the *Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity* (ODLA), p. lxxxii. Where there are well-established English forms, these are preferred (e.g. Justinian not *Iustinianus*). Where a Latinised form is well-established in the English scholarship, it is preferred to the Greek or Syriac (e.g., Procopius not *Prokopios*, John not *Yuhannan*). Names from other languages are treated similarly. When a person is first mentioned in a chapter, I provide a citation to the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (PLRE) or to the *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire* (PCBE) .

Place Names

Place names follow the conventions of the ODLA, pp. lxxxii–lxxxiii. When there are well-established English forms like Constantinople, these are preferred to more accurate ancient names like *Konstantinoupolis* or modern names like Istanbul. Citations for places are provided from the *Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World* (BATlas), ed. by Richard J. A. Talbert (Princeton University Press, 2000).

Dates

Dates are given in the Julian calendar and the Christian era (*anno domini*) unless otherwise stated. Appendix 1 explains the correspondence between regnal, consular, indictional and *anno mundi* systems. Dates given with a slash (e.g., 527/28) indicate when a source places an event within a period that spans two Christian-era years, such as a regnal year, and cannot be more precisely determined. For an overview see Oliver Nicholson, ‘Eras’ in *ODLA*, pp. 552–53; for a comprehensive guide see Venance Grumel, *Traité d’études byzantines* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1958).

Seasons

Seasons follow Brian Croke’s argument that sixth-century sources conceived summer as a ‘long’ season from March/April to October (including spring and autumn), and winter as a ‘short’ season from November to February/March. See Brian Croke, ‘Procopius and Thucydides: Defining the Gothic War Year’, *Classica Cracoviensia* 26 (2023), pp. 14–15. This supersedes the ‘June-to-June’ war year found in older scholarship such as J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, 2 vols (Macmillan, 1923), I, p. 176, n. 2.

Weights and Coinage

Weights are given in their original measurement, typically the Roman pound (*libra*) or the *centenarium* (100 *librae*). The modern metric equivalent is given in parentheses, calculated on the basis of 327 grams per Roman *libra* following ‘Weights and Measures’, ODLA, p. 1588. Coinage is enumerated in units of gold coins (Lat. *solidi*, Gk. *nomismata*), weighted to the standard of 72 to the Roman *libra* unless otherwise stated. See ‘Solidus’, ODLA, pp. 1402–03.

Ancient Languages

I have prepared translations of Latin, Greek and Syriac sources based on the editions listed in the Bibliography. I have provided the original quotes in footnotes and transliterations of key words in the body of the thesis. Transliterations follow the American Library Association/Library of Congress (ALA-LC) schemes. Typesetting is in Times New Roman except for Syriac script in Estrangelo Edessa.

Modern Languages

I include direct quotations from French and German scholarship and provide translations where critical for the flow of the argument.

Cartography

The accompanying maps have been produced by the author, using and modifying shapefiles produced by the Ancient World Mapping Centre and the Consortium of Ancient World Mappers. In preparing the maps I consulted the *Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World*, ed. by Richard J. A. Talbert (Princeton University Press, 2000) and the *Palgrave Atlas of the Byzantine World*, ed. by John Haldon (Palgrave, 2005).

Abbreviations

General Abbreviations

a.	<i>anno</i> , in the year
AD	<i>anno Domini</i> , in the year of the Lord (equivalent to Common Era)
AM	<i>anno Mundi</i> , in the Year of the World
BC	Before Christ (equivalent to Before Common Era)
c.	<i>circa</i>
chron.	chronicle
cos.	consul
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare
ed./eds	editor(s)
fr./frs	fragment(s)
Fr.	French
Ger.	German
Gk.	Greek
ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> , in the same place
Lat.	Latin
mod.	modern
n.	note
Syr.	Syriac
tr./trs	translator(s)
vol./vols	volume(s)

Bibliographic Abbreviations

BASIC	Irfan Shahîd, <i>Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century</i>
BAtlas	<i>Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World</i>
CAH	<i>The Cambridge Ancient History</i>
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
CFHB	<i>Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae</i>
CSCO	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i>
CSHB	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae</i>
GCS	<i>Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller</i>
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
Auct. Ant.	<i>Auctores Antiquissimi</i>
SS rer. Merov.	<i>Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum</i>
SS rer. Lang.	<i>Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum</i>
FHN	<i>Fontes Historiae Nubiorum</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
OCD	<i>The Oxford Classical Dictionary</i>
ODLA	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity</i>
PCBE	<i>Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire</i>
PLRE	<i>The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i>
PLRE I	Vol. I, AD 260–395
PLRE II	Vol. II, AD 395–527
PLRE III	Vol. III, AD 527–641 (2 parts)
SB	<i>Sammelbuch Griechischer Urkunden aus Ägypten</i>
TTH	Translated Texts for Historians

Primary Source Abbreviations

Agath., <i>Hist.</i>	Agathias, <i>Histories</i>
<i>Chron. Pasch.</i>	<i>Chronicle Paschale</i>
Coripp., <i>Ioh.</i>	Corippus, <i>Iohannidos seu de bellis Libycis</i>
Coripp., <i>Iust.</i>	Corippus, <i>In Laudem Iustini Augusti Minoris</i>
Greg. Tur., <i>HF</i>	Gregory of Tours, <i>Historia Francorum</i>
Joh. Eph., <i>HE</i>	John of Ephesus, <i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
Joh. Lyd., <i>De Mag.</i>	John Lydus, <i>De Magistratibus</i>
Jord., <i>Get.</i>	Jordanes, <i>Getica</i>
Jord., <i>Rom.</i>	Jordanes, <i>Romana</i>
Josh. Styl., <i>Chron.</i>	Joshua the Stylite, <i>Chronicle</i>
Just. <i>Nov.</i>	Justinian, <i>Novellae</i>
Just. <i>Cod. Iust.</i>	Justinian, <i>Codex Iustinianus</i>
Just., <i>Ed.</i>	Justinian, <i>Edicta</i>
Just., <i>Inst.</i>	Justinian, <i>Institutiones</i>
Marcell. com., <i>Chron.</i>	Marcellinus Comes, <i>Chronicle</i>
Marcell. com. addit.	Marcellinus Comes (anonymous continuator), <i>Chronicle</i>
Menander, fr.	Menander Protector, <i>History</i> (fragments)
Paul Diac., <i>Hist. Lang.</i>	Paul the Deacon, <i>History of the Lombards</i>
Procop., <i>Aed.</i>	Procopius, <i>De Aedificiis</i>
Procop., <i>Anecd.</i>	Procopius, <i>Anecdota (Historia Arcana)</i>
Procop., <i>BG</i>	Procopius, <i>De Bello Gothico</i>
Procop., <i>BP</i>	Procopius, <i>De Bello Persico</i>
Procop., <i>BV</i>	Procopius, <i>De Bello Vandalico</i>
Tabari, <i>Annals</i>	al-Ṭabarī, <i>Annals of the Prophets and Kings</i>
Theoph., <i>Chron.</i>	Theophanes the Confessor, <i>Chronographia</i>
Zach., <i>HE</i>	Zacharias Rhetor, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>

Introduction

The supply of material commodities to foreign rulers by late Roman emperors has long presented a historical paradox. As Michael Maas has observed, the sixth century under Justinian was the ‘heyday of systematic, often regularized, and always carefully calculated payments of cash used as a diplomatic instrument’.¹ Yet on the other hand, these transfers triggered ‘blowback’ from Roman critics who lambasted ‘tribute’ being paid to barbarians.² Rather than treat the polymorphous appearance of these payments in our sources as a barrier, this thesis proposes a new framework to analyse the discursive contestation.

In doing so, it builds on the work of historians such as Richard Payne, Matthew Canepa and Ekaterina Nechaeva who have read Late Antique diplomacy as the expression and construction of symbolic meaning. To understand how economic and political signification met in the process of subsidies, I propose to adapt Karl Polanyi’s substantivist economics. For Polanyi economic exchange ought to be understood as ‘embedded’ in social values and symbolism, rather than existing as a parallel field of human activity.³ I argue that since subsidies were not fully instituted as a distinct form of exchange in Late Antiquity, historical actors expressed themselves in vocabularies associated with existing social institutions of gift, payment and tribute. Not only does this explain the variety of expressions in our sources, but also why the political resonance was so visceral. High policy conducted

1 Michael Maas, *The Conqueror’s Gift: Roman Ethnography and the End of Antiquity* (Princeton University Press, 2025), p. 57, doi:10.1515/9780691259048.

2 Ibid.

3 Karl Polanyi, ‘The Economy as an Instituted Process’, in *The Sociology of Economic Life*, ed. by Mark Granovetter and Richard Swedberg, 3rd edn (Routledge, 2011), pp. 3–21, doi:10.4324/9780429494338-2.

through the foundational language of basic institutions of the economy was immediately legible, resonant – and contestable.

This framework is developed and applied to a case study of the emperor Justinian I (r. 527–65). Justinian has been chosen not only because of his extensive use of payments, but also because the density of extant textual sources enables close analysis of discourse. While the case study draws substantive conclusions about Justinian’s foreign policy, the overall goal of this thesis is to demonstrate a wider theoretical point. Substantivist theory offers a toolbox that renders the contingency and complexity of the ancient world as an opportunity, not a problem, for history-writing.

Definition of Terms

To facilitate precision, I distinguish between the formal, analytical term ‘subsidy’ and the discursive terms ‘gift’, ‘tribute’ and ‘pay’. Subsidy serves as a heuristic concept to identify and label a state exchanging material commodities for political commitments. It is well-established in the scholarship as a neutral term.⁴ However, while its neutrality and comparability make it suitable as a modern heuristic, they do not fully represent its social logic in the ancient world. Subsidy was not established as a distinct form of exchange; it was instead expressed through vocabularies drawn from other economic institutions. The language of gift, tribute or payment carried embedded social values across from those institutions to the understanding of subsidy. Rather than an obstacle, this offers valuable evidence for how ancient people experienced, imagined and contested these exchanges. In summary, ‘subsidy’ operates as a formal modern heuristic, while ‘gift’, ‘pay’, and ‘tribute’ reflect the substantive realities of ancient exchange.

4 A. D. Lee, *War in Late Antiquity: A Social History* (Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 120.

Literature Review

Scholars have drawn starkly different interpretations of payments in foreign policy depending on their theoretical and methodological perspectives. This review will consider the two main perspectives: the rationalist model of ‘protection costs’, and the historicist model of symbolic expression. This discussion will show that both approaches offer insights towards a comprehensive and integrated account.

Rationalist Approaches

The predominant interpretation of subsidies has been through a concept of rationalist utility-maximisation. In the mid-twentieth century the historian C. D. Gordon reframed subsidies as a positive, pragmatic instrument of Roman strength and diplomacy; this argument was incorporated into Edward Luttwak’s influential, if controversial, account of Roman ‘grand strategy’.⁵ While ‘grand strategy’ has fallen out of favour, the underlying ideas remained influential.⁶ Peter Heather, for example, distanced himself from ‘grand strategy’, but still argued that the logic of subsidies was ‘maximising the amount of peace and stability generated by any particular set of military campaigns’.⁷

The most theoretically sophisticated version of this account is the ‘protection costs’ model.⁸ Peter Bang in particular has proposed that we should regard protection from violence

- 5 C. D. Gordon, ‘The Subsidization of Border Peoples as a Roman Policy of Imperial Defense’, (University of Michigan, 1948); C. D. Gordon, ‘Subsidies in Roman Imperial Defence’, *Phoenix*, 3 (1949), pp. 60–69. Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century A.D. to the Third* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 37; cf. Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 111–12.
- 6 Benjamin Isaac, *The Limits of Empire: The Roman Army in the East* (Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 374.
- 7 Peter Heather, ‘The Late Roman Art of Client Management: Imperial Defence in the Fourth Century West’, in *The Transformation of Frontiers: From Late Antiquity to the Carolingians*, ed. by Walter Pohl, Ian N. Wood, and Helmut Reimitz (Brill, 2001), pp. 15–68, doi:10.1163/9789004476394_004.
- 8 Peter F. Bang, ‘Trade and Empire: in search of organizing concepts for the Roman economy’, *Past & Present*, 195 (2007), pp. 3–54 (p. 39), drawing on Frederic C. Lane, *Profits from Power: Readings in Protection Rent and Violence-Controlling Enterprises* (Albany, 1979); Niels Steensgaard, ‘Violence and the Rise of Capitalism: Frederic C. Lane’s Theory of Protection and Tribute’, *Review*, 5.2 (1981), pp. 247–273.

as ‘an economic good’; in other words, a commodity.⁹ Protection can be ‘produced’ by military force or acquired via exchange, which he terms tribute. In this sense, the tribute given by subjects to the Roman state is cognate with subsidies given by the Roman state to its barbarian powers. For the state, therefore, subsidies should be understood as ‘functionally complementary to military spending and belong in the same overall category of protection costs’, as Scheidel puts it.¹⁰ Bang argues that the hegemonic position of the Roman Empire in the first and second centuries AD allowed it ‘to increase the share taken up by tribute in the total protection bill while for a long period keeping military costs at a relatively low level’, thereby creating a ‘peace dividend’.¹¹ The increasing plurality of political power in Late Antiquity diminished the monopolistic advantage of *pax Romana*, reducing the ‘peace dividend’ and causing increasing social tension.¹²

At the same time that tribute offered the advantage of efficiency to the supplier, it also offered benefits to the receiver. Nicola di Cosma argues that ‘compared to a purely predatory strategy, tribute obtained by diplomatic means had the advantage of replacing irregular spoils of war with regular yearly collections’.¹³ The protection costs model therefore allows for a positive case as to why both supplier and recipient would choose subsidies. The disadvantage of this model is the requirement to assume the underlying logic of ancient actors was utility-maximisation, thereby discounting the visceral criticism of our sources as irrational rhetoric. It also depends on the empirical finding that the fiscal contribution of subsidies was indeed more efficient for both parties than warfare. These concerns lead us to consider the alternative approach.

9 Bang, ‘Trade and Empire’, p. 39.

10 Walter Scheidel, ‘State Revenue and Expenditure in the Han and Roman Empires’, in *State Power in Ancient China and Rome*, ed. by Walter Scheidel (Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 150–80 (p. 175).

11 Bang, ‘Trade and Empire’, pp. 40–41.

12 Bang, ‘Trade and Empire’, pp. 40–41.

13 Nicola Di Cosmo, ‘The War Economy of Nomadic Empires,’ in *Rebel Economies: Warlords, Insurgents, Humanitarians*, ed. by Nicola Di Cosmo, Didier Fassin, and Clémence Pinaud (London: 2021), 103–25, at 113.

Historicist Approaches

Historians have increasingly explored payments not in a fiscal sense, but as repositories of ‘great symbolic value’.¹⁴ This approach is heavily indebted to the theoretical foundations laid by Marcel Mauss, whose work will be explored further in the methodology.¹⁵ The most stimulating recent work has applied this method to explore the Sasanian perspective on Late Roman subsidies. Richard Payne has argued that while the acquisition of gold was the driving force of Sasanian policy towards the East Roman empire, the relatively small size of the subsidies must mean they had ‘symbolic, not economic, value’.¹⁶ By taking the literary tradition of the *Book of Kings*, Payne demonstrated the importance of receiving tribute within Sasanian ideology.¹⁷ This offers a model in which ‘cosmological, rather than straightforwardly material, incentives’ explain the demand for subsidies.¹⁸

In a similar vein, Matthew Canepa has conceptualised the Late Antique diplomacy between Rome and Iran as the ‘competitive, yet mutual process of agonistic exchange’ of cultural and ideological values.¹⁹ Canepa’s point is that the same act could be represented within the ideology of both sides.²⁰ Canepa’s important point is that the symbolic meaning was co-created and contested.

A similar approach has been applied to the Eastern Roman Empire by Ekaterina Nechaeva. Her study explored how the ‘hierarchical and symbolic character of East-Roman diplomacy’ was expressed through diplomatic gifts.²¹ Nechaeva maintained, however, that

14 Maas, *The Conqueror’s Gift*, pp. 55-56.

15 Marcel Mauss, ‘Essai sur le don: forme et raison de l’échange dans les sociétés archaïques’, *l’Année Sociologique*, NS 1 (1925), pp. 30–186; Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*, trans. by W. D. Halls (Routledge, 1990)

16 Richard Payne, ‘Cosmology and the Expansion of the Iranian Empire, 502–628 CE’, *Past & Present*, 220 (2013), pp. 3–33 (pp. 10–13), doi:10.1093/pastj/gtt008.

17 Payne, ‘Cosmology and the Expansion of the Iranian Empire’, p. 14.

18 Payne, ‘Cosmology and the Expansion of the Iranian Empire’, 30.

19 Matthew P. Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth: Art and Ritual of Kingship between Rome and Sasanian Iran* (University of California Press, 2007), p. 3, doi:10.1525/9780520944572.

20 Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth*, p. 124.

21 Ekaterina Nechaeva, *Embassies – Negotiations – Gifts: Systems of East Roman Diplomacy in Late Antiquity* (Steiner, 2014), pp. 15–16, doi:10.25162/9783515108010.

payments were valued ‘for their cost’, whereas luxury gifts purely expressed ‘semantically symbolic language of diplomatic interaction’.²²

Application to Justinian’s Foreign Policy

These perspectives on subsidies overlap with the debate about the reign of Justinian. The traditional historiographical interpretation is that Justinian was motivated by a ‘mission to restore the ancient glories of the empire by recovering the provinces of the West’, with ‘no ambitions for conquest in the East’.²³ From this perspective, subsidies had the clear and rational function of ending wars in the East to enable the reconquest of the West.²⁴ However, there has long been scepticism about whether Justinian pursued a strategy with such clarity.²⁵ Most scholars now prefer to explain Justinian’s foreign policy as developing responsively and often being justified retrospectively in imperial propaganda.²⁶

Nonetheless, the interpretation of subsidies as ‘a flexible and efficient instrument of foreign policy’ for Justinian remains popular. One recent regional study concluded that Justinian’s ‘main policy’ was using subsidies as part of a divide-and-rule.²⁷ There remains some debate, however, as to why subsidies were so controversial. It is widely accepted that

22 Nechaeva, *Embassies – Negotiations – Gifts*, pp. 15–16.

23 A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey*, 3 vols (Blackwell, 1961), pp. 270–71. Cf. ‘Justinien rêvait à l’empire universel’, in Charles Diehl, *L’Afrique Byzantine: histoire de la domination Byzantine en Afrique (533–709)* (Leroux, 1896), p. 4.

24 Ze’ev Rubin, ‘The Mediterranean and the Dilemma of the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity’, *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 1.1 (1986), pp. 13–62 (p. 48), doi:10.1080/09518968608569501. Cf. ‘the distraction of any second-front hostilities with Persia’ in Barker, *Justinian and the Later Roman Empire*, p. 118.

25 ‘The idea of restoring the Empire to its ancient limits seems to have floated before the mind of Justinian, but it is difficult to say whether he conceived it from the first as a definite aim of policy’ in Bury, *Theodosius to Justinian*, II, p. 124. The Moors and Franks were not considered by Iluk, ‘The Export of Gold’, pp. 91–92. Gordon noted them as insignificant: Gordon, ‘Procopius and Justinian’s Financial Policies’, p. 26.

26 Peter Heather, *The Restoration of Rome: Barbarian Popes and Imperial Pretenders* (Macmillan, 2014), p. 118. Miranda Williams, ‘The African Policy of Justinian I’, DPhil thesis (University of Oxford, 2015), p. 116; Christopher Lillington-Martin, ‘Procopius, πάρεδρος / quaestor, Codex Justinianus, 1.27 and Belisarius’ strategy in the Mediterranean’, in *Procopius of Caesarea: Literary and Historical Interpretations*, ed. by Christopher Lillington-Martin and Elodie Turquois (Routledge, 2017), pp. 157–85, doi:10.4324/9781315602288-11.

27 Alexander Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars: Campaigning, Diplomacy and Development in Illyricum, Thrace and the Northern World, A.D. 527–65* (Francis Cairns, 2016), pp. 395–96.

the size of subsidies was negligible within the fiscal framework of the Late Roman Empire.²⁸ However, it has been suggested that Justinian's shift to annual payments from one-off payments rendered his policy harder to defend.²⁹ In this way, we can see a partial application of the symbolic perspective, alongside the predominant use of the rationalist model. In order to build on the insights from both perspectives, we shall now turn to proposing a theoretical framework that puts the contested discourse at the centre of our explanation.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Basis

The philosophical premise is 'critical historicism', seeking historical explanation through 'the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's own mind'.³⁰ We must understand our sources in their own terms, before we can proceed with analysis. As R. G. Collingwood warned, we must not translate *triērēs* as 'steamship', only to criticise ancient Greek sources for their poor description of steamships.³¹ Another useful warning comes from John Moreland, who argued we must neither treat early medieval economies as simply the 'Same' as ours, nor as an utterly alien 'Other'.³² To operationalise these philosophical principles, we shall adopt the theoretical concepts from Karl Polanyi's 'substantivist economics'. Polanyi's taxonomy of

- 28 'Ein Betrag, der durchaus hoch genug war, um eindrucksvoll zu wirken, zugleich aber relativ bescheiden war,' in Börm, "'Es war allerdings nicht so'", p. 340; see also Jan Iluk, 'The export of gold from the Roman Empire to barbarian countries from the 4th to the 6th centuries.' *Münstersche Beiträge zur Antiken Handelgeschichte* 4.1 (1985), p. 101–04; Michael F. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c.300–1450* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 260–264, doi:10.1017/CBO9780511896750;
- 29 Henning Börm, "'Es war allerdings nicht so, daß sie es im Sinne eines Tributes erhielten, wie viele meinten...": Anlässe und Funktion der persischen Geldforderungen an die Römer (3. bis 6. Jh.)', *História*, 57.3 (2008), pp. 327–46 (p. 331).
- 30 R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 215.
- 31 R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 78.
- 32 John Moreland, 'Concepts of the Early Medieval Economy', in *The Long Eighth Century: Production, Distribution and Demand*, ed. by Inge Lyse Hansen and Chris Wickham (Brill, 2000), pp. 1–34 (p. 2), doi:10.1163/9789004473454_004.

redistribution, reciprocity, and exchange provides a better vocabulary to describe the ‘trireme’ of the sixth-century embedded economy.

The theoretical basis of this work arises from Marcel Mauss’s fundamental insight that not all societies have always conceived of the economic sphere as a rationalist, utility maximising exercise conducted by individuals. Rather, economic ‘phenomena are at the same time juridical, economic, religious, and even aesthetic and morphological’.³³ This theory has proven highly influential and useful for scholars of the ancient world.³⁴ We will be employing the idea as it was reformulated by Karl Polanyi in a wider theory of ‘substantivist economics’.³⁵ Polanyi’s theory allows a more complete view and also implies several methodological commitments.

The fundamental claim of Polanyi’s theory is that ‘gain’ is socially constructed and context dependent, rather than a universal motive of material acquisition. Therefore economic agents may be motivated by ‘competition for honour or glory, by the concern to uphold custom or political control’.³⁶ In this sense, the achievement of their aims may not appear simply as a greater amount of material value. Furthermore, as Hartmut Ziche observes, this implies that the ‘economic remarks, observations and interpretations’ of our ancient sources were ‘subordinate to their political or panegyric narrative’.³⁷ So both the action and its representation may be in distinctly different terms than a rationalist model would assume.

33 Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, p. 111.

34 Maas, *Conqueror’s Gift*, p. 3; N. K. Rollason, *Gifts of Clothing in Late Antique Literature* (Routledge, 2016).

35 Karl Polanyi, ‘Aristotle Discovers the Economy’, in *Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory* ed. by K. Polanyi, C. M. Arensberg and H. W. Pearson (Glencoe, 1957), pp. 65–94.

36 Christopher Holmes and David Yarrow, ‘Economic Ideas’, in *Karl Polanyi’s Political and Economic Thought: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Gareth Dale, Christopher Holmes, and Maria Markantonatou (Agenda Publishing, 2019), pp. 7–26 (pp. 12–13).

37 Hartmut Ziche, ‘Historians and the Economy: Zosimos and Prokopios on Fifth- and Sixth- Century Economic Development’, in *Byzantine Narrative: Papers in honour of Roger Scott*, ed. by Ursula Betka, Penelope Buckley, and John Burke (Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 2006), pp. 462–74 (p. 462), doi:10.1163/9789004344877_036.

An important area to clarify is the potential distinction between luxury goods, commodities, and money. This led Nechaeva to argue that we must distinguish between payments valued ‘for their cost’ from luxury gifts purely expressed ‘semantically symbolic language of diplomatic interaction’.³⁸ This is a purist reading of Mauss, whose original argument has been criticised. For example, Costas Lapavistas has argued that commodities are never simply given a market value, but also a use-value beyond the market system.³⁹ In Polanyi’s theory the economic and non-economic is a contingent and socially-determined distinction.

There may be material goods without economic value, just as an immaterial commitment (such as permission for traders to enter the empire) might have economic value. This is illustrated by the famous example of Theoderic sending the regalia of the West Roman emperor to Constantinople in return for political recognition. Though the regalia was a material object, and perhaps very costly, it was animated by its symbolic value rather than economic potential. To put it another way, its exchange value was independent of its economic value. Had a sackcloth been the regalia, it would have retained its value. In contrast cash subsidies had a legible and fungible economic value.

Discursive Exchange

By adopting this substantivist framework, we can recognise that our sixth-century sources neither employ nor represent an underlying, neutral concept of ‘subsidies’. Instead, historical actors represented the transfer of wealth through discourses that denoted specific moral and temporal relationships. We can trace three primary discursive patterns in the sources: pay, gift, and tribute.

38 Nechaeva, *Embassies – Negotiations – Gifts*, pp. 15–16.

39 Costas Lapavistas, ‘Commodities and Gifts: Why Commodities Represent More than Market Relations’, *Science & Society* 68.1 (2004), pp. 33–56.

The language of pay framed the exchange as strictly economic and synchronic. It implied a rough, transactional equality between the payer and the payee that was time-limited to the moment of fulfilment. In contrast, the language of gift and tribute operated on a diachronic plane, projecting obligations into the future or the past. Following Marcel Mauss's foundational observations, giving a gift was not a free surrender of economic value, but an assertion of social prestige that created a debt to be fulfilled by the recipient. The giver assumed a position of superiority over the indebted. In making a tribute, conversely, an actor acknowledged a prior or ongoing debt, taking a subordinate position beneath the creditor.

Therefore, when the emperor and his critics fought over whether to label a transfer of *solidi* as a 'gift' or a 'tribute', they were not merely arguing about fiscal policy. They were actively invoking different elements of Roman ideology to negotiate the hierarchy of the empire and its neighbours.

Late Antique ideologies could not express the concept of state-to-state relations as a discrete field of human activity. Both Roman and Persian worldviews held their ruler to be the ultimate and universal temporal authority: the world was divided between territory under that ruler's effective control (the *Imperium Romanum* or *Ēranšahr*) and that which was provisionally beyond it (*barbaricum* or *Anērān*). Even if an idea of equality developed by which Rome and Iran recognised each other as states (*politeiai*), the vast majority of political actors were not allowed this appellation. Other polities were peoples (*gens* or *ethnos*) and not considered states, even if they had kings.⁴⁰

Method and Overview of Sources

I proceed with a positive choice to focus on textual sources rather than material culture. This is not because material culture cannot be used: indeed, archaeologists arguably drew earlier

40 Patrick Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 77–79

and more deeply on ideas of economic anthropology than historians. A groundbreaking article by Philip Grierson of 1959 argued that Mauss's 'gift exchange' provided an alternative explanation for coin deposition, and so commercial trade cannot be assumed.⁴¹ By the same principle, however, the ultimate cause of deposition can only ever be provisional and hypothesised. Because I wish to focus on the discursive systems through which subsidies were imagined and enacted, I will focus on textual sources that positively identify this form of exchange.

Following the foundational work of Averil Cameron, it is now universally accepted that these texts cannot be mined for pure empirical data without first understanding the strict literary genres and expectations that governed them.⁴² Rather than viewing these generic constraints as an obstacle, I treat them as the very parameters of the discourse. To trace this contested discourse, this thesis uses a diverse corpus of sixth-century texts surveyed below.

Classicizing Historiography

In speaking of an 'age of Justinian', we may as well speak of an 'age of Procopius'.⁴³

Procopius provides an enormous volume of information. But he does not simply provide empirical 'data'. The question of how to work with Procopius remains a fundamental, or indeed the fundamental, methodological problem for Justinianic studies.⁴⁴ On the one hand, the combination of eye-witness observation, learned scholarship and sharp commentary offer our most compelling narrative of, and insight into, the emperor's reign. On the other, there remains enduring controversy about Procopius' method, purpose and agenda given the

41 Philip Grierson, 'Commerce in the Dark Ages: A Critique of the Evidence', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 9 (1959), pp. 123–40.

42 Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (University of California Press, 1985), p. x.

43 PLRE III, 'Procopius 2', pp. 1060–66. 'The reign of Justinian and Procopius' works are indissolubly bound together. In writing the history of Justinian's reign, modern scholars have no choice but to rely to a great extent on his writings,' in Geoffrey Greatrex, 'Perceptions of Procopius in Recent Scholarship', *Histos*, 8 (2014), pp. 76–121 (p. 82), doi:10.29173/histos255

44 Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, p. 1.

generic and ideological range his extant works. In this section I shall first situate my methodology within the scholarship, then report the evidence contained within the *Wars* and the *Anecdota*.

The first question is with which Procopius we are dealing.⁴⁵ The basic details of the writer's biography are widely accepted. He was raised in the cosmopolitan port city of Caesarea in Palestine, growing up in a family of sufficient means to fund a classical education.⁴⁶ It is widely, but not universally, accepted that he was a Christian: although he clearly held moderate beliefs and disliked religious intolerance.⁴⁷ Others have suggested he could have been a Samaritan or pagan.⁴⁸ In around 527 he became the assessor, or legal secretary, to the newly-appointed *magister militum per Orientalem*, Belisarius.⁴⁹ This gave him an 'insider' view of Belisarius' campaign in the East, invasion of Africa, and two campaigns in Italy. In addition, he served the general and governor of Africa, Solomon, during his campaigns in the 530s. After his military career Procopius retired to Constantinople. In retirement, as Dariusz Brodka has demonstrated, he maintained a network to gather the news and information needed to continue writing his history.⁵⁰

Whilst his basic biography is reasonably clear, it is the diverse character of Procopius' work that introduces contention. His main work was the extensive *Wars of Justinian*. The original edition comprised seven volumes which narrated in sequence the 'Persian', 'Vandal'

45 Contra 'In truth there is only one Procopius, but few scholars have been willing to trust him on this,' in Anthony Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 45, doi:10.9783/9780812202410.

46 Greatrex, 'Perceptions of Procopius in Recent Scholarship', pp. 77–82.

47 Greatrex, 'Perceptions of Procopius in Recent Scholarship', pp. 92.

48 Katherine Adshead, 'Procopius and the Samaritans', in *The Sixth Century: End or Beginning?*, ed. by Pauline Allen and Elizabeth Jeffreys (Australian Association of Byzantine Studies, 1996), pp. 35–41; Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity*, p. 217.

49 PLRE III, 'Belisarius I', pp. 181–204.

50 Dariusz Brodka, 'Prokop von Kaisareia und seine Informanten: Ein Identifikationsversuch', *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 65.1 (2016), pp. 108–24, doi:10.25162/historia-2016-0007

and ‘Gothic’ wars of Justinian. It is generally accepted as having been published in 550.⁵¹ Procopius reprised the *Wars* with an additional eighth volume, which ranged across all three theatres to extend the narrative until 554.⁵² It is considered a work of ‘classicizing historiography’, a term denoting a genre of late antiquity in which writers self-consciously narrated contemporary events in the style of Herodotus and Thucydides.⁵³ Yet these historians were working in a hybrid tradition: as Dariusz Brodka expressed it, ‘das Alte und das Neue beeinflussten ihr Geschichtsdenken’.⁵⁴ Their work, as Michael Kulikowski has highlighted, shows ‘an increasingly evident transition to a post-Classical, medieval worldview’, with a more ‘folkloric’ approach to digressions than a classical excursus would show.⁵⁵

The other works then take strikingly different tones. The *Anecdota* was unpublished during Justinian’s lifetime and, it seems, for centuries beyond. The author’s stated purpose was to give the ‘true causes’ of the events he had narrated in the *Wars*. Amongst political gossip correcting the record of certain episodes of his published history, the *Anecdota* lampooned the avarice, sexual impropriety and ‘demonic’ character of Justinian and his associates in the starkest terms. Again, Haury’s dating to 550 in parallel to the *Wars* is generally accepted.⁵⁶ Since its modern rediscovery in the sixteenth century, the tone of this ‘venomous pamphlet’ has caused much disquiet, not least because Procopius’ third work, *De Aedificiis* (*On the Buildings*), reads so differently.⁵⁷ Dated to the later 550s, *De Aedificiis*

51 Jakob Haury, *Procopiana* (Druck des Litterarischen Instituts von Haas & Grabherr, 1891), pp. 9–27; Geoffrey Greatrex, ‘The Dates of Procopius’ Works’, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 18 (1994), pp. 101–15.

52 Greatrex, ‘The Dates of Procopius’ Works’, pp. 105–07; Geoffrey Greatrex, ‘Recent work on Procopius and the composition of Wars VIII’, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 27 (2003), pp. 45–67.

53 Warren Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 216–20.

54 Dariusz Brodka, *Die Geschichtsphilosophie in der spätantiken Historiographie* (Peter Lang, 2004), p. 8.

55 Michael Kulikowski, ‘Classicizing History and Historical Epitomes’, in *A Companion to Late Antique Literature*, ed. by Scott McGill and Edward J. Watts (Wiley, 2018), pp. 155–66, doi:10.1002/9781118830390.ch9.

56 Haury, *Procopiana*, pp. 9–27; Anthony Kaldellis, ‘The Date and Structure of Prokopios’ Secret History and His Projected Work on Church History’, *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 49 (2009), pp. 585–616.

57 Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, p. 266.

celebrated construction works that had been sponsored by the emperor in the form of a panegyric, or praise poem.

The discordance between purported objectivity in the *Wars*, venomous satire of the *Anecdota* and terms of highest praise in the *De Aedificiis* has sometimes caused consternation. Attempts to read a common subtext, such as Anthony Kaldellis proposed, have met with scepticism.⁵⁸ It is generally accepted that the apparent discordance is produced by the differing generic expectations of each work. This should not, however, lead us to overlook the ways in which Procopius adapts or subverts genre in his work.⁵⁹

From these considerations, we can identify several features of Procopius's perspective. Firstly he was a loyal Roman and a critic of Justinian's policies, but not his aims.⁶⁰ Secondly, the evidence assembled by Dariusz Brodka clearly validates Averil Cameron's longstanding argument that Procopius was a Christian.⁶¹ Thirdly, he was a historian like us, but not possessing the methods of modern historiography.

With Procopius' writing terminating in the mid-550s, aspirant historians had an opportunity to write continuations and complete the narrative of Justinian's reign. This was taken up by two authors, Agathias of Myrina and Menander Protector, who both wrote under Justinian's successors but had probably lived through the emperor's reign.⁶² Agathias' *History* extends Procopius' narrative to 559 and survives in full.⁶³ Menander's *History* continued from

58 Anthony Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), doi:10.9783/9780812202410

59 Hartmut G. Ziche, 'Historians and the Economy: Zosimos and Prokopios on Fifth- and Sixth-Century Economic Development', in *Byzantine Narrative: Papers in Honour of Roger Scott*, ed. by Ursula Betka, Penelope Buckley, and John Burke (Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 2006), pp. 462–74 (pp. 464–65).

60 Brodka, *Die Geschichtsphilosophie in der spätantiken Historiographie*, pp. 131–132.

61 Brodka, *Die Geschichtsphilosophie in der spätantiken Historiographie*, pp. 21–39; Greatrex, 'Perceptions of Procopius in Recent Scholarship', pp. 91–92.

62 Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians*, p. 294; PLRE III, 'Agathias', pp. 23–25; PLRE III, 'Menander 1', p. 873.

63 Evagrius, *HE*, v. 24: καὶ Προκοπίῳ δὲ τῷ ῥήτορι πεποιήται τὰ ἐξ ἐκείνου ἕως τῶν Ἰουστινιανοῦ χρόνων. καὶ τὰ ἐχόμενα δὲ τούτοις Ἀγαθία τῷ ῥήτορι καὶ Ἰωάννῃ ἐμῷ τε πολίτῃ καὶ συγγενεῖ καθ' εἰρμὸν ἱστόρηται. 'The occurrences subsequent to that period have been written by Procopius the rhetorician as far as the time of Justinian; and the account has been thenceforward continued by Agathias the rhetorician, and John, my fellow-citizen and kinsman'.

the end of Agathias' to the end of Justinian's reign and beyond, but only survives in fragments. Along with Theophylact Simocatta, these have been judged as the final historians working within the classical tradition.⁶⁴

The circumstances of composition thus imply an immediate point of difference: writing after Justinian's death, both historians were considerable freer to make commentary on the emperor's policies. For our present purpose, however, this is a double-edged sword: it also means they reflect a post-Justinianic political context and cannot be assumed to reflect contemporary opinion.

State Perspectives

This traditionalist perspective must be considered alongside the administrative and official discourses of the empire. To capture this, the thesis incorporates surviving documentary evidence, including legal papyri and epistolary collections of Ostrogothic and Merovingian kings. Ian Colvin has demonstrated that even large parts of the narrative of Procopius and Agathias seem to have been composed from official documents.⁶⁵ Following Colvin, my approach is to carefully assess the authenticity of documents based on the internal evidence of the literary sources. We know from that in the fifth-century, ambassadors were expected to lodge written reports upon their return to Constantinople.⁶⁶ Secondly, Menander the Guardsman explained that he translated the terms of the treaty between the Romans and Persians verbatim, 'lest he be accused of distorting the truth'.⁶⁷ This firstly validates the idea that historians valued empirical accuracy. It secondly supports the idea that authentic

64 'Die spätantiken Geschichtsschreiber Prokopios, Agathias und Theophylaktos beenden die lange, über tausendjährige Tradition der antiken Historiographie,' Brodka, *Die Geschichtsphilosophie in der spätantiken Historiographie*, p. 8.

65 Ian Colvin, 'Reporting Battles and Understanding Campaigns in Procopius and Agathias: Classicising Historians' Use of Archived Documents as Sources', in *War and Warfare in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Alexander Sarantis and Neil Christie (Brill, 2013), pp. 569–59, doi:10.1163/9789004252585_018.

66 Priscus, fr. 15. 4; R. C. Blockley, *The History of Menander the Guardsman: Introductory essay, text, translation and historiographical notes* (Francis Cairns, 1985), p. 19.

67 Men. Prot., fr. 6. 1. 184–87: εἶποιμι δὲ αὐτὴν γε δῆπου τῶν λόγων τὴν συνθήκην.

documents were lodged in an archive in such a manner that Menander could consult them even several decades later.

When authors like Menander Protector translated the terms of Roman-Persian treaties, they preserved the official vocabulary of statecraft.

Furthermore, the writings of bureaucrats like John Lydus and chroniclers such as John Malalas offer perspectives closer to the administrative realities of the state. John Lydus was a civil servant in the reign of Justinian who authored several antiquarian essays.⁶⁸ Of these, *On the Magistracies of the Roman State* directly interests us by providing an extended discussion of Roman subsidies to Persia.⁶⁹

The second is the chronicle attributed to John Malalas, or John the Rhetor.⁷⁰ The titular author was a civil servant, but of lower rank to Lydus or Procopius. He wrote a world chronicle often regarded as written for a more popular audience. Modern scholarship believes that the ancient *Chronicle* was written in three stages: up to 527, between 527 and 533, and between 533 and 565.⁷¹ The Greek version of Malalas' own text only survives in a heavily-abridged eleventh-century epitome, the *Codex Baroccianus*. However, the seventh-century *Chronicon Paschale* and the ninth-century *Chronographia* of Theophanes the Confessor incorporated information from the original text that is missing from the epitome.⁷² Despite this complicated transmission, the Malalas texts have much value. Firstly, the original author demonstrably drew upon official reports.⁷³ Secondly, he gave a 'coherent' presentation of

68 PLRE II, 'Ioannes 75', pp. 612–15.

69 Joh. Lyd., *De Mag.*

70 PLRE III, 'Ioannes Malalas', pp. 662–63.

71 Michael Whitby, *The Wars of Justinian* (Pen & Sword, 2021), pp. 71–73; Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians*, p. 240. Brian Croke, 'Malalas, the Man and His Work', in *Studies in John Malalas*, ed. by Elizabeth Jeffreys, Brian Croke and Roger Scott (Sydney, 1990), pp. 21–22.

72 Geoffrey Greatrex, 'Malalas and Procopius', in *Die Weltchroniken des Johannes Malalas*, ed. by Mischa Meier, Christine Radtki and Fabian Schulz (Steiner, 2015), pp. 161–77 (p. 170).

73 Greatrex, 'Malalas and Procopius', pp. 175–76.

Justinian which likely reflected the emperor's own self-image as a Christian ruler.⁷⁴ Therefore Malalas provides a valuable perspective to contrast with Procopius's account

The third was Marcellinus *comes*, a junior officer under Justinian when the future emperor was *magister militum*. This was a more traditional chronicle, based on consular years, which provides helpful evidence for dating key events. In addition to these works, the later sixth century gives us two military handbooks which are of some interest to our enquiry. These are the *Strategikon* attributed to the emperor Maurice and the *Anonymous Byzantine Treatise on Strategy*.⁷⁵ These provide useful comparative material for the ethnographic claims of the literary sources.

Two further works of interest are panegyrics by Flavius Cresconius Corippus, the *Iohannis* and *In Praise of Justinian the Younger*.⁷⁶ The former narrated the exploits of the general John Troglita in Africa.⁷⁷ The latter commemorated the accession of Justin II as *augustus* in November 565 and as consul in January 566. It therefore offers a valuable impression of how the court of Justin perceived the policies of the late emperor, including direct criticism of his use of subsidies.

Provincial Perspectives

Like Procopius, Jordanes served in the East Roman army as a legal officer to a *magister militum*.⁷⁸ Jordanes, however, describes his origin (*origo*) as among the Goths.⁷⁹ The general he served under appears to have commanded Gothic federate soldiers in Moesia. These had remained in Roman service in the late fifth century when Theoderic had led his army

74 Philippe Blauddau, 'Malalas and the Representation of Justinian's Reign: a Few Remarks', in *Die Weltchroniken des Johannes Malalas*, ed. by Mischa Meier, Christine Radtki and Fabian Schulz (Steiner, 2015), pp. 77–89 (pp. 86–87).

75 Maurice, *Strategikon*.

76 PLRE III, 'Corippus', pp. 354–55.

77 Coripp., *Ioh.* and *Iust.*

78 PLRE III, 'Jordanes I', pp. 713–14.

79 Jordanes, *Getica*, 316.

westwards to Italy.⁸⁰ In his later life, Jordanes settled in Constantinople. By 551 he had written a pair of historical works, *On the Origins and Acts of the Goths* (the *Getica*) and *The Origins and Acts of the Roman Gens* (the *Romana*). Jordanes tells us that he based his histories partly on the lost *Gothic History* of Cassiodorus, the Italian senator who had served the Ostrogothic kings of Italy. He later retired to Constantinople after the fall of the Ostrogothic kingdom.⁸¹ One notable feature is that Jordanes' wide range of terms for a 'people' or 'nation' elides the traditional Roman distinction between Roman *populus* and barbarian *gentes* to describe the Romans themselves as a *gens*.⁸² Thus Jordanes and Cassiodorus offers the best contemporary 'barbarian' perspective on Justinian's foreign policy, even if they wrote in the Roman style and perhaps for Roman audiences.

Another group of sources is the literature written by imperial subjects in the Syriac dialect of Aramaic. The source of greatest interest is the partially extant *Ecclesiastical History* written in Syriac by the bishop Yuhannon, commonly known as John of Ephesus.⁸³ John lived during Justinian's reign. His Miaphysite theology put him at odds with the emperor but, perhaps crucially, not the empress Theodora. He enjoyed imperial favour and was dispatched as a missionary to pagan communities. Under Justin II, however, a persecution of Miaphysites resulted in John's imprisonment. His writings are understood to have been largely composed in those circumstances. While they represent the recollections of an eye-witness to Justinian's policy, therefore, John's work was produced in a quite different personal and political context. There are several other sources from the Syriac milieu of interest to us.

80 Peter Van Nuffelen and Lieve Van Hoof (eds), *Jordanes: Romana and Getica* (Liverpool, 2020), pp. 3–4.

81 Jordanes, *Getica*, preface, 2–3; Nuffelen and Hoof (eds), *Jordanes: Romana and Getica*, pp. 65–99.

82 'A consequence of this choice is that the Romans are also a people or nation (cf. *Get.* 58),' in Nuffelen and Hoof (eds), *Jordanes: Romana and Getica*, p. 102. See the important discussion in Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, p. 61 and pp. 164–65.

83 PCBE III, 'Ioannes 43'.

External Perspectives

The perspective of Sasanian Persia was well-documented: Agathias attests that the Sasanian rulers maintained a ‘book of kings’ in the sixth century.⁸⁴ This perspective is, however, transmitted through later sources. The first is the Arabic history of al-Ṭabarī (lived 839–923).

⁸⁵ The second is the poem the *Shahnameh* of Ferdowsi (lived 940–c.1020).⁸⁶ Both were composed under totally different political and cultural circumstances, but there is good reason to accept the basic narrative as voicing the lost Sasanian tradition.⁸⁷ This thesis will draw primarily on al-Ṭabarī’s historiography, although Ferdowsi is valuable for reconstructing the Sasanian perspective.

Arguments

Chapter Overview

The case study of Justinian’s use of subsidies will be set out through a series of chapters addressing the fundamental dynamics of Justinian’s use of subsidies across different geopolitical contexts.

Chapter One assesses relations with the Sasanian Empire, the only polity recognised by Rome as a rival great power, arguing that Justinian’s shifting discursive strategies represented multiple, competing goals. Over the course of his reign, Justinian’s political rhetoric evolved dramatically: from an early rejection of ‘tribute’, to framing subsidies as ‘gifts’ between equals, and finally to claiming he was paying Persia merely to serve Roman interests. I demonstrate that the ideological incoherence of these arguments explains his

84 Agath., *Hist.*, IV. 30. 3. See Arash Zeini, ‘Xwaday Namag (Khvadhaynamagh, Book of Lords)’, in ODLA, p. 1599.

85 Tabari, *Annals*; see Altay Coşkun, ‘al-Tabari (839–923)’, in ODLA, p. 1447–48.

86 Ferdowsi, *Shanameh*, trans. by Dick Davis in *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings* (Viking, 2006). See Arash Zeini, ‘Xwaday Namag (Khvadhaynamagh, Book of Lords)’, in ODLA, p. 1599.

87 Ehsan Yarshater, ‘Iranian National History’, in *The Cambridge History of Iran, vol. 3 (I), The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, ed. by Ehsan Yarshater (Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 359–480, doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521200929.014.

failure to build consensus, ultimately leading his nephew, Justin II, to scrap the long-term peace treaty.

Chapter Two turns to the Arabian and Egyptian frontiers. In both cases Justinian continued the established precedent of giving subsidies, but he expanded the use of money in Arabia. However, the failure to prevent raiding in either case compromised the imperial claims. In contrast, Chapter Three considers a region where Justinian made significant changes to the use of subsidies both compared to his predecessors and throughout his own reign. In Armenia and Pontus, Lazica, and the Caspian Steppe these new offers of money disrupted traditional relationships of reciprocity and encouraged a more transactional approach.

The remaining chapters explore how the subsidies were used in Justinian's 'reconquest' of the former Western Roman Empire. Chapter Four argues that the distribution of cash has been an underappreciated tactic in the immediate conquests of the Vandal and Ostrogothic kingdoms. However, Justinian's use of money to draw third parties into these conflicts ultimately contributed to their punishing longevity. Chapter Five demonstrates that following these reconquests subsidies in Africa, Italy, and Illyria were characterised by contradictory political claims. The failure to establish a coherent discourse of exchange in these theatres led directly to brutal, prolonged conflicts.

Finally, Chapter Six addresses the Pontic Steppe and Lower Danube, where Justinian's policy toward the Huns, Slavs, and Avars had profound implications for the Balkans. Engaging with the model of 'steppe subsidies' popularised by Thomas Barfield, I argue that the demands of steppe nomads shared the same fundamental discursive dynamics as other frontiers. Against recent revisionist histories, I demonstrate that the Avars did indeed receive subsidies, and that Justinian's late decision to promote a hegemonic power on the Eurasian steppe aligns perfectly with his substantivist deployment of wealth elsewhere.

Overarching Arguments

Throughout these chapters, a core theoretical argument emerges: the diplomatic exchange of wealth in the sixth century cannot be fully explained by modern, rationalist utility-maximisation. However, this does not mean ancient actors were irrational. I argue that a substantivist account offers the best explanation of these dynamics: sixth-century actors made highly rational calculations, but those calculations were embedded within complex social and ideological values. The payment of money to foreign powers was a process that Romans and their neighbours actively competed to define. Labelling an exchange as a ‘gift’, ‘pay’, or ‘tribute’ was a contest of values fought in a shared discursive arena. Ultimately, Justinian struggled to articulate a coherent, hegemonic concept of why the Roman state ought to give money to some ‘barbarians’ but not others. Because he often prioritized immediate imperial glory over narrative consistency, he failed to build a political or moral consensus around his policies. The visceral blowback by contemporaries and wholesale rejection of subsidies by his successor were not inevitable. They were the product of Justinian’s willingness to pay a material price for his empire that he could not justify discursively to his own subjects.



FIG. 1.1. Map of the Roman and Sasanian Frontier

contrast, that Justinian's subsidies to Persia were shaped by multiple, conflicting aims that manifested in a shifting discourse of exchange. Moving through three phases of confrontation, compromise, and concession, Justinian continually attempted to redefine these wealth transfers. What began as a rigid refusal of 'tribute' evolved into an uneasy language of mutual 'gifts' and 'payments', before a concrete concession of annual subsidies that proved difficult to justify.

This chapter establishes three overarching arguments that run throughout the thesis. Firstly, it is not anachronistic to speak of 'policy'. Justinian and his ministers repeatedly formulated and issued directives about relations with Persia in our narrative sources. They calculated these directives in pursuit of identifiable aims which our sources expressed in rational terms. The limited capacity of state and social structures to execute these directives

was, however, a qualifying factor. Communication was a prosaic example of this. Even with the imperial post, opportunities were missed while envoys were travelling between the Eastern front and the emperor in Constantinople. The Roman failure to anticipate the invasion of 540 was an example of a more complex institutional problem.

Policy was further qualified by the moral and political discourses which shaped Roman thinking. For example, the belief that the Sasanian state would collapse without subsidies is judged by modern scholars to have been extremely unlikely. Because this discourse shaped thinking so profoundly, however, we must take it seriously when analysing Roman decision-making. We cannot reduce concepts like the honour of friendship or the shame of tribute to merely formal features. These ideas had substantive social meaning and consequently, Justinian's conflicting justifications of subsidies caused real political problems. He initially rejected the idea of mutual defence as tributary. He then described himself as exchanging gifts with an equal. He finally attempted to explain that the Persians were hired to guard the empire on his behalf. By that time, it was too late. It was not inevitable that Justinian's successor would reject his policy of giving money to Persia. After so long spent rejecting annual payments on principle, only to commit to payments for fifty years, Justinian had made a backlash very likely.

I make these arguments by presenting the three phases of Justinian's policies. I first argue that Justinian began his reign with a policy of confrontation. He refused to give money, arguing it would make the Romans tributary to the Persians. By tracing the origins of the dispute over subsidies, I show how this continued a position that was rationalised as a strategy to collapse the Sasanian state. Justinian knowingly went to war and turned down opportunities for peace in order to pursue short-term military objectives. Traditional scholarship maintained that Justinian regarded Persia as a distraction from reconquering the

West. I demonstrate in contrast that Justinian's use of subsidies escalated conflict with Persia.⁶

We then turn to the middle of Justinian's reign, when he adopted a policy of compromise. He changed his approach in response to Roman military failures, political turmoil at home, and changed circumstances in the Western Mediterranean. Although he maintained that Rome should not pay Persia annually, he compromised this principle by making one-off payments. This reflected his new priorities of conquering Vandal Africa and Ostrogothic Italy. This serves to challenge revisionist scholarship which denies Justinian had any concept of 'reconquest'. The final section shows that Justinian adopted a policy of concession between 545 and 565. He made a series of agreements which culminated in him formally conceding the principle of annual payments. The emperor recognised his military overextension and sought to consolidate his position in the East.

1.1. The Policy of Confrontation (527–31)

Justinian began his reign by seeking to confront Persia. Although Kavādh made his proposals in the discourse of the joint defence of the 'Caspian Gates', Justinian rejected any obligation to give money. We shall begin by considering the development of the Persian claim and its rejection by Roman emperors from Anastasius onwards. Then we can consider the practical steps Justinian took to pursue this policy. I demonstrate that he declined opportunities for peace and knowingly went to war. Finally, we can assess the outcomes of this approach. The lacklustre military performance of Roman armies and changing circumstances in the Western

6 J. W. Barker, *Justinian and the Later Roman Empire* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), p. 118; cf. 'Justinien put se dire qu'il avait mis de l'ordre dans les relations avec le grand voisin oriental de l'Empire avant de se jeter dans la guerre vandale,' in Ernst Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire: De la disparition de l'Empire d'Occident à la mort de Justinien (476–565)*, 2 vols (Desclée de Brouwer, 1949), II, p. 295; Ze'ev Rubin, 'The Mediterranean and the Dilemma of the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity', *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 1.1 (1986), pp. 13–62 (p. 48), doi:10.1080/09518968608569501.

Mediterranean meant that by the summer of 531, Justinian was beginning to move away from his policy of confrontation.

To understand the thinking behind Justinian's policy of confrontation, we must first establish the context for the Persian claim to Roman gold. It emerged from the period of cooperation which began in the late fourth century.⁷ The Romans and Persians began to recognise each other as lawful states of comparable status, their rulers referring to each other as 'brother'.⁸ This was caused by rise of the Huns of the Eurasian steppe as a mutual enemy. A series of treaties resolved disputes over the Mesopotamian and Armenian borders which had been the objects of the wars between the great powers during the third and fourth centuries.⁹ East Roman emperors began giving money to fund the Persians' war effort.

While modern scholars long accepted reports from ancient sources that the Sasanian state was perennially bankrupt, there is now near-consensus that the Sasanians administered a bureaucratic state as capable of extracting revenue as the Roman empire.¹⁰ Furthermore, as

7 Contra 'Diese Situation sollte sich auch nach dem Ende der Partherherrschaft nicht ändern. Gemeinsame Interessen im Kaukasus intensivierten die Beziehungen zwischen Rom und dem Sāsānidenreich. Im Rahmen des foedus von 244 zwischen Philippus Arabs und Šāpūr I. mußte sich der römische Kaiser verpflichten, die bislang von Rom für die Sicherung der Kaukasusfestungen zur Verfügung gestellten Gelder nun in Form jährlicher Subsidien an den Sasanidenkönig zu zahlen. Damit oblag Šāpūr I. die Verantwortung für die Instandhaltung der Kaukasuspässe,' as argued by Beate Dignas and Engelbert Winter, *Rom und das Perserreich: Zwei Weltmächte Zwischen Konfrontation und Koexistenz* (Akademie Verlag, 2001), p. 220. Cf. 'Sowohl der Streit über die Kosten für die Instandhaltung der Kaukasusfestungen als auch das Ausbleiben der festgelegten jährlichen Geldzahlungen löste bis weit ins 6. Jahrhundert hinein immer neue Konflikte aus,' in Dignas and Winter, *Rom und das Perserreich*, p. 226. See R. C. Blockley, 'Subsidies and Diplomacy: Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity', *Phoenix*, 39.1 (1985), pp. 62–74.

8 Karl Güterbock, *Byzanz und Persien in ihren diplomatisch-völkerrechtlichen Beziehungen im Zeitalter Justinians: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Völkerrechts* (Salzwasser-Verlag, 1906), p. 6. Further discussed in Evangelos K. Chrysos, 'The Title ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ in Early Byzantine International Relations', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 32 (1978), pp. 29–75.

9 For an overview, see Geoffrey Greatrex, 'Byzantium and the East in the Sixth Century', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. Michael Maas (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 407–509.

10 For example, Joh. Mal., XVIII. 44: καὶ μεμενήκαμεν ἐξ ἐκείνου καὶ μέχρι τοῦ παρόντος οὕτως διατελοῦντες. καὶ ποτὲ μὲν ἔθνων ἡμῖν ἐπανισταμένων, τοῖς μὲν παρατάξασθαι ἠναγχάσθημεν, τοὺς δὲ καὶ διὰ δόσεως χρημάτων ὑποταγῆναι ἐπέισαμεν, ὥς δῆλον εἶναι πάντα τὰ ἐν τοῖς ἡμετέροις θησαυροῖς ἀναλωθῆναι. The Sasanian tax system was 'wasteful and inefficient' before Khosrow's reforms, according to Ze'ev Rubin, 'The Sasanid Monarchy', in CAH 14, ed. by Averil Cameron, Bryan Ward-Perkins, and Michael Whitby (Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 638–61 (p. 655), doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521325912.025; demands for Roman money, although sometimes opportunistic, represented a 'real need': Rubin, 'The Mediterranean and the Dilemma of the Roman Empire', p. 40. For the shift in modern scholarship, see Jairus Banaji, 'Late Antique Aristocracies: The

Richard Payne put it, ‘the walls, settlements and irrigation systems constructed in the fifth and sixth centuries unambiguously attest to the organization of resources ... on a scale only the Roman and Chinese empires at their height could have rivalled’.¹¹ Given this, the Sasanians’ motive for seeking Roman gold was unlikely to have been fiscal.

Instead, it seems that the Sasanians used the receipt of gold to evidence their ideological claim to rule an empire of universal jurisdiction.¹² As Henning Börm argued, ‘the key to understanding the Persian demands for money against Rome is thus – despite the economic dimension of the events – above all of a political nature’.¹³ Nevertheless, it is attested by Roman sources in both reconstructed speeches and quotes from official documents that the Persians did make their case in terms of the fiscal responsibility of the ‘Caspian Gates’. It can be understood that the Sasanians expressed their claims in a way that was acceptable to the Romans.

The argument of the ‘Caspian Gates’ proved acceptable for much of the fifth century, but the Roman belief in the fragility of the Sasanian state proved dangerous. In the 480s the Sasanians suffered a string of defeats against the Hephthalite Huns, with the *shāhanshāh* Peroz dying in battle.¹⁴ His successors were left liable for an annual tribute. Learning of this, the East Romans changed their approach. Instead of supporting Persia against the Huns, they

Case of Iran’, in *Exploring the Economy of Late Antiquity: Selected Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 178–204, doi:10.1017/cbo9781316182314.009. The main dissenting voice is Parvaneh Pourshariati, who argues the Sasanian empire was a loose confederation of noble families: Parvaneh Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran* (I.B. Tauris, 2008).

11 Richard Payne, ‘The Archaeology of Sasanian Politics’, *Journal of Ancient History*, 2.2 (2014), pp. 80–92, doi:10.1515/jah-2014-0029.

12 Richard Payne, ‘Cosmology and the Expansion of the Iranian Empire, 502–628 CE’, *Past & Present*, 220 (2013), pp. 3–33 (pp. 10–17), doi:10.1093/pastj/gtt008.

13 Henning Börm, “‘Es war allerdings nicht so, daß sie es im Sinne eines Tributes erhielten, wie viele meinten...’ Anlässe und Funktion der persischen Geldforderungen an die Römer (3. bis 6. Jh.)’, *História*, 57.3 (2008), pp. 327–46. Ger.: ‘Der Schlüssel zum Verständnis der persischen Geldforderungen an Rom ist also - trotz der ökonomischen Dimension der Vorgänge - vor allem politischer Natur’.

14 Peroz, from MP *Pērōz* (cf. NP *Pīrūz* [پرویز]; Gk. *Perozēs* [Περόζης]; Lat. *Perozes*); see PLRE II, ‘Perozes’, p. 860. Procop., *BP*, I. 4. 35. For the symbolism see Richard Payne, ‘The Reinvention of Iran: The Sasanian Empire and the Huns’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Attila*, ed. by Michael Maas (Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 287–88.

began refusing payments, hoping to keep the Persians and Huns ‘as much as possible at odds with each other’ if they failed to pay their tribute.¹⁵ This was a profound shift: having previously operated on the principle that a strong Sasanian state was beneficial to the Romans, they now sought to weaken it. Yet, as we might expect given modern understandings of the underlying strength of the Sasanians, the policy did not work. While the Sasanian regime experienced unrest in the 480s and 490s, by the turn of the century Kavādh had secured his position as *shāhanshāh* and reformed the relationship with the Hephthalites.

With Anastasius still refusing to give money, Kavādh and his Hephthalite allies launched the biggest invasion of the Roman East since the reign of Shapur II (309–79).¹⁶ He refused a belated imperial offer of money to instead collect thousands of *librae* of gold from sacking and ransoming Roman cities in Syria and Mesopotamia.¹⁷ When an armistice was finally agreed, it was almost certainly on the basis of a further payment by the Romans.¹⁸ Anastasius quickly began strengthening the fortifications at Dara to prevent a future invasion and when the armistice expired in 513, it was not renewed.

Anastasius’s legacy was contested. Justinianic authors, like John Lydus and Procopius, remembered fondly that Anastasius ran a budget surplus and built a sizeable reserve of gold in the treasury.¹⁹ Yet John of Antioch, writing in the later sixth century but

15 Procop., *BP*, I. 7. 1–3. Christensen accepted that Kavādh needed the money: ‘Pour payer le tribut promis au roi des Hephthalites, Kavādh s’était adressé à l’empereur Anastase avec la demande d’un emprunt, et l’empereur, dans l’espoir que l’amitié entre les Iraniens et les Hephthalites se refroidirait, si le tribut n’était pas payé, avait répondu par un refus,’ in Arthur Christensen, *L’Iran sous les Sassanides*, rev. edn (Levin & Munksgaard, 1944), p. 352.

16 Procop., *BP*, I. 7. 2–3: οἵπερ αὐτὸν τὸ συμβόλαιον ποιῆσθαι οὐκ εἶων. ἀξύμορον γὰρ ἀπέφαινον εἶναι βεβαιωτέραν τοῖς πολεμίοις χρήμασιν οἰκείοις ἐς τοὺς Ἑφθαλίτας τὴν φιλίαν ποιήσασθαι, οὓς δὴ ἐς ἀλλήλους ξυγκρούειν ὅτι μάλιστα σφίσιν ἄμεινον εἶναι. διὸ δὴ Καβάδης ἐξ αἰτίας οὐδεμιᾶς ἔγνω ἐπὶ Ῥωμαίους στρατεύεσθαι. PLRE II, ‘Anastasius 4’, pp. 78–80.

17 Procop., *BP*, I. 10. 17; Josh. Styl., *Chron.*, LXXXI.

18 John Lydus *de. mag.*, III. 53. 20: Ὅτι ὁ βασιλεὺς Αναστάσιος ἐπὶ τὸ χεῖρον τραπεῖς ... οὐδέ γάρ οὐλοῖς τοὺς ἐπιόντας βαρβάρους ἡμύνετο, ἀλλὰ χρήμασι τὴν εἰρήνην ἐξωνούμενος διετελεῖ. Discussed by Geoffrey Greatrex, *Rome and Persia at War, 502–532* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 118.

19 John Lydus *de. mag.*, III. 51. 5–6: ἅπας μὲν ὁ πλοῦτος Ἀναστασίου εἰς ἀπείρους μυριάδας χρυσίου λιτρῶν συναγόμενος διερρῆν; Procop., *Anecd.*, XIX. 5: Ἀναστάσιος γὰρ προνοητικώτατός τε ἅμα καὶ

drawing on earlier sources, wrote that the emperor ‘changed much for the worse [...] and in reality, he no longer repelled the aggressions of the barbarians with weapons, but always bought peace with gold’.²⁰ To dismiss John of Antioch as expressing a ‘strictly traditionalist and minority point of view’, as does R. C. Blockley, would be to go too far.²¹ While Joshua the Stylite wrote in the reign of Anastasius to defend Roman payments to Persia, he also acknowledged that ‘many supposed it to be’ tribute (*madattā*).²²

Justin I therefore inherited a formal state of war with Persia, but one that was soluble.²³ Throughout his reign Kavādh clearly articulated three conditions for peace: respecting spheres of influence, recognising each other’s line of succession, and recommencing payments. By refusing all three demands, Justin was pursuing a policy of confrontation. His hard line should be associated with the increasing influence of his nephew.²⁴ Procopius satirised Justinian as leading his uncle ‘like a stupid donkey’: an exaggeration conveying a partial truth.²⁵ In 520 Justinian became one of two military

οικονομικώτατος πάντων αὐτοκρατόρων γενόμενος, δείσας ὅπερ ἐγένετο, μή οἱ ὁ τὴν βασιλείαν ἐκδεξόμενος χρημάτων ὑποσπανίζων ἴσως τοὺς κατηκόους ληΐζεται, χρυσοῦ τοὺς θησαυροὺς ἅπαντας κατακόρως ἐμπλησάμενος, τὸν βίον ξυνεμετρήσατο.

20 John of Antioch, fr. 215 (Müller): ‘Ὅτι ὁ βασιλεὺς Αναστάσιος ἐπὶ τὸ χεῖρον τραπεῖς [...] οὐδέ γάρ οπλοῖς τοὺς ἐπιόντας βαρβάρους ἡμύνετο, ἀλλὰ χρήμασι τὴν εἰρήνην ἐξωνούμενος διετέλει. For John’s methodology, see Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians*, p. 314.

21 R. C. Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy: Formation and Conduct from Diocletian to Anastasius* (Francis Cairns, 1992), p. 95.

22 Josh. Styl., *Chron.*, VIII:

τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος ἀναστάσιου ὁ βασιλεὺς ἀναστάσιος ἐπὶ τὸ χεῖρον τραπεῖς [...] οὐδέ γάρ οπλοῖς τοὺς ἐπιόντας βαρβάρους ἡμύνετο, ἀλλὰ χρήμασι τὴν εἰρήνην ἐξωνούμενος διετέλει. For John’s methodology, see Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians*, p. 314.

23 PLRE II, ‘Iustinus 4’, pp. 648–51.

24 Procop., *BP*, I. 11. 6: ἔδοξεν οὖν αὐτῷ ἄριστον εἶναι τὸν τε πόλεμον καὶ τὰς τοῦ πολέμου αἰτίας διαλῦσαι Ῥωμαίοις, ἐφ’ ᾧ Χοσρόης παῖς ἐσποιητὸς Ἰουστίνῳ βασιλεῖ γένοιτο: οὕτω γάρ οἱ μόνως τὸ ὄχυρόν ἐπὶ τῇ ἀρχῇ διασώσασθαι. διὸ δὴ πρέσβεις τε ὑπὲρ τούτων καὶ γράμματα ἐς Βυζάντιον Ἰουστίνῳ βασιλεῖ ἐπεμψεν. For the cause of war in 502, see Procop., *BP*, I. 7. 2–3: οὔτε γὰρ αὐτὸν τὸ συμβόλαιον ποιῆσθαι οὐκ εἶον. ἀξύνφορον γὰρ ἀπέφαινον εἶναι βεβαιότεραν τοῖς πολέμοις χρήμασιν οἰκείοις ἐς τοὺς Ἐφθαλίτας τὴν φιλίαν ποιήσασθαι, οὓς δὴ ἐς ἀλλήλους ξυγκρούειν ὅτι μάλιστα σφίσιιν ἄμεινον εἶναι. διὸ δὴ Καβάδης ἐξ αἰτίας οὐδεμιᾶς ἔγνω ἐπὶ Ῥωμαίους στρατεύεσθαι. Peter Heather, *Rome Resurgent: War and Empire in the Age of Justinian* (Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 92–93.

25 Procop., *Anecd.*, VIII. 2–4: βασιλεῖ δὲ τῶν πρᾶσσομένων ἥκιστα ἔμελεν, ἐπεὶ οὐδέ τις αἴσθησις τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ ἐγένετο, καίπερ αὐτόπτη τῶν δρωμένων ἐν τοῖς ἵπποδρομίῳις αἰεὶ γινομένων. ἡλίθιος τε γὰρ ὑπερφυῶς ἦν καὶ νωθεὶ ὄνῳ ἐμφορῆς μάλιστα καὶ οἷος τῷ τὸν χαλινὸν ἔλκοντι ἔπεσθαι, συχνὰ οἱ

commanders (*magistri militum praesentalis*) based at Constantinople. In 525 Justin appointed him *caesar* or junior emperor, effectively nominating him as his successor. This status was confirmed by his co-option as joint emperor *Augustus* in April 527. Justinian was in the senior ranks of the empire when his uncle formulated his confrontational policy.

Furthermore, he acquired knowledge about the situation. Although he remained in the capital, he built a retinue of guardsmen (*bucellarii*) including Belisarius and Sittas. These men both gained experience in the proxy wars against Persia in Armenia and the Caucasus.²⁶ Upon his uncle's death and his accession as sole emperor, he was not naïve. When he received a letter from Kavādh in 528 demanding he 'give us some of your gold' or face war within a year, Justinian's refusal to give money knowingly risked all-out war.²⁷ At the same time, relations with the 'barbarian kingdoms' in the Western Mediterranean were warm. The Vandal king Hilderic was a 'guest friend'.²⁸ While initial relations with the queen regent of Ostrogothic Italy, Amalasuintha, were cooler, by the early 530s they declared each other to be friends and allies. To claim that Justinian sought peace in the East at any price so that he could reconquer the West is therefore unsustainable. He instead pursued a policy of confrontation with the intention of resisting Kavādh's demands for gold.

Had Justinian sought peace, his accession as sole emperor presented the ideal opportunity to resume negotiations and reset relations. A protocol had emerged that the two empires would exchange embassies to formally announce the succession of a new ruler.²⁹ Instead, his actions demonstrate the policy of confrontation in practice. Justinian only

σειομένων τῶν ὧτων. Ἰουστινιανὸς ταῦτά τε ἔπρασσε καὶ ξύμπαντα τᾶλλα ἐκύκα. ὅσπερ ἐπειδὴ τάχιστα ἐπελάβετο τῆς τοῦ θείου ἀρχῆς, χρήματα μὲν τὰ δημόσια εὐθὺς καταναλοῦν κόσμῳ οὐδενὶ ἐν σπουδῇ εἶχεν ἅτε αὐτῶν κύριος γεγονώς.

26 They held the rank of *doryphoroi* ('spear-carriers'), the officers of a retinue; see Bury, *Theodosius to Justinian*, II, pp. 77–78; Heather, *Rome Resurgent*, pp. 54, 84; for general discussion David Alan Parnell, *Justinian's Men: Careers and Relationships of Byzantine Army Officers, 518–610* (Macmillan, 2017), pp. 17–19, doi:10.1057/978-1-137-56204-3.

27 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 36; cf. Joh. Mal., XVIII. 34

28 See Chapter Four for both Hilderic and Amalasuintha.

29 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 36. PLRE III, 'Hermogenes 1', pp. 590–92.

dispatched this embassy, led by the *magister officiorum* Hermogenes, in April 529. That it reached Kavādh's court in July 529, almost two whole years since Justinian's accession, hardly showed urgency.

Hermogenes returned to Justinian with a letter from the Persian ruler which set out the ultimatum described above. If we accept the provenance of the letter, it shows the willingness of Kavādh to invoke the discourse of the Caspian Gates to persuade Justinian. He wrote that 'We have found it written in our ancient records that we are brothers of one another, and that if one of us should stand in need of men or money, the other should provide them'.³⁰ It is notable that this claim reflects the formulation in the earlier *Chronicle* of Joshua the Stylite that the empires had agreed 'that if they had need of each other while at war with another nation, they would assist by giving either three hundred fighting men along with their weapons and horses, or three hundred *staters* for each man'.³¹ Joshua was at pains to clarify that 'this payment was not made as tribute (*madattā*), as many supposed it to be'.³²

Kavādh had given his final ultimatum. When Justinian's ambassadors requested to enter Persian territory in the spring of 530, they were refused entry.³³ When the Persian general Peroz initiated the Battle of Dara in June 530, however, he was defeated. Belisarius, the recently appointed *magister militum* and former bodyguard of Justinian, thus began to make a name for himself. This military setback prompted Kavādh to reopen negotiations. He

30 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 44: Κωάδης βασιλεὺς βασιλευόντων, ἡλίου ἀνατολῆς, Φλαβίῳ Ἰουστινιανῷ Καίσαρι σελήνης δύσεως. ἡΐραμεν ἐν τοῖς ἡμετέροις ἀρχαίοις ἀναγεγραμμένα ἀδελφοὺς ἡμᾶς ἀλλήλων εἶναι, καὶ ἐάν τις ἐπιδεηθῇ σωμάτων ἢ χρημάτων, παρέχειν τὸν ἕτερον. καὶ μεμενήκαμεν ἐξ ἐκείνου καὶ μέχρι τοῦ παρόντος οὕτως διατελοῦντες. καὶ ποτὲ μὲν ἐθνῶν ἡμῖν ἐπανισταμένων, τοῖς μὲν παρατάξασθαι ἠναγκάσθημεν, τοὺς δὲ καὶ διὰ δόσεως χρημάτων ὑποταγῆναι ἐπέισαμεν, ὥς δηλον εἶναι πάντα τὰ ἐν τοῖς ἡμετέροις θησαυροῖς ἀναλωθῆναι, ταῦτα δὲ καὶ Ἀναστασίῳ καὶ Ἰουστίνῳ τοῖς βασιλεῦσι γεγραφήκαμεν, καὶ ἠνύσαμεν πλέον οὐδέν. ὅθεν ἠναγκάσθημεν παρατάξασθαι πολέμου χάριν, καὶ πλησίον τῶν Ρωμαϊκῶν γενόμενοι τοὺς ἐν μέσῳ μηδὲν ἀμαρτήσαντας προφάσει τῆς ἐκείνων ἀπειθείας ἀπολέσαι. ἀλλ', ὥς χριστιανοὶ καὶ εὐσεβεῖς, φείσασθε ψυχῶν καὶ σωμάτων, καὶ μετάδοτε ἡμῖν χρυσίου. εἰ δὲ μὴ τοῦτο ποιεῖτε, εὐτρεπίσατε ἑαυτοὺς πρὸς πόλεμον, προθεσμέων ἔχοντες ὅλου τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ, ἵνα μὴ νομισθῶμεν κλέπτειν τὴν νίκην καὶ δόλῳ περιγίνεσθαι τοῦ πολέμου.

31 Josh. Styl., *Chron.*, VIII. 8.

32 Josh. Styl., *Chron.*, VIII. 8.

33 Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6022 (March of the Eighth Indiction = March, AD 530); discussed by Geoffrey Greatrex, *Rome and Persia at War, 502–532* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 168.

allowed Rufinus and the comes Alexander to enter Persian territory and met them in August 530.³⁴ In November 530 they returned to Constantinople with a draft treaty.³⁵

Procopius did not specify a formal treaty, instead presenting an exchange of speeches between the ambassadors and Kavādh explaining their reasoning. This was a classic literary technique of the genre. Similarly to the letter in Malalas, Procopius stated Rufinus addressed Kavādh as the ‘brother’ of Justinian.³⁶ Kavādh argued that the Romans were morally obliged to do one of two things. Either they demilitarise the Mesopotamian frontier or they contribute to the Persian cost of defending the ‘Caspian Gates’. He said ‘we guard the Caspian Gates to the advantage of both the Persians and Romans’, arguing that the emperor Anastasius had declined the opportunity to take on the defences in order to save money.³⁷ According to Procopius, Kavādh then ‘hinted he was willing to take money from the Romans and have done with the causes of the war’ to the ambassadors.³⁸ This could be because neither side intended to include the money within the formal written treaty; even if, as Malalas attests, the treaty included a commitment to give money if asked.³⁹ The different emphases in the Malalas and Procopius accounts can be explained by genre and sources. Malalas is thought to have written his chronicle based on official imperial reports that he saw in his civil service role at Antioch. Procopius, as the legal secretary to the *magister militum* Belisarius, would have seen confidential papers.

34 Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6022; cf. Joh. Mal., XVIII. 50.

35 Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6023 (November of the Ninth Indiction = November, AD 530).

36 Procop., *BP*, I. 16. 1

37 Procop., *BP*, I. 16. 4–8: πύλας γὰρ τὰς Κασπίας ἡμεῖς ἔσχομεν ἐπὶ τῷ Περσῶν τε καὶ Ῥωμαίων ἀγαθῷ, βιασάμενοι τοὺς ἐκείνη βαρβάρους, ἐπεὶ Ἀναστάσιος ὁ Ῥωμαίων αὐτοκράτωρ, ὥς που καὶ αὐτὸς οἶσθα, παρὸν αὐτὰς χρήμασιν ὠνεῖσθαι, οὐκ ἤθελεν, ὅπως μὴ στράτευμα εἰς πάντα τὸν αἰῶνα ἐνταῦθα ἔχων χρήματα μεγάλα ὑπὲρ ἀμφοτέρων προῖεσθαι ἀναγκάζεται.

38 Procop., *BP*, I. 16. 9: τοσαῦτα Καβάδης εἰπὼν τὸν πρεσβευτὴν ἀπεπέμψατο, παραδηλώσας ὥς οἱ βουλομένῳ εἴη χρήματά τε πρὸς Ῥωμαίων λαβεῖν καὶ τὰς τοῦ πολέμου καταλύειν αἰτίας.

39 Blockley, ‘Subsidies and Diplomacy’, pp. 70–71.

In late 530 Justinian's ambassadors returned to Constantinople with a draft treaty and accompanying letter.⁴⁰ In this letter Kavādh asked to conclude peace, in order that 'the enemies of both our states will be destroyed'.⁴¹ Justinian agreed to the proposals and sent Rufinus back to Kavādh, only to find the Persians would no longer agree to the treaty. Their official objection was that the treaty left the Roman occupation of parts of Persarmenia unresolved, with the mines of those areas formerly paying 200 *librae* a year of gold to the Persians.⁴² Malalas claims the real reason was that Kavādh had heard of the uprising by Justinian's Samaritan subjects in Palestine and sought to exploit it.⁴³ The Samaritans apparently wrote to Kavādh to offer 'a large sum of gold and an untold quantity of precious stones' if he liberated them from the Romans.⁴⁴

531 therefore began with few prospects of a negotiated solution. Yet two bloody battles at either end of the campaigning season changed each emperor's position. After the bloody battle of Callinicum in April, Justinian 'immediately' sent Hermogenes to meet Kavādh and restart peace talks.⁴⁵ Later in the summer, Justinian sent Rufinus and Strategius to present gifts from him and the empress Theodora to Kavādh and his sister. The ambassadors reached Edessa, but Kavādh refused them entry.⁴⁶ In late August, however, the Romans won a major victory at Martyropolis in Armenia. The Roman army was commanded

40 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 53 has September 530; Procop., *BP*, has the 'close of winter' and end of Justinian's fourth year (= March 531); Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6024 has November 531, but he is clearly confused: see Cyril Mango, Roger Scott, and Geoffrey Greatrex, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284–813* (Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 276, n. 5.

41 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 53: ἀνελθόντες πρὸς ἡμᾶς οἱ ἡμέτεροι πρεσβευταὶ οἱ πρὸς τὴν σὴν σταλέντες ἡμερότητα ἀτήγγειλαν ἡμῖν «τὴν ἀγαθὴν προαίρεσιν τῆς πατρικῆς ὑμῶν διαθέσεως. καὶ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν εὐχαριστήσαμεν τῷ δεσπότῃ θεῷ ὅτι πρέπον τῇ αὐτοῦ ἀγαθότητι πρᾶγμα γέγονε καὶ προέβη σὺν θεῷ εἰρήνη εἰς ὠφέλειαν τῶν δύο πολιτειῶν. ὅτε δὲ μεγάλη δόξα καὶ ἔπαινός ἐστιν ἐν πάσῃ τῇ γῇ παρὰ θεῷ καὶ ἀνθρώποις τὸ εἰρήνην γενέσθαι μεταξὺ τῶν δύο κόσμων ἐπὶ τῆς σῆς ἡμερότητος καὶ ἡμῶν τῶν γνησίως ὑμᾶς ἀγαπώντων πρόδηλόν ἐστε: καὶ οἱ ἐχθροὶ δὲ ἑκατέρας πολιτείας καταπεσοῦνται ταύτης σὺν θεῷ γενομένης. διὰ τάχους τοίνυν ἐπικαταλήγονται οἱ ἡμέτεροι πρεσβευταί, ὀφείλοντες ἀναπληρῶσαι τὰ πρὸς ἀσφάλειαν τῆς εἰρήνης. εὐχόμεθα γοῦν ἐν πολλοῖς χρόνοις τὴν πατρικὴν ὑμῶν διάθεσιν περισώζεσθαι.

42 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 54.

43 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 54.

44 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 54.

45 Procop., *BP*, I. 21. 1.

46 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 61.

by Sittas, one of Justinian's former *bucellarii*. According to Malalas, the news of the defeat caused the eighty-three-year-old Kavādh to have a stroke. He confirmed Khosrow as his successor before dying on 13 September.⁴⁷ Rather than pursue peace, Justinian attempted to exploit the opportunity.

The new *shāhanshāh*, Khosrow I, immediately sought to negotiate with the Romans. Henning Börm argues that Khosrow was predisposed towards peace.⁴⁸ He also needed to see off challengers and secure his rule. Like at his own accession in 527, however, Justinian did not take the opportunity for a diplomatic reset. His ambassadors at Edessa refused to negotiate with Khosrow's embassy without knowing the emperor's position. When Justinian was informed of Khosrow's wishes, he wrote to him stating: 'we do not give permission for our ambassadors to come to you, nor do we recognise you as emperor of the Persians'.⁴⁹ This was exactly what Kavādh had feared when he sought Justin's endorsement of his heir. Justinian intended to seize the military initiative while the Persians were embroiled in a succession dispute. In doing so, he could potentially force Khosrow to agree peace without payments, thereby achieving his original objective. This decision is crucial to understanding the policy of compromise: when he believed it possible, Justinian tried to avoid payments.

Yet over the winter, Khosrow defeated his rivals and emerged as the undisputed ruler of Persia. Meanwhile, Roman forces were tied up by a major incursion of Sabir Huns 'through the Caspian Gates' which reached as far as Syria.⁵⁰ The emperor despatched the *magister militum* of Armenia, Dorotheus, to expel the Huns.⁵¹ Zachariah was explicit that this raid was sponsored by the Persians.⁵² Malalas, reflecting the official position, was less sure:

47 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 68.

48 Henning Börm, *Prokop und die Perser: Untersuchungen zu den römisch-sasanidischen Kontakten in der ausgehenden Spätantike* (Steiner, 2007), p. 634.

49 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 68.

50 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 70; Zach., *HE*, IX. 6.

51 PLRE III, 'Dorotheus 2', pp. 420–21.

52 Zach., *HE*, IX. 6.

he reports that the emperor sent Rufinus to assess the situation, who reported that the Persians were not responsible. This was politically convenient for future negotiations.⁵³ Given we know that Kavādh had sought to recruit Sabirs to fight against the Romans in 528, it seems entirely possible that the Huns had crossed the Caspian Gates with at least the tacit permission of the Persians, but that Romans were seeking to ease the diplomatic situation by absolving the Persians of blame.

What were the outcomes of the policy of confrontation? The first point is that the demands for money were framed around the ‘Caspian Gates’ by our Roman sources. This context has often led historians to attribute the entire Persian demand for money from emperors, including Justinian, to the defence of the Caspian Gates. For example, Beate Dignas and Engelbert Winter state as fact that the treaty agreed by Philip I (244–49) ceded the defence of the Caucasus to the Sasanians and obliged the Romans to send the Persians the money that has previously been spent on Roman forts in the region.⁵⁴ They further associate the wars of the sixth century with payments obliged by this treaty.⁵⁵

It has, however, long been proven that no such treaty existed. As R. C. Blockley demonstrated, this notion was based on a misreading of the sources.⁵⁶ Procopius attributes speeches to the Persian envoy which argue for money in moral terms. The envoy identified the grievance that Anastasius declining to take on the defences of the Caspian Gates while

53 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 70.

54 ‘Diese Situation sollte sich auch nach dem Ende der Partherherrschaft nicht ändern. Gemeinsame Interessen im Kaukasus intensivierten die Beziehungen zwischen Rom und dem Sāsānidenreich. Im Rahmen des foedus von 244 zwischen Philippus Arabs und Šāpūr I. mußte sich der römische Kaiser verpflichten, die bislang von Rom für die Sicherung der Kaukasusfestungen zur Verfügung gestellten Gelder nun in Form jährlicher Subsidien an den Sasanidenkönig zu zahlen. Damit oblag Šāpūr I. die Verantwortung für die Instandhaltung der Kaukasuspässe,’ in Dignas and Winter, *Rom und das Perserreich*, p. 220. For Philip, see Michael Peachin, ‘Philippus (2), Marcus Iulius’, in OCD, p. 1133.

55 ‘Sowohl der Streit über die Kosten für die Instandhaltung der Kaukasusfestungen als auch das Ausbleiben der festgelegten jährlichen Geldzahlungen löste bis weit ins 6. Jahrhundert hinein immer neue Konflikte aus,’ in Dignas and Winter, *Rom und das Perserreich*, p. 226.

56 Blockley, ‘Subsidies and Diplomacy’, pp. 62–74.

reinforcing Dara had imposed intolerable costs on Persia.⁵⁷ While it might be objected that a Roman source would have no desire to acknowledge that fact, Procopius is not generally shy about such matters. Instead of a literal legal obligation, therefore, the defence of the ‘Caspian Gates’ was a discourse that both Romans and Persians invoked.

The second feature is that Kavādh was consistently trying to negotiate during this period. In 527 Kavādh was still attempting to negotiate, but Justinian was willing to go to war. From 529 their positions switched, with Justinian sending repeated embassies and Kavādh refusing to conclude a treaty. Geoffrey Greatrex makes two arguments: firstly, that Justinian had already exhausted his finances with domestic projects, and was loath to make payments; secondly, Justinian had put the eastern front on a war-footing and believed he was ready to meet an invasion.⁵⁸

Taking the second point further, Peter Heather argues that Justinian actively sought to provoke Kavādh in the belief he could win the war.⁵⁹ This conclusion is important, as it disproves the theory that Justinian worked from the outset of his reign to pivot his military from the East towards the reconquest of the Mediterranean.⁶⁰ Traditional scholarship emphasised the fifth-century division of the Roman Empire as the key structural factor behind the need to pay Persia: for Ze’ev Rubin, Justinian was simply accepting ‘an impossible compromise’ was needed to ‘break loose from this vicious cycle’ of fighting wars

57 Procop., *BP*, I. 16. 4–8: πύλας γὰρ τὰς Κασπίας ἡμεῖς ἔσχομεν ἐπὶ τῷ Περσῶν τε καὶ Ῥωμαίων ἀγαθῷ, βιασάμενοι τοὺς ἐκεῖνη βαρβάρους, ἐπεὶ Ἀναστάσιος ὁ Ῥωμαίων αὐτοκράτωρ, ὥς που καὶ αὐτὸς οἶσθα, παρὸν αὐτὰς χρήμασιν ὠνεῖσθαι, οὐκ ἤθελεν, ὅπως μὴ στράτευμα εἰς πάντα τὸν αἰῶνα ἐνταῦθα ἔχων χρήματα μεγάλα ὑπὲρ ἀμφοτέρων προΐεσθαι ἀναγκάζεται.

58 Greatrex, *Rome and Persia at War, 502–532*, p. 168.

59 Heather, *Rome Resurgent*, p. 98.

60 ‘Of course we may well ask why a man of Justinian’s talents continued such a potentially dangerous and certainly undignified policy [of subsidies]. The answer lies, as has frequently been noted, in his schemes of reconquest of the West [...] To gain freedom for his western enterprises, therefore, and to release troops for them, he was forced to follow the policy of his predecessors in buying security and peace from Persia and the Danubian tribes,’ in Gordon, ‘Procopius and Justinian’s Financial Policies’, p. 24.

on two distant frontiers.⁶¹ Yet if this was the case, Justinian missed the initial opportunities to agree payments.

The third point, however, is that the Romans were less successful in the ensuing war than Justinian must have expected. Although the Battle of Dara (June 530) was a success that marked Belisarius as one to watch, the Battle of Callinicum (April 531) was a bloodbath that led to his dismissal after an official inquiry.⁶² The outcome of Callinicum led Justinian to ‘immediately’ send Hermogenes to meet Kavādh and restart peace talks.⁶³ Yet it only took the victory of Sittas at Martyropolis (August 531) for Justinian to resolve to pursue the war.⁶⁴ Thus even after Justinian had entertained the possibility of paying for peace, the prospect of military success led to a change of policy. We can see throughout the period how the delayed cycle of news between the frontier and Constantinople shaped decisions.

1.2. The Policy of Compromise (531–45)

Justinian had pursued a policy of confrontation with Kavādh, preferring all-out war than giving money. In the autumn of 531, however, the situation had changed. On the eastern front, bloody battles of the year’s campaign season had produced stalemate. Meanwhile in the Western Mediterranean, the overthrow of Justinian’s friend Hilderic in 530 had led the emperor to threaten war on the Vandal Kingdom.⁶⁵ The death of Kavādh in September 531 thus gave Justinian an opportunity to reset relations with Persia. This section first looks at Justinian’s objectives, then at his practice, and then offers an overall assessment. This section argues that despite the traditional account that Justinian prioritised the West, his relations with Kavādh’s successor Khosrow were marked by indecision. While Justinian had clearly

61 Rubin, ‘The Mediterranean and the Dilemma of the Roman Empire’, pp. 48–49.

62 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 61.

63 Procop., *BP*, I. 21. 1.

64 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 68.

65 Whitby, *The Wars of Justinian*, p. 176.

decided to pivot to the West, he remained unwilling to concede annual payments to Persia or to respect its sphere of influence in a way that undermined that pivot.

To begin, we must assess the evidence for a deliberate intention to end the conflict with Persia and reorientate with the Western Mediterranean. Procopius offers the most explicit association between the ‘Eternal Peace’ and the West. He says Justinian sought to end the Persian War ‘as quickly as possible and then to campaign against Libya’, and so ‘the treaty with Persia was duly made’.⁶⁶ Recently historians have treated this account with scepticism. On the one hand, it has been read as criticism of the emperor (*Kaiserkritik*). Shane Bjornlie argues that Procopius deliberately constructs ‘jarring contrast’ so that the ‘entire narrative constructed around the ‘Eternal Peace’ casts the character of Justinian in doubt’, ‘sapping the glory’ of the Vandal conquests by making clear how it depended on ‘tribute’ to Persia.⁶⁷

More prosaically, others have argued that Procopius had a motive to manipulate the narrative to exonerate Belisarius.⁶⁸ Dismissed after the Battle of Callinicum in 531, Belisarius endured a period of isolation before being brought back to lead the African campaign. Greatrex argues that Procopius ‘has subordinated chronology to narrative structure’ to rehabilitate his patron.⁶⁹ From either perspective, Procopius is advancing a political agenda rather than offering a true account.

Yet this is not the only point where Procopius made the connection. He reprised the claim in speeches of foreign ambassadors, a popular technique of ancient authors for

66 Procop., *BV*, III. 9. 25–26: καὶ οἱ ἔδοξε καταλύσαντι ὡς τάχιστα τὸν Μηδικὸν πόλεμον ἐς Λιβύην στρατεῦσαι, καὶ ἦν γὰρ ἐπινοῆσαί [...] γεγονάσι δὲ αὐτίκα αἱ πρὸς Πέρσας σπονδαί.

67 M. Shane Bjornlie, *Politics and Tradition Between Rome, Ravenna and Constantinople: A Study of Cassiodorus and the Variae, 527–554* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 106–07, doi:10.1017/cbo9781139236171.

68 John Moorhead, *Justinian* (Routledge, 1994), pp. 23–24, doi:10.4324/9781315845746.

69 Geoffrey Greatrex, *Procopius of Caesarea: The Persian Wars: A Historical Commentary* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), p. 308.

critiquing their own rulers.⁷⁰ The Persian ambassador says that Justinian ‘could never have conquered the Vandals if the Persians had not made a treaty with him’.⁷¹ He later has an Ostrogothic envoy declare to the Persians that Justinian ‘decided to deceive you with the smoke screen of peace and, by forcing the others into subjection, to acquire mighty forces to use against your state’.⁷² These examples demonstrate that the association between the ‘Eternal Peace’ and the successful Vandal War would have been accepted by his readers when he wrote in the early 550s.

To prove Justinian began his reign with a preconceived plan of reconquest requires earlier sources which we unfortunately lack. For example, the 533 preface of Justinian’s *Institutes* celebrated that how Africa ‘testifies’ to the emperor’s military success.⁷³ We would like to know whether such success had been promised in the earlier edition of the *Codex* that had been promulgated in 529. The unfortunate loss of that text means we cannot make such a comparison.⁷⁴ The closest we might get is the *Chronicle* of Malalas. It is understood to have been first published after the ‘Eternal Peace’, but before the invasion of Africa. Unlike Procopius, Malalas includes no hint of a declared intent to turn to the West when it reports the conclusion of the Persian treaty.⁷⁵ The status of the extant text, however, renders such a task perilous. ‘Our’ version of Malalas has been delicately reconstructed from excerpts in

70 Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea*, p. 91; Bjornlie, *Politics and Tradition Between Rome, Ravenna and Constantinople*, p. 106; Averil Cameron, ‘Early Byzantine *Kaiserkritik*: Two Case Histories’, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 3.1 (1977), pp. 1–17, doi:10.1179/030701377806931843.

71 Procop., *BP*, I. 26. 3: πέμψας τε ὁ Χοσρόης ἐς Βυζάντιον πρέσβεις, ξυγχαίρειν τε Ἰουστινιανῷ τῷ βασιλεῖ ἔφασκε, καὶ τὸ μέρος λαβεῖν ξὺν γέλῳ διήθεν τῶν ἐκ Λιβύης λαφύρων ἡξίου, ὅτι δὴ οὐκ ἂν ποτε Βανδύλων τῷ πολέμῳ περιέσεσθαι ἴσχυεν.

72 Procop., *BP*, II. 2. 7: εἴτα ‘οὐδὲ γὰρ Πέρσαις κατὰ μόνας ἐγχειρεῖν ἴσχυεν οὐδὲ Περσῶν οἱ ἀντιστατούντων οἷός τε ἦν ἐπ’ ἄλλους ἰέναι σὲ μὲν τῷ τῆς εἰρήνης παραπετάσματι ἐξαπατᾶν ἔγνω, τοὺς δὲ λοιποὺς βιαζόμενος μεγάλας δυνάμεις ἐπὶ τῇ σῇ ἀρχῇ ἐταιρίζεσθαι.

73 Just., *Institutiones*, ‘Proemium’, 1: et tam Africa quam aliae innumerosae provinciae [...] protestantur. See Charles Pazdernik, ‘Justinianic Ideology and the Power of the Past’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. by Michael Maas (Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 185–212 (p. 209), n. 53, doi:10.1017/CCOL0521817463.008.

74 Caroline Humphreys, ‘Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. by Michael Maas (Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 161–84 (p. 164), doi:10.1017/CCOL0521817463.007.

75 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 76.

later authors and even later manuscripts, leading Greatrex to warn ‘it is hard to see how much precision can be obtained in discussions on the elusive author of the (no longer extant) sixth-century chronicle’.⁷⁶ We must, therefore, be cautious in placing too much weight on Malalas as a supposed source attesting to views before the African war.

Given these problems with the primary sources, recent accounts have tended towards the view that the ideology of *renovatio imperii* must have been retrospective. Miranda Williams maintains that all ideas of reconquering Africa were rationalisations after the event.⁷⁷ Those defending this interpretation make reasonable observations but draw an excessively sceptical conclusion. ‘Victory’ was so important to Justinianic ideology that even the incomplete conquest of a small group like the Tzani was lauded.⁷⁸ It goes too far to argue that Justinian never intended ‘reconquest’. Indeed, the combination of the Nika revolt and military failure against Persia provided a context for a new policy.⁷⁹ Therefore we can conclude Justinian may have begun considering ending the Persian War in order to launch a campaign in Vandal Africa in late 531; he had certainly done so in 532.

While Khosrow emerged more secure, Justinian’s regime was almost toppled by the ‘Nika revolt’ of January 532.⁸⁰ Beginning as a circus riot, the unrest took on a sharp political dimension when rioters attempted to elevate to the throne first Probus, the nephew of the former emperor Anastasius, and the senior senator Hypatius. Justinian restored control through military might rather than political compromise: having ‘forfeited all obvious

76 Geoffrey Greatrex, ‘Malalas and Procopius’, in *Die Weltchroniken des Johannes Malalas*, ed. by Mischa Meier, Christine Radtki, and Fabian Schulz (Steiner, 2015), pp. 161–77; cf. Ian Colvin, ‘Comparing Procopius and Malalas’, in *Procopius of Caesarea: Literary and Historical Interpretations*, ed. by Christopher Lillington-Martin and Elodie Turquois (Routledge, 2018), pp. 201–13, doi:10.4324/9781315602288-13.

77 Williams, ‘The African Policy of Justinian’, p. 107.

78 See Chapter Three.

79 Peter Heather, *The Restoration of Rome: Barbarian Popes and Imperial Pretenders* (Macmillan, 2014), p. 118.

80 J. B. Bury, ‘The Nika Riot’, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 17 (1897), pp. 92–119; Geoffrey Greatrex, ‘The Nika Riot: A Reappraisal’, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 117 (1997), pp. 60–86; Mischa Meier, ‘Die Inszenierung Einer Katastrophe: Justinian Und Der Nika-Aufstand’, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 142 (2003), pp. 273–300; Heather, *Rome Resurgent*, pp. 109–14.

consent', he 'had held on at sword's point'.⁸¹ In Henning Börm's interpretation, the important outcome of the Nika revolt was to decisively shift power away from the senatorial 'hawks' who had followed the disgraced Hypatius. Instead the 'doves', who preferred to see a conclusion to the war, gained influence.⁸²

Thus, several developments coalesced: the failure to achieve military advantage over the winter, a motive to invade in Africa and the near-death experience for his regime of Nika. These led Justinian to reformulate his Persian policy. In the spring of 532 Justinian agreed to Khosrow's request for a three-month armistice to allow negotiations.⁸³ The course of the negotiations demonstrates, however, how Justinian remained conflicted about his multiple and competing objectives. The Roman embassy comprising Rufinus, Alexander, Thomas and Hermogenes was received by Khosrow at a palace near the River Tigris. Khosrow sought 110 *centenaria*, the equivalent to 11,000 *librae* or 792,000 *solidi*.⁸⁴ He again cited the defence of the Caspian Gates and the Roman construction of Dara.⁸⁵ Khosrow also wanted the military headquarters moved back from Dara to Edessa; recognition of Persian control of border forts in Lazica, and the return of Roman-occupied land in Persarmenia.⁸⁶ The ambassadors said they needed to consult Justinian on the question of Lazica and despatched Rufinus back to Constantinople. Justinian agreed the proposed terms and sent Rufinus back to give his assent and hand over the money.

Shortly afterwards, however, he regretted this decision. He sought to cancel the treaty and recall the money. Procopius says that Rufinus had already given the money to the

81 Heather, *Rome Resurgent*, p. 114.

82 Börm, *Prokop und die Perser*, p. 330.

83 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 69.

84 Procop., *BP*, I. 22. 2–5: καὶ αὐτοὺς μὲν Χοσρόης ἐπειδὴ εἶδε, τοὺς ὁμήρους ἀφῆκε. τιθασσεύοντες δὲ Χοσρόην οἱ πρέσβεις ἐπαγωγὰ τε πολλὰ ἔλεξαν καὶ Ῥωμαίων ὡς ἥκιστα πρέσβεισι πρέποντα. οἷς δὴ χειροῆθης ὁ Χοσρόης γενόμενος τὴν μὲν εἰρήνην πέρας οὐκ ἔχουσιν δέκα καὶ ἑκατὸν κεντηναρίων ὁμολόγει πρὸς αὐτοὺς θήσεσθαι.

85 Procop., *BP*, I. 22. 2–5: τοῦτο δὲ οἱ δίδωσθαι τὸ χρυσίον ἡξίου, ὡς μήτε πόλιν Δάρας Ῥωμαῖοι καθελεῖν ἀναγκάζονται μήτε φυλακτηρίου τοῦ ἐν πύλαις Κασπίαις μεταλαχεῖν Πέρσαις.

86 Procop., *BP*, I. 22. 5.

Persians and had to ask for it back.⁸⁷ We are told that Justinian's rationale was that by improving his military position through a further season of campaigning, he could reach better terms about the status of the client kingdom of Lazica. This indeed proved the case and in the summer of 532, Rufinus and Hermogenes were again despatched. They concluded the treaty with the issues of the Laz border forts resolved in the Romans' favour.⁸⁸

The Roman sources were clear that Kavādh's demand for annual payments had caused the prior three decades of war. The lump sum Justinian paid to Khosrow could be expected to restore the era of peaceful cooperation between the empires, while avoiding an annual payment that could be presented as tributary. Malalas reports that in the treaty, 'the two rulers said explicitly that they were brothers according to ancient custom and that if one of them needed military assistance in money or men, they should provide it without dispute'.⁸⁹ This payment did not, however, settle the peace in practice. In the Sasanian historiographical tradition, it was remembered that 'Caesar had submitted to [Khosrow] and conveyed to him the ransom'.⁹⁰

We gain an insight into Roman representation of this clause from an episode later in the decade. After the conquest of Vandal Africa, Khosrow sent an embassy to request his

87 Procop., *BP*, I. 22. 10–14: διὸ δὴ αὐτοὶ τε ἐν τῇ πόλει ταύτῃ ἐγένοντο καί, ἐπεὶ τὴν εἰρήνην βεβαιοῦν ἐμελλον, τὰ χρήματα οἱ πρέσβεις ἐνταῦθα ἐκόμιζον. ἀλλ' Ἰουστινιανῷ βασιλεῖ τὰ Λαζικῆς φρούρια ζυγκεχωρηκότε μετέμελεν ἤδη, γράμματά τε ἀντικρυς ἀπολέγοντα τοῖς πρέσβεσιν ἔγραφε μηδαμῶς αὐτὰ προῖεσθαι Πέρσαις, διὸ δὴ Χοσρόης τὰς σπονδὰς θέσθαι οὐκέτι ἤξιον, καὶ τότε Ρουφίνῳ ἐννοιά τις ἐγένετο ὡς ταχύτερα ἢ ἀσφαλέστερα βουλευσάμενος ἐς γῆν τὴν Περσῶν τὰ χρήματα ἐσκομίσειεν. αὐτίκα γοῦν ἐς τὸ ἔδαφος καθῆκε τὸ σῶμα, κείμενός τε πρηνὴς Χοσρόην ἰκέτευε τὰ τε χρήματα σφίσι ξυμπέμψαι καὶ μὴ ἐπὶ Ῥωμαίους εὐθὺς στρατεύειν, ἀλλὰ ἐς χρόνον τινὰ ἕτερον τὸν πόλεμον ἀποτίθεσθαι. Χοσρόης δὲ αὐτὸν ἐνθένδε ἐκέλευεν ἐξανίστασθαι, ἅπαντά οἱ ταῦτα χαριεῖσθαι ὑποσχόμενος. οἱ τε γοῦν πρέσβεις ζῦν τοῖς χρήμασιν ἐς Δάρας ἦλθον, καὶ ὁ Περσῶν στρατὸς ὀπίσω ἀπήλυνε.

88 Procop., *BP*, I. 22. 16–17: χρόνῳ δὲ οὐ πολλῷ ὕστερον Ρουφίνος τε αὐτὸς καὶ Ἑρμογένης αὖτις παρὰ Χοσρόην ἐστέλλοντο, ἐς τε τὰς σπονδὰς αὐτίκα ἀλλήλοις ξυνέβησαν, ἐφ' ᾧ ἑκάτεροι ἀποδώσουσιν ὅσα δὴ ἀμφοτέροι χωρία ἐν τῷδε τῷ πολέμῳ ἀλλήλους ἀφείλοντο, καὶ μηκέτι στρατιωτῶν τις ἀρχὴ ἐν Δάρας εἶη [...] οὕτω τοίνυν τὴν τε ἀπέραντον καλουμένην εἰρήνην ἐσπείσαντο, ἕκτον ἤδη ἔτος τὴν βασιλείαν Ἰουστινιανοῦ ἔχοντος.

89 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 76: Ῥωμαίων τε καὶ Περσῶν, τοῦ πολέμου κατασχόντος λ' καὶ ἓνα ἐνιαυτὸν ἄφ' οὗ ἦν ἀνεληθὼν ἐν τοῖς Ῥωμαϊκοῖς Κωάδης ὁ Περσῶν βασιλεὺς πολεμῶν, ὡς προγέγραπται ἐπὶ τῆς βασιλείας Ἀναστασίου, καὶ τὴν παράληψιν Ἀμίδης, ὡς προγέγραπται, καὶ τὴν πρὸς Ῥωμαίους ἀποκατάστασιν τῆς αὐτῆς πόλεως Ἀμίδης καὶ τοὺς μερικοὺς πολέμους τῶν Σαρακηνῶν ἐπιδρομῶν.

90 Tabari, *Annals*, V. 898.

‘share of the spoils’, given it was the peace treaty with Persia that had enabled the victory.⁹¹

That Justinian had gained much wealth was undeniable: Persian ambassador had witnessed Belisarius’s triumph, in which he paraded his magnificent plunder through the streets of Constantinople.⁹² Procopius clearly states that Justinian acceded to this request and ‘made a present of money’.⁹³ This exemplifies how Justinian attempted to express the subsidy within an acceptable Roman idiom. By deliberately employing the discourse of gift exchange to invoke a mutual exchange between brothers, the connotations of tribute involved in this obligatory payment were sidestepped.

By the end of the decade, however, Khosrow was preparing for war. Procopius says that even in the late autumn of 539, the Romans did not perceive the Persian preparations.⁹⁴ In the winter of 539/40 he sent a prominent citizen of Dara, named Anastasius, as ambassador to Khosrow to ask for peace.⁹⁵ The decision to send a local Syrian should be noted, given the previous discussion suggesting that Romans living at risk of Persian invasion desired peace more than the bellicose attitudes of Constantinopolitan citizens. The emperor’s letter implored Khosrow to ‘consider also the oaths you took when you accepted the money’.⁹⁶ Disregarding these pleas, Khosrow led the invasion in May 540. He advanced up the Euphrates, sacking or ransoming the cities he reached.⁹⁷

91 Procop., *BP*, I. 26. 3–4: πέμψας τε ὁ Χοσρόης ἐς Βυζάντιον πρέσβεις, συγχαίρειν τε Ἰουστινιανῷ τῷ βασιλεῖ ἔφασκε, καὶ τὸ μέρος λαβεῖν ξὺν γέλωτι διήθεν τῶν ἐκ Λιβύης λαφύρων ἡξίου, ὅτι δὴ οὐκ ἂν ποτε Βανδύλων τῷ πολέμῳ περιέσεσθαι ἴσχυσεν, εἰ μὴ αὐτῷ Πέρσαι ἐσπείσαντο. τότε μὲν οὖν Χοσρόην Ἰουστινιανὸς χρήμασι δωρησάμενος, τοὺς πρέσβεις οὐκ εἰς μακρὰν ἀπεπέμψατο.

92 Zach., *HE*, IX. 133.

93 Procop., *BP*, I. 26. 3–4: πέμψας τε ὁ Χοσρόης ἐς Βυζάντιον πρέσβεις, συγχαίρειν τε Ἰουστινιανῷ τῷ βασιλεῖ ἔφασκε, καὶ τὸ μέρος λαβεῖν ξὺν γέλωτι διήθεν τῶν ἐκ Λιβύης λαφύρων ἡξίου, ὅτι δὴ οὐκ ἂν ποτε Βανδύλων τῷ πολέμῳ περιέσεσθαι ἴσχυσεν, εἰ μὴ αὐτῷ Πέρσαι ἐσπείσαντο. τότε μὲν οὖν Χοσρόην Ἰουστινιανὸς χρήμασι δωρησάμενος, τοὺς πρέσβεις οὐκ εἰς μακρὰν ἀπεπέμψατο. See Colvin, ‘Comparing Procopius and Malalas’, pp. 201–13; Whitby reads this as Justinian declining to pay, which I disagree with: see Whitby, *The Wars of Justinian*, p. 141.

94 For the dates compare Procop., *BP*, II. 3. 56–57 and II. 5. 1.

95 PLRE III, ‘Anastasius 6’, p. 63.

96 Procop., *BP*, II. 4. 25: λογίζου δὲ τοὺς ὄρκους, οὓς δὴ ὁμοσάμενός τε καὶ τὰ χρήματα κομισάμενος, εἴτα ἀτιμάσας οὐ δέον τέχναις τισὶν ἢ σοφίσμασι παραγαγεῖν οὐκ ἂν δύναιο: τὸ γὰρ θεῖον κρεῖσσον ἢ ἐξαπατᾶσθαι πέφυκε πρὸς πάντων ἀνθρώπων.

97 *Chronicle of Edessa*, 105; Joh. Mal., XVIII. 87.

The local leadership in the cities under threat took it upon themselves to negotiate with the advancing Persians, with a particularly prominent role played by bishops. The bishop of Sura (mod. Suriya) tried to negotiate, but the city was sacked.⁹⁸ The prisoners of Sura were ransomed for two centenaria (200 *librae* of gold) by Candidus, the bishop of the neighbouring city of Sergiopolis (mod. Resafa).⁹⁹ The citizens of Hierapolis (mod. Manbij) bought relief for 2,000 *librae* of silver.¹⁰⁰ Jordanes gives a good impression of the view from Constantinople: ‘passing by neighbouring cities and towns, of which they occupied some and requested a quantity of money from others, the Parthian acquired for himself all the goods of Coele Syria in virtually the course of a single year’.¹⁰¹

On hearing of the invasion, emperor immediately dispatched his nephew Germanus to oversee the war from Antioch.¹⁰² Once there, however, Germanus feared the city was indefensible. He dispatched the bishop of Beroea, Megas as an ambassador to Khosrow.¹⁰³ Megas eventually persuaded Khosrow to agree that a sum of ‘ten *centenaria* of gold’ would be sufficient for the Persians to withdraw.¹⁰⁴ This was 1,000 *librae*, equating to 72,000 *solidi*; one tenth of the amount paid for the ‘Eternal Peace’.¹⁰⁵ Khosrow continued to march westward after agreeing these terms, which Greatrex argues shows he was acting in bad faith.¹⁰⁶ This does not necessarily follow: as we shall discuss shortly, Khosrow began to

98 Procop., *BP*, II. 5. 8–27. BATlas, Map 68 G2, ‘Soura’.

99 Procop., *BP*, II. 5. 28–33. BATlas, Map 68 G2, ‘Resafa/Sergiopolis’. Candidus is not listed in the PLRE.

100 Procop., *BP*, II. 6. 22–23.

101 Jordanes, *Romana*, 376: *diripiunt vicinasque urbes et oppida partim invasa partim pecuniae quantitate multata praetereunt et totius Cylesyriae bona sibi unius in anni spatium pene Parthus adsumit.*

102 Procop., *BP*, II. 6. 9–10.

103 Procop., *BP*, II. 6. 17–19. On Megas, not identified in the PLRE, see Greatrex, *Procopius of Caesarea: The Persian Wars: A Historical Commentary*, p. 432.

104 Procop., *BP*, II. 6. 25: δέκα τε χρυσοῦ κεντηνάρια λήψεσθαι.

105 For this sum in particular, cf. the figure of ‘ca. 325 kg’ in Henning Börm, ‘Der Perserkönig im Imperium Romanum: Chosroes I. und der sasanidische Einfall in das Oströmische Reich 540 n. Chr.’, *Chiron*, 36 (2006), pp. 299–328 (p. 303).

106 Greatrex, *Procopius of Caesarea: The Persian Wars: A Historical Commentary*, p. 434.

withdraw when he received later terms in writing. In the meantime, however, more imperial officials had arrived at Antioch.

One of these was Julian, the emperor's senior secretary (*a secretis* or *asēkretis*).¹⁰⁷ He overruled Megas and issued an instruction which 'explicitly forbade everyone from giving money to the enemy or purchasing (*ōneisthai*) the cities of the emperor'.¹⁰⁸ Here the discourse of payment has a negative connotation and would undermine the emperor's rightful authority. As well as a moral charge, it has also been observed that it was rational to try and limit Khosrow's ability to raise money from city authorities and 'to initiate negotiation on a higher level'.¹⁰⁹ When Megas returned to Khosrow and reported that no money would be forthcoming, the Persians advanced on Antioch and sacked the city in June 540.¹¹⁰

The sack of Antioch shocked Roman commentators: the city was among the richest in the East and a former imperial residence. It prompted Procopius' judgement that 'for the sake of money he would debase his soul to every act of pollution without any hesitation'.¹¹¹ After the sack of Antioch, ambassadors of the emperor met directly with Khosrow. The Persian ruler listed his grievances and demanded money. Unlike the settlement of 532, however, Khosrow 'warned them not to hope that they could establish peace for all time by giving money at that moment only'.¹¹² He insisted that a 'fixed annual sum' was the only solution to the conflict, arguing that the Romans were obliged to offset the expense of defending the 'Caspian Gates' from the Huns at the same time they were guarding against the Roman threat posed by the fortress of Dara.

107 PLRE III, 'Iulianus 8', pp. 731–32. See Alexander Kazhdan, 'Asekretis', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. by Alexander Kazhdan and others, 3 vols (Oxford University Press, 1991), I, p. 204.

108 Procop., *BP*, II. 7. 16: διαρρήδην ἀπέειπεν ἅπασιν χρήματα μὴ διδόναι τοῖς πολεμίοις, μηδὲ τὰς βασιλέως ὀνειδίσθαι πόλεις.

109 Glanville Downey, 'The Persian Campaign in Syria in A.D. 540', *Speculum*, 28.2 (1953), pp. 340–48 (p. 342), doi:10.2307/2849692.

110 Procop., *BP*, II. 8. 1; Joh. Mal., XVIII. 87.

111 Procop., *BP*, II. 9. 8: καὶ χρημάτων μὲν ἕνεκεν ἐπὶ πᾶν ἄγος καθεῖναι τὴν ψυχὴν ἄοκνος.

112 Procop., *BP*, II. 10. 19–21.

The negotiators drew up the terms that the Romans would pay fifty *centenaria* (5,000 *librae* or 360,000 *solidi*) upfront, then five *centenaria* (500 *librae* or 36,000 *solidi*) annually ‘for all time’.¹¹³ These terms were accepted in writing by Justinian.¹¹⁴ The Persians began withdrawing eastwards once Khosrow heard this, but by continuing to ransom and sack cities they marched past, they provoked Justinian to declare the treaty to have been voided.¹¹⁵ Thus three more seasons of war followed over the summers of 541, 542 and 543. After these campaigns Justinian sought to return to negotiations and agreed with Khosrow that they would observe a five-year armistice to allow time to negotiate a comprehensive peace settlement.¹¹⁶

In this section, I have argued that Justinian’s relations with Khosrow in the middle of his reign should be characterised as a policy of compromise. Justinian began by stepping back from the terms he had sought with Kavādh, to try and gain military advantage over the winter of 531/2. Not only did he fail in this, but the ‘Nika revolt’ weakened his own position while Khosrow secured his. Therefore Justinian, who had chosen war over payments to Persia, agreed to the largest-ever single payment in 532. This was supposed to secure an ‘Eternal Peace’, but in around 534 Justinian was willing to pay a supplement to Khosrow after the conquest of Africa.

When Khosrow went to war in 540, however, Justinian sought to prevent Roman cities from making deals with Khosrow and refused the terms the bishop Megas agreed. After the devastation of Antioch the Roman approach changed, with Justinian offering to honour the terms of Megas. When Khosrow continued ransoming cities, Justinian withdrew this offer. Two more invasions followed before Khosrow was willing to agree an armistice in

113 Procop., *BP*, II. 10. 25: Χοσρόην ἐν μὲν τῷ παραντίκα κεντηνάρια πεντήκοντα πρὸς Ῥωμαίων λαβόντα, πέντε δὲ ἄλλων φερόμενον ἐπέτειον ἐς τὸν πάντα αἰῶνα δασμόν.

114 Procop., *BP*, II. 13. 1.

115 Procop., *BP*, II. 13. 29.

116 Procop., *BP*, II. 28. 3–11.

Syria, underwritten by Roman payments. In this period Justinian would have preferred not to make payments but was willing to compromise this principle for other goals.

Of particular importance to understanding this is the dialogue given by Procopius between Khosrow and the Roman ambassadors which defines key concepts. Procopius then includes a dialogue in which the ambassadors ask whether ‘the Persians desire to have the Romans subject and tributary to themselves’.¹¹⁷ Khosrow replies by explaining ‘the Romans will have the Persians as their own soldiers for the future, paying a fixed sum for their services’. He compares it to the ‘annual payment of gold to some of the Huns and to the Saracens, not because you are their tributary subjects but in order that they may guard your land unplundered for all time’.¹¹⁸ This dialogue offers us a clarification of key terms; whether the words accurately reflect what Khosrow said is irrelevant for this purpose. The Roman reader is expected to understand Procopius’ distinction between *phoros* as a payment that would render the Romans tributary and politically subservient, and a transactional ‘fixed sum’ that functioned merely as pay for military service. This dialogue perfectly illustrates how the same transfer of gold could be framed discursively.

One question often arises as to whether the price of the ‘Eternal Peace’ was unusually high. Whitby regards it as a ‘not astronomical’ sum, observing that it bought twenty-two or twenty-six years of peace at the rate of other annual subsidies. He also observes that it is comparable to the 4000 *librae* of gold Justinian had earlier spent on games to celebrate his consulship.¹¹⁹ A more balanced view is offered by Börm, who described it as ‘an amount that was certainly high enough to be impressive, but at the same time was relatively modest’.¹²⁰

117 Procop., *BP*, II. 10. 22: ὑποτελεῖς Πέρσαι βούλονται Ῥωμαίους ἐς φόρου ἀπαγωγὴν ἔχειν.

118 Procop., *BP*, II. 10. 23 ἔξουσι τὸ λοιπὸν Πέρσας Ῥωμαῖοι, μισθὸν τῆς ὑπουργίας αὐτοῖς χορηγοῦντες ῥητόν: ἐπεὶ καὶ Οὐννων τισὶ καὶ Σαρακηνοῖς ἐπέτειον χορηγεῖτε χρυσόν, οὐ φόρου αὐτοῖς ὑποτελεῖς ὄντες, ἀλλ’ ὅπως ἀδήωτον γῆν τὴν ὑμετέραν φυλάξωσιν ἐς τὸν πάντα.

119 Whitby, *The Wars of Justinian*, p. 140.

120 Börm, “‘Es war allerdings nicht so’”, p. 340. Ger.: ‘ein Betrag, der durchaus hoch genug war, um eindrucksvoll zu wirken, zugleich aber relativ bescheiden war’.

This is a better characterisation, as the sum certainly struck contemporaries like Procopius as high. One example of how such a position might be articulated positively is given by John Lydus. He described how Justinian ‘overwhelmed, therefore, the Persians and the unruly Chosroes with gold at first, then, when he started warring again, also with steel’.¹²¹ To describe ‘gold’ and ‘steel’ as alternative means to the same end shows how supportive Romans could reconcile themselves to Justinian’s policy. It is the best example of subsidies being conceptualised as a pragmatic instrument.

Beyond the politics of Constantinople, the other dynamic in this period was the attempt by the elites of wealthy Syrian cities to protect themselves from the Persians. A rare inscription from the Syrian city of Hierapolis gives us great insight into Justinian’s propaganda and, therefore, what he expected the Syrians wanted to hear. The final line of the inscription, partly broken, openly stated that ‘with the help of God, peace has been made between the Romans and the Persians, the money has been handed over and [...]’.¹²² For imperial propaganda to make such an honest admission of money being paid suggests that subsidies were preferential to war amongst citizens in the East. Thus, it is unsurprising that representatives of these cities attempted to negotiate deals with Khosrow between 540 and 543 to avoid being plundered. Justinian’s attempt to restrain this dynamic was unsuccessful. This shows the limits of directives from Constantinople on the imperial periphery.

Overall, we cannot escape the conclusion that Justinian failed in his objectives between 531 and 540. He first intended to avoid any payments, then made the largest-ever payment to secure ‘Eternal Peace’. When the peace collapsed, he reverted to his principle of refusing payments and hoped to withstand Khosrow militarily. When this proved impossible, he agreed to pay for an armistice. Even then, he had to wait for three years before Khosrow

121 John Lydus *de. mag.*, III. 55: καὶ Πέρσας μὲν οὖν καὶ Χοσρόην τὸν ἄτακτον χρυσίῳ μὲν πρῶτον, εἶτα παλιμμάχοντα καὶ σιδήρῳ κατέχωσε.

122 Hierapolis inscription, pp. 361–72: Γέγονεν συν θεῷ τῷ ἀγίῳ ἡ εἰρήνη μεταξύ Ῥωμαίων καὶ Περσῶν, δοθέντων τῶν χρημάτων καὶ δημ- [text stops].

would agree. Justinian thus began his relationship with Khosrow not by attempting a deeper reset of relations, but by pursuing a short-term tactical opportunity. When this came to nothing, he was prepared to compromise his principle in order to pursue objectives elsewhere. He was not, however, willing to accept an obligation to annual payments. Given this was the central demand of Persia, his attempt to secure peace in the East between 532 and 545 was fundamentally flawed.

1.3. The Policy of Concession (545–65)

By agreeing to the armistice of 545, Justinian abandoned the principle that he and his predecessors had gone to war to defend: that the Romans would not make annual payments to Persia. This principle had been overshadowed by circumstance. By the middle of the 540s the Romans were struggling to hold their newly acquired territories in Africa, Italy and Illyria and were hit by the plague. The armistice closed the conflict between Romans and Persians in Syria, protecting the Roman cities that Khosrow had ravaged. It left the conflict in Lazica unresolved, as shall be discussed fully in Chapter Three. The objective of Justinian over this later period was to secure a new peace treaty with Persia. Even though he was willing to pay to extend the armistices, his preference was that the final treaty would not include any subsidies at all.¹²³

The armistice agreed in 545 was not immediately renewed upon its expiration in 550. The anonymous continuator of Malalas' *Chronicle* attests to the presence of a Persian ambassador watching the races with the emperor in Constantinople in May 556.¹²⁴ Agathias also attests to an ambassador 'by the name of Zich' being sent to Constantinople.¹²⁵ We learn from Menander that 'Zich' was the title of the Persian king's chamberlain and this post was

123 Men. Prot., fr. 6. 1. 148–49: λ' χιλιάδας ἐτησίας χρυσίου νομίσματος.

124 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 121

125 Agath., Hist., IV. 30. 8–9.

held by the same Yazdgushnasp from Procopius's narrative.¹²⁶ Agathias tells us that Justinian agreed to a further armistice to allow the negotiation of a full treaty; unlike the armistices of 546 and 551, this agreement also covered the Kingdom of Lazica. Agathias makes no comment on whether a payment was made by Justinian but, given the prior armistices and subsequent treaty depended on Roman gold, we should consider it likely.

It took five years for a treaty to emerge, by which point Agathias's narrative terminates and we must turn to the fragments of Menander Protector and John of Epiphania. Menander reports that a 'general treaty' (*tōn katholou spondōn*) was negotiated by Peter Patricius and Yazdgushnasp on the border near the city of Dara.¹²⁷ The two sides began with divergent proposals: the Persians wanted an unlimited treaty with annual payments, while the Romans sought a limited treaty without money changing hands. Finally, they agreed on a time-limited treaty. Menander states it was for 50 years at a price of 30,000 *solidi* per year.¹²⁸ John states it was 55 years at 500 *librae* of gold per year (36,000 *solidi* at 1/72).¹²⁹ Menander is generally preferred by historians and John discounted, but one ingenious attempt managed to reconcile these figures. If John had counted his *solidi* to the older standard (1/60), his 500 *librae* can be converted into 30,000 *solidi* in agreement with Menander.¹³⁰ Regardless of whether this theory is accepted, the figures are broadly similar in magnitude.

The more important issue is the basis on which the instalments were paid. Menander states that the first seven years were paid as a lump sum by Justinian (561 to 568). This was to be followed by a second lump sum covering three years (568 to 571). From 571 payments

126 Men. Prot., fr. 6. 1. 11–14.

127 Men. Prot., fr. 6. 1. 8: τῶν καθόλου σπονδῶν.

128 Men. Prot., fr. 6. 1. 148–49: λ' χιλιάδας ἐτησίας χρυσίου νομίσματος.

129 John of Epiphania, fr. 2. 73–78: ὅτι δὴ ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἰουστίνος οὐδαμῇ ἤξιον, χρυσίου λίτρας πεντακοσίας, ἐφ' αἷς ἔμπροσθεν γεγόνασιν αἱ σπονδαί, παρέχειν Μήδοις εἰς ἕκαστον ἔτος, καὶ τὴν Ῥωμαίων πολιτείαν Πέρσαις ὑπόφορον ἐς αἰὲν καταστήσασθαι.

130 Güterbock, *Byzanz und Persien in ihren diplomatisch-völkerrechtlichen Beziehungen im Zeitalter Justinians*, pp. 63–65.

would be due annually.¹³¹ A later fragment of Menander, however, states that a ten-year lump sum had been paid by Justinian.¹³² This is corroborated by John of Epiphania, who states ten years.¹³³ It should be noted that in either case, the Persians had proposed thirty or forty years' payments up front, which would have totalled up to 1.2m *solidi*.

Modern historians have continued to dispute the date of this final treaty. Despite the arguments of Ernst Stein and R. C. Blockley in favour of 561 many decades ago, some continue to cite 562.¹³⁴ Menander states precisely that after the conference had concluded and before proceeding to Persia to meet Khosrow directly, Peter remained around Dara to celebrate the Nativity of Christ and Epiphany.¹³⁵ Both these festivals had been established as public holidays by an earlier law of Justinian in 534.¹³⁶ Thus, the treaty must have been concluded before 25 December 561. We also know that Justin II went to war with Khosrow in the summer of 572, rather than begin making the annual payments obliged by the treaty after the initial decade covered by Justinian's lump sum payment had expired.¹³⁷ Thus, we can count back to the summer of 562 and, given the treaty had been agreed in December, count further back to December 561. We might infer that the payment was due in December 571 and the Persians pressed their case in the following year.

131 Men. Prot., fr. 6. 1. 150–55: ἐβεβαιώθη δὲ τοῦτο ὥστε Ῥωμαίους ἐν ὁμάδι δεκαετίας ποσότητα προπαρασχεῖν οὕτω· παραχρήμα μὲν ἐνιαυτῶν ἐπτὰ, καὶ μετὰ τὴν τῶν ζ' ἐτῶν παραδρομὴν οὐκ ἐς ἀναβολὴν κατατιθέναι τῶν λοιπῶν τριῶν ἐτῶν τὴν συντέλειαν· εἴθ' οὕτω καθ' ἕκαστον ἔτος πορίζεσθαι Πέρσας τὸ ὀρισμένον ἐνιαυσιαῖον.

132 Men. Prot., fr. 16. 1. 7–8: οἷα δὴ τῆς δεκαετίας περαιωθείσης, ἥς τὰ χρήματα ὑφ' ἐν ἐκομίσαστο.

133 John of Epiphania, fr. 3. 78–83: τοῦ χρόνου τοῖνυν ἐς πέρας ἀχθέντος, ὑπὲρ οὗ τὰ χρήματα κατὰ τὰ πάλαι συγκεῖμενα Χοσρόης ὁ Περσῶν ἐκεκόμιστο βασιλεύς (καὶ γὰρ ἐδόκει κατὰ ταῦτὸν τὸ τῆς δεκαετίας ποσὸν ἐπιδίδοσθαι), μηδενός τε τὸ λοιπὸν ἐς σύμβασιν ὁμιληθέντος.

134 Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, II, p. 518, n. 2; Blockley, *The History of Menander the Guardsman*, p. 269; cf. the arguments of Geoffrey Greatrex and Samuel N. C. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars, AD 363–628* (Routledge, 2002), p. 277, n. 44, doi:10.4324/9780203994542.

135 Men. Prot., fr. 16. 1.

136 *Codex Iustinianus*, III. 12. 6. Justinian interpolated these holidays into an early Theodosian law, as noted by Edward Vansittart Neale, *Feasts and Fasts: An Essay on the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Laws Relating to Sundays and Other Holidays and Days of Fasting* (J. Murray, 1845), p. 23.

137 Men. Prot., fr. 16. 1. See discussion in Blockley, *The History of Menander the Guardsman*, pp. 259, n. 71 and 71, n. 182.

This treaty explicitly included a clause obliging the Persians to defend the ‘Caspian Gates’ from the Huns but did not directly associate this with the money.¹³⁸ After agreeing to the treaty, the Persians sent officials to Dara to weigh the gold and convey it to Persia. In early 562 Peter then travelled to Persia to discuss the unresolved issues in South Caucasus with Khosrow directly. He returned, however, without an agreement.¹³⁹ This treaty held up until 572, when a Persian embassy arrived at the court of Justin II to claim the expected payment for the eleventh year.¹⁴⁰

For these reasons, we must characterise Justinian’s final decades as a policy of concession. He conceded the basic principle of annual payments in order to secure peace in the east. He twice extended the armistice in Syria, paying for each year of the peace. When the final treaty was negotiated, Justinian had his ambassador try to avoid any payments at all, but this was quickly abandoned. In the end, his ambassador Peter Patricius agreed terms obliging Roman payments for fifty years. This obligation was written in an annex to the official treaty, which was to be destroyed at the end of the period. Furthermore, the first tranche of payments would be made as a lump sum, rather than each year. With these measures, Justinian’s ambassador sought to prevent any accusation that the Romans were tributary.

1.4. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Justinian had multiple, conflicting positions on Persian subsidies as his wider approach to foreign policy changed over time. This case has been made through detailed source analysis and narrative reconstruction to both demonstrate that Justinian was capable of formulating and enacting policy, and it was contingent rather than guided by an

138 Men. Prot., fr. 6. 1. 314–19

139 Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6055; cf. Men. Prot., fr. 6. 3; Just., *Nov.*, CXXXXII. See Chapter 4 below.

140 Men. Prot., fr. 16. 1.

overriding ‘grand strategy’. Thus, on the one hand I argue that his refusal to pay Kavādh and insistence on confronting Persia between 527 and 531 disproves the traditional account that Justinian always prioritised the reconquest of the Western Roman Empire. On the other hand, I reject revisionist accounts that deny he ever had any coherent intention of reconquest. Instead, Justinian’s willingness to compromise on subsidies between 532 and 545 was clearly guided by a reformulated policy which prioritized the West. In his final decades he prioritised peace on the Eastern frontier at all costs, leading to a series of agreements conceding the principle of annual payments.

The profound rejection of Justinian’s policy by his nephew and successor should not be dismissed as a curiosity. It was the end result of how Justinian managed these shifts in policy. He began by rejecting tribute and devaluing Kavādh’s framing of mutual interest and imperial solidarity. When he then switched to the discourse of gifts between peers, he found it had limited power over his Persian counterpart. Justinian struggled to maintain the ‘endless peace’ while refusing to make annual payments. When he eventually did so, he had eroded any arguments that could have justified annual payments as anything other than tribute.

Chapter Two: ‘No means to preserve loyalty except by fear’¹ The Arabian and Egyptian Frontiers

As the most prosperous and productive region of Justinian’s empire, Egypt’s success story had little cause to be included in the grand narratives of Justinian’s wars. The surviving papyri of the lawyer Dioscorus of Aphrodito, however, offer a unique perspective. At the end of Justinian’s reign or just after his death, the councillors of the city of Omboi hired Dioscorus to complain to the regional military commander.² The cause of their concern was a local tax collector they nicknamed *Ōmophagos*: ‘eater of raw flesh’.³ They accused this ‘Flesh-eater’ of ‘making common cause’ with the barbarians of the Blemmyes tribe, giving them ‘gifts’ (*dōra*) and ‘inducements’ (*lōtismata*).⁴ In return, the Blemmyes accompanied him on his tax collecting duties. Together, said the councillors, ‘Flesh-eater’ and his allies ‘plundered us completely and utterly ravaged our houses, making them uninhabitable, having pillaged all of our various belongings’.⁵ Late Antique legal petitions were elaborate exercises

- 1 Procop., *BP*, I. 19. 33–34: οὕτως ἄρα βαρβάρους ἅπαντας οὐδεμία μηχανὴ διασώσασθαι τὴν ἐς Ῥωμαίους πίστιν ὅτι μὴ δέει τῶν ἀμυνομένων στρατιωτῶν.
- 2 The papyrus P. Cair. Masp. I 67004 (= SB 28 17239). The date is calculated by a reference to the *dux* Athanasius in P. Oxy. 16 1920 which is dated to the eleventh indiction; in the later reign of Justinian this would either be 548 or 563: see PLRE III, ‘Athanasius 3’, pp. 145–47. Even if the petition was drafted in the early reign of Justin II, it still represents the end result of Justinian’s policy. For a discussion see Jitse H. F. Dijkstra, ‘A Cult of Isis at Philae after Justinian? Reconsidering ‘P. Cair. Masp.’ I 67004’, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 146 (2004), pp. 137–54. For Egyptian stability: Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800* (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 20–21. See also PLRE III, ‘Dioscorus 7’, pp. 404–06.
- 3 BATlas, Map 80 B5, ‘Omboi’; PLRE III, ‘Colluthus 3’, p. 320. For the office of *pagarch*, see Matthias Stern, *Taxes and Authority in the Late Antique Countryside: The Reach of the State and the Pagarchs of Byzantine Egypt (284–642 CE)* (De Gruyter, 2025), doi:10.1515/9783111493183.
- 4 P. Cair. Masp. I 67004 (= SB 28 17239), 11: δια[π]ραξάμε[ν]ος συνομόνο[ι]α]ν τοῖς [εἰρ]ημέ(νοις) βαρβάρο[ι]ς. P. Cair. Masp. I 67004 (= SB 28 17239), 15–16: πρὸς λύμ[ην τοῦ] δημοσίου λόγου καὶ τελεί[αν ἡμ]ῶν ἀνατροπὴν, ἔξω [ἡ κ]αὶ προσπορίσας βαρβ[ά]ροις ἔθνεσι δῶρα κ[αὶ] λωτίσματα.
- 5 P. Cair. Masp. I 67004 (= SB 28 17239), 10: [ἐ]πραίτευσαν(*) ἡ[μ]ᾶς παντελῶς καὶ ἁο[ι]κήτους τὰς ἡμετέρας ἐξεπόρθησεν οἰκίας, λεηλατήσας τὰ παντοῖα ἡμῶν πράγματ[α].

in rhetorical flourish and Dioscorus was good at his job. In his defence, ‘Flesh-eater’ may well have argued the assistance was needed to compel recalcitrant taxpayers. Even taking that into account, the petition establishes a simple fact. Residents of Justinian’s most stable and peaceful frontier still feared the Blemmyes, a group in receipt of an imperial subsidy.

This chapter considers Justinian’s policy on the Theban and Arabian *limes* alongside each other. The first part discusses the provision of cash to Arab kings allied with Rome and to those allied with the Persians. The second considers the purported arrangement to subsidise the Blemmyes and Nobadae, arguing that the ethnographic account of Procopius is clearly confused. While the exact relationship between the Blemmyes near Omboi and the Blemmyes on the frontier is uncertain, this remains an important example of how partial information from the periphery reached the imperial metropole and shaped public opinion.

2.1. The Arabian Frontier

The *limes Arabicus* was the frontier zone between Rome’s Levantine provinces and the interior, ‘deserted Arabia’ (*Arabia deserta*).⁶ This zone covered the ecological boundary between the arable ‘Fertile Crescent’, the pastoral steppe land, and the deserts, punctuated only by oasis. While earlier Roman sources had referred to these peoples as Arabs, by the sixth century they were known as *Saraceni*, *Sarakēnoi* or *Ṭayyāyē*.⁷ The main challenge for historians of sixth-century Arabia is how to handle this process of ethnogenesis while almost entirely relying on either sixth-century Roman sources or seventh-century Arabic sources. It

6 G. W. Bowersock, ‘Limes Arabicus’, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 80 (1976), pp. 219–29 (pp. 227–29), doi:10.2307/311242. ‘Arabia’ emerged from a centuries-long interaction between the inhabitants of the peninsula and imperial powers like the Seleucids and Rome, see M. C. A. Macdonald, ‘Arabians, Arabias and the Greeks: Contact and Perceptions’, *Topoi: Orient-Occident*, 16.1 (2009), pp. 277–332.

7 Lat. *Saraceni*, Gk. *Sarakēnoi* [Σαρακηνοί], Syr. *Ṭayyāyē* [ܬܝܝܝܝܐ].



FIG. 2.1. Map of the Arabian Frontier

is generally agreed that there was a nascent Arab identity, but we are limited to epigraphy for self-expression.⁸

This is more than a formal problem, because the choice of names involves assumptions about political structures. Over many decades Irfan Shahîd has argued the Arabs formed confederations led by principal tribes. Hence the Roman allies led by the *Banū Ghassan* can be called Ghassanids, while the Persian confederation led by the *Banū Lakhm* can be called Lakhmids.⁹ Others have rejected this as a category error, arguing that tribal names cannot be generalised like this.¹⁰ As an alternative it has been proposed to name only the leaders of these polities, using dynastic names such as Jafnid and Nasrid which are derived from Islamic sources.¹¹ All sides have accused each other of anachronism, and

8 Robert G. Hoyland, 'Arab Kings, Arab Tribes and the Beginnings of Arab Historical Memory in Late Roman Epigraphy', in *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East*, ed. by Hannah M. Cotton and others (Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 374–400.

9 Irfan Shahîd, *BASIC*, 1.1. (Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995).

10 A. G. Grouchevov, 'Trois "niveaux" de phylarques: Étude terminologique sur les relations de Rome et de Byzance avec les Arabes avant l'Islam', *Syria*, 75 (1995), pp. 105–31.

11 Greg Fisher, *Between Empires: Arabs, Romans, and Sasanians in Late Antiquity* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

sometimes acknowledge this themselves.¹² All of this matters for the same reason as the frontiers discussed in other chapters: if the *gens* was the basic unit of ancient foreign policy, we must be able to distinguish between *gentes* in writing such a history. This chapter takes a neutral position on these debates and so employs ‘Arab’ except when directly quoting sources.

The primary aim of Justinian was to create a buffer state from his Arab allies that could protect the desert frontier from the Arabs allied to the Sasanians.¹³ Justinian inherited a longstanding system of alliances with leaders called *phylarchoi* (literally, ‘tribal rulers’) designated for each frontier province.¹⁴ It is attested that these allies received subsidies, called in this instance *annona*, in the fourth and fifth centuries.¹⁵ Procopius attests to ‘an annual payment of gold’ to Saracens to ‘guard [the emperor’s] land unplundered for all time’.¹⁶ Yet the Persians had an ally who could penetrate the desert: al-Mundhir III.¹⁷ Roman sources saw al-Mundhir as a powerful king in his own right. Procopius says he ‘ruled alone over the Persian Saracens, holding the rank of king (*basileus*)’, and likewise Syriac sources

12 Greg Fisher, ‘Kingdoms or Dynasties? Arabs, History, and Identity before Islam’, *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 4.2 (2011), pp. 245–67, doi:10.1353/jla.2011.0024.

13 Four aims are enumerated by Isaac: raiding enemy territory, defending the Roman population, defending the Arab population, and policing the Roman territories; see Benjamin Isaac, *The Limits of Empire: The Roman Army in the East* (Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 235–51. For al-Ḥārith leading a ‘state-like polity’ see Greg Fisher, ‘The Political Development of the Ghassan between Rome and Iran’, *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 1.2 (2008), pp. 311–34 (p. 312), doi:10.1353/jla.0.0015.

14 Phylarch from Gk. Φύλαρχοι. See Procop., *BP*, I. 17. 46. The phylarchs themselves used this title in epigraphy: see Geoffrey Greatrex and Samuel N. C. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars, AD 363–628* (Routledge, 2002), doi:10.4324/9780203994542.

15 For the fourth century, see Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, XXV. 6. 10: hos autem Saracenos ideo patiebamur infestos, quod salaria muneraque plurima a Iuliano ad similitudinem praeteriti temporis accipere vetiti, questique apud eum, solum audierant, imperatorem bellicosum et vigilantem ferrum habere, non aurum. For the fifth century, see *Codex Theodosianus*, Novel XXIV. 13–16: Saracenorum vero foederatorum aliarumque gentium annonariis alimentis nullam penitus eos decerpenti aliquid vel auferendi licentiam habere concedimus. For discussion see Isaac, *The Limits of Empire*, p. 245.

16 He has Khosrow say this in a speech, see Procop., *BP*, II. 10. 23 ἀλλὰ στρατιώτας οἰκείους, ὁ Χοσρόης εἶπεν, ἔξουσιν τὸ λοιπὸν Πέρσας Ῥωμαῖοι, μισθὸν τῆς ὑπουργίας αὐτοῖς χορηγοῦντες ῥητόν: ἐπεὶ καὶ Οὐννων τισὶ καὶ Σαρακηνοῖς ἐπέτειον χορηγεῖτε χρυσόν, οὐ φόρου αὐτοῖς ὑποτελεῖς ὄντες, ἀλλ’ ὅπως ἀδῆφτον γῆν τὴν ὑμετέραν φυλάξωσιν ἐς τὸν πάντα.

17 PLRE II, ‘Alamundarus’, pp. 41–43.

call him king (*malkā*).¹⁸ In Procopius's words, al-Mundhir 'humbled the Roman state for fifty years' from 'the borders of Egypt, reaching as far as Mesopotamia'. However, 'no one at all joined battle with him, for he never made an inroad without forethought'.¹⁹ Roman sources agreed that the only way to combat al-Mundhir was through their own Arab allies, because of an environmental limit. Roman forces were uneasy about 'a land destitute of human presence and absolutely dry'.²⁰ After a raid by the Persians' Arab allies, for example, they 'fled to Indian territory where none of the Romans had ever been' to avoid capture.²¹ What is interesting about this episode is that Malalas explains al-Mundhir's success as the product of a falling out between Diomedes, the *dux* of Roman regular forces in Palestine III, and Arethas, *phylarch* of their Arab allies in that province.²² Yet as this example shows, the system of alliances which Justinian inherited was not perfect.

For this reason, Justinian aimed to create a parallel buffer state to the Persians' Arab allies. According to Procopius, his approach was to elevate one man, the *phylarch* al-Hārith

- 18 Procop., *BP*, I. 17. 45 καὶ τὸ ξύμπαν εἶπεῖν χαλεπώτατός τε καὶ δεινότατος οὗτος ἀνὴρ γέγονε Ῥωμαίοις πολέμιος πάντων μάλιστα. αἴτιον δὲ ἦν ὅτι Ἀλαμούνδαρος μὲν βασιλέως ἀξίωμα ἔχων πάντων μόνος τῶν ἐν Πέρσαις Σαρακηνῶν ἦρχε, παντί τε τῷ στρατῷ οἷός τε ἦν αἰεὶ τὴν ἐφοδὸν ποιεῖσθαι ὅπῃ βούλοιο τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς. For Syriac sources see: Christian Julien Robin, 'Les Arabes de Himyar, des « Romains » et des Perses (IIIe–VIe siècles de l'ère chrétienne)', *Semitica et Classica*, 1, (2008), pp. 167–202 (p. 181).
- 19 Procop., *BP*, I. 17. 40–43: ἦν γὰρ Ἀλαμούνδαρος ξυνετώτατός τε καὶ τῆς κατὰ πόλεμον ἐμπειρίας εὖ ἥκων, Πέρσαις τε πιστὸς ἐς τὰ μάλιστα, καὶ διαφερόντως δραστήριος, ὃς δὴ ἐς πεντήκοντα ἐνιαυτῶν χρόνον ἐς γόνυ ἐλθεῖν τὰ Ῥωμαίων ἐποίησε πράγματα. ἐκ γὰρ τῶν Αἰγύπτου ὁρίων ἀρξάμενος καὶ μέχρι ἐς Μεσοποταμίαν ληϊζόμενος τὰ ἐκείνη χωρία, ἥγέ τε καὶ ἔφερεν ἐφεξῆς ἅπαντα, καίων τε τὰς ἐν ποσὶν οἰκοδομίας καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους κατὰ πολλὰς αἰεὶ μυριάδας ἀνδραποδίζων, καὶ αὐτῶν τοὺς μὲν πλείστους ἀποκτείνων οὐδενὶ λόγῳ, τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους ἀποδιδόμενος χρημάτων μεγάλων. ἀπῆντα δὲ οἱ τῶν πάντων οὐδεῖς. οὐ γάρ ποτε ἀνεπισκέπτως ἐποιεῖτο τὴν ἐφοδὸν, ἀλλ' οὕτως ἐξαπιναίως τε καὶ αὐτῷ ἐς τὰ μάλιστα ἐπιτηδείως, ὥστε ὁ μὲν ἤδη ὡς τὰ πολλὰ ξὺν τῇ λείᾳ πάσῃ ἀπιὼν ὄχρετο, οἱ δὲ στρατηγοὶ τε καὶ στρατιῶται πυνθάνεσθαι τε τὰ ξυμπεσόντα καὶ ἀγείρεσθαι ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἤρχοντο. ἦν δὲ πού αὐτὸν καὶ καταλαβεῖν τύχῃ τινὶ ἔσχον, ἀλλ' ἔτι ἀπαρασκευοῖς τε οὖσι καὶ οὐ ξυντεταγμένοις ἐπιπεσὼν τοῖς διώκουσιν ὁ βάρβαρος οὗτος ἔτρεπέ τε καὶ διέφθειρεν οὐδενὶ πόνῳ, καὶ ποτε τοὺς διώκοντας στρατιώτας ξὺν τοῖς ἄρχουσιν ἐξώγρησεν ἅπαντας.
- 20 Procop., *BP*, I. 19. 7–13: Ταύτην δὴ τὴν ἡϊόνα εὐθὺς μὲν ὄρους τοὺς Παλαιστίνης ὑπερβάντι Σαρακηνοὶ ἔχουσιν, οἱ ἐν τῷ φοινικῶνι ἐκ παλαιῶν ἰδρυνται.
- 21 Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6021: καὶ ἀκούσας ὁ Ἀλαμούνδαρος ἔφυγεν εἰς τὰ Ἰνδικὰ μέρη, εἰς ἃ οὐδεὶς τῶν Ῥωμαίων εἰσηλθὲ ποτε. For the date, see Cyril Mango, Roger Scott, and Geoffrey Greatrex, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284–813* (Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 272–74, n. 17.
- 22 PLRE III, 'Diomedes 1', p. 402; PLRE II, 'Arethas', p. 139–40.

ibn Jabalah (Gk. *Arethas*), to take ‘command of as many tribes as possible’.²³ al-Hārith’s father Jabalah (Gk. *Gabala*) had been incorporated into the alliance network as a *phylarch* by the emperor Anastasius, after a successful raid in 502 which showed the weakness of the existing allies.²⁴ Procopius explains Justinian’s decision as stemming from fear that no individual *dux* or *phylarch* could withstand al-Mundhir’s forces; instead, an overarching king on the model of the Nasrids could coordinate defences.²⁵ During the drought of 536, for example, a large group of Arabs, supposedly 15,000 strong, sought supplies from neighbouring farmland. The Nasrids were able to redirect these away from Sasanian territory to instead plunder the Roman province of Euphratensis.²⁶ To ensure his new ally had authority, Justinian apparently ‘bestowed over him the dignity of king, a thing that had never been done among the Romans’.²⁷ Whether the ‘dignity of king’ was a formal title has, however, been met with scepticism. The title has not been corroborated by other literature or epigraphic evidence.²⁸ It remains relevant for our purpose, however, because it reflects the impression given to Procopius at the imperial metropole.

2.1.1. ‘The dignity of king’: Subsidies to al-Hārith ibn Jabalah

Justinian’s aim was thus to establish a buffer state on the *limes Arabicus* which could protect regions from the Persians’ Arab allies, that Romans regarded as indefensible by regular Roman forces. Throughout the reign of Justin I (518–527), the Persians’ Saracen allies had mounted regular raids on the Roman East in concert with the Kavādh’s demands for

23 Arethas from Gk. *Arethas* [Ἀρέθας] (cf. Ar. *al-Hārith ibn Jabalah* [جبله بن الحارث]); see PLRE III, ‘Arethas’, pp. 110–13. For his rank see Joh. Mal., XVIII, 435 and 461.

24 Gabala from Gk. *Gabalas* [Γαβαλάς] (cf. Ar. *Jabalāh ibn al-Hārith* [جبله بن الحارث]); see PLRE II, ‘Gabala’, p. 489. Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 5990; PLRE II, ‘Gabala’, p. 489; Fisher, ‘The Political Development of the Ghassan’, p. 96; Irfan Shahīd, *BASIC* 2.1 (Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2002), pp. 26–27 and 48–49.

25 Procop., *BP*, I. 17. 46.

26 Marcell. com., a. 536; Shahīd, *BASIC*, vol. 1 part 1, *Political and Military History*, pp. 194–96.

27 Procop., *BP*, I. 17. 47: διὸ δὴ βασιλεὺς Ἰουστινιανὸς φυλαῖς ὅτι πλείσταις Ἀρέθαν τὸν Γαβαλᾶ παῖδα ἐπέστησεν, ὃς τῶν ἐν Ἀραβίῳις Σαρακηνῶν ἥρχεν, ἀξίωμα βασιλέως αὐτῷ περιθέμενος, οὐ πρότερον τοῦτο ἔν γε Ῥωμαίοις γεγονὸς πώποτε.

28 Grouchevov, ‘Trois “niveaux” de phylarques’, p. 193.

al-Hārith participated in the war with Kavādh. Malalas gives the figure of 5000 soldiers following al-Hārith alongside 8000 in Belisarius's army.³⁰ Even if these figures were rounded, they can be regarded as giving an accurate representation of the proportions.³¹ When the 'Eternal Peace' was agreed between Justinian and Khosrow in 532, the terms did not include the two empires' allies or clients.³² This allowed for a conflict between the two sides' Arab allies, which contributed to the collapse of the peace in 540.³³

This conflict broke out over the control over the steppe and desert region along the Roman military highway, the *Strata Diocletian*, which connected Damascus and the River Euphrates via Palmyra. Both Arab kings claimed the right to tax the pastoralists who grazed there; Procopius says the Romans had no interest in a land that ‘does not produce a single tree or any useful crop, for it is burned extremely dry by the sun, but it has since ancient times been devoted to the pasturage of flocks’.³⁴ Procopius claims that Khosrow deliberately

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encouraged al-Mundhir to take the territory to provoke the Romans.³⁵ Interestingly, the Persian tradition accepts that this was the cause of the war, but blames al-Ḥārith.³⁶ al-Ṭabarī frames Khosrow's request for money at the start of his second war with Justinian as the 'blood money' for al-Mundhir's losses.³⁷ In an effort to de-escalate the conflict, Justinian dispatched an embassy in 538/9. This was led by the *dux Palaestinae*, Summus, and the *comes sacrarum largitionum*, Strategius.³⁸ For the delegation to have included such a senior imperial finance officer suggests subsidies were on the agenda. The mission was, however, unsuccessful, and war resumed in Mesopotamia from 540 to 545. Both sides' Arab allies participated in the war³⁹

When the armistice was agreed, however, the Arab allies were again omitted.⁴⁰ 'A little later', al-Ḥārith captured a son of al-Mundhir in a raid and killed him in a ritual of sacrifice.⁴¹ 'Later', the two kings then fought a battle, which al-Ḥārith won decisively.⁴² In the negotiations of 551 between Justinian and the Persian ambassador Yazdgushnasp, the Persians alleged that al-Ḥārith's attack on al-Mundhir 'during a time of peace' represented a breach of the Roman-Persian armistice they had agreed with Persia.⁴³ Even when those talks were extended and the armistice was renewed, however, the Saracens were excluded and continued fighting.⁴⁴ Thus, their war continued until a battle in June 554 near the city of Chalcis ad Belum in Syria.⁴⁵ At this battle al-Mundhir III was slain, possibly by al-Ḥārith

35 Procop., *BP*, II. 1. 1–3; Shahîd, *BASIC: Volume 1, Part 1: Political and Military History*, pp. 209–18.

36 Tabari, *Annals*, V. 958–59.

37 Tabari, *Annals*, V. 958–59.

38 PLRE II, 'Strategius 9', pp. 1034–36; PLRE II, 'Summus', pp. 1038–39.

39 Procop., *Anecd.*, II. 28.

40 Procop., *BP*, II. 28. 12–14.

41 Procop., *BP*, II. 28. 12–14.

42 Procop., *BP*, II. 28. 12–14.

43 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 11. 10.

44 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 15. 2.

45 BATlas, Map 68 C2, 'Chalcis ad Belum'.

himself.⁴⁶ In either case it was, as Shahîd puts it, a ‘landmark’: for the rest of Justinian’s reign the contest between Saracen allies had been decisively resolved in favour of the Romans.⁴⁷ Given this, the omission of these events in the narrative of Agathias might seem curious. Shahîd argues that this can be explained by the changed political context of the 570s in which Agathias was writing, with Justin II taking a hostile stance towards the Arab allies.⁴⁸

In Justinian’s final round of negotiations with the Persians in 561, the victory of his Arab allies seems to have resolved the diplomatic impasse. The Persians allowed the treaty to include a written commitment to respect each other’s clients. Moreover, it established a mechanism for de-escalating conflicts between the ‘subjects of the other state’.⁴⁹ In November 563 al-Ḥārith went to Constantinople to meet Justinian. He discussed his choice of successor. He also complained that ‘Amr, the son and successor of al-Mundhir III, had attacked him.⁵⁰ This shows al-Ḥārith respecting the terms of the treaty and raising the issue formally rather than retaliating.

What was the role of subsidies? Greg Fisher’s suggestion that the Ghassanids used some of the money to hire troops is the only one that can be directly evidenced by the sources.⁵¹ The evidence comes from the relations between Justinian’s successors’ and al-Mundhir ibn Ḥārith (569–81), al-Ḥārith’s successor.⁵² When fighting broke out between the

46 Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, IX. 33; Greatrex argues both could be describing the same battles, but also highlights the chronological problems with that: see Greatrex, *Procopius of Caesarea: The Persian Wars: A Historical Commentary*, pp. 626–27.

47 ‘The course of the Lakhmid-Ghassanid war ended with a signal victory for Ghassanid arms in 554, which should be recognized as a landmark in the history of the federate wars of this century. It came a quarter century after the appointment of the Ghassanid Arethas to the extraordinary Basileia in 529 and was the crowning justification of that appointment by Justinian, as the distinguished phylarch fulfilled the emperor’s expectations. So 554 should be related to 529, separated by Procopius and left unrelated to each other,’ in Shahîd, *BASIC*, 1.1., p. 247, cf. p. 61.

48 Shahîd, *BASIC*, 1.1., pp. 256–57.

49 Men. Prot., fr. 6. 1. 348–54: ζ’ μέρος τῶν σπονδῶν, ὥστε τοὺς ἐπεγαλοῦντας περὶ τοῦ σίνεσθαι τι σφᾶς τοὺς ἀντιπολιτευομένους δίκη τέμνεσθαι τὸ φιλονεικούμενον ἢ δι’ ἑαυτῶν τὴν βλάβην πεπονθότων ἢ δι’ οἰκείων ἀνθρώπων ἐν τοῖς μεθορίοις παρὰ τοῖς ἄρχουσιν ἐκατέρας πολιτείας ζυγιόντων, οὕτω τε τὸν ζημιώσαντα ἀκέσασθαι τὸ σκάζον.

50 Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6055; PLRE III, ‘Ambrus 2’, pp. 54–55.

51 Fisher, ‘The Political Development of the Ghassan’, pp. 319–20.

52 PLRE III, ‘Alamundarus’, pp. 34–37.

54 Joh. Eph., *HE*, III. 5. 1.

56 Joh. Eph., *HE*, IV. 6; John of Biclaro, a. 575.

58 Joh. Eph., *HE*, III. 42:

59 R. Payne Smith, *The Third Part of the Ecclesiastical History of John, Bishop of Ephesus* (Oxford, 1860), p. 241.

63

Gordon argued that we should take the 500 *librae* of gold distributed in the South Caucasus or given to Persia as an upper limit for the quantity given to the Arabs.⁶¹

2.1.2. ‘Given as the Emperor saw fit’: Subsidies to the Persians’ Saracen Allies

The account thus far appears coherent: Justinian reformed the *phylarch* system and, even if it was not impregnable, the new system eventually resulted in the defeat of the Persians ally, al-Mundhir, and the defence of the frontier. It is somewhat of a surprise, therefore, that Justinian was also pursuing a parallel policy of paying al-Mundhir himself. This section will assess the circumstances and impact of this policy on the stated aim of building a buffer state against the Persian-aligned Arabs. As has been described, the Persians’ allies mounted a series of raids throughout the 520s, the audacity of which shocked the Romans. One particular incident occurred when al-Mundhir III captured two Roman *duces* who were meant to guard the frontier against him.⁶² The priest Abraham was sent to Mundhir as the imperial ambassador.⁶³ They met in January 524 at al-Hira, the Lakhmids’ regular encampment south of the River Euphrates.⁶⁴ Procopius says Abraham had to give ‘wealth neither small nor ordinary’ to ransom their release.⁶⁵ Yet the raids continued, leading to Justinian’s attempt to reform his own alliance network as a buffer.

When the war between Justinian and Kavādh became a stalemate after the Battle of Callinicum, al-Mundhir took the initiative and sought to arrange terms. Malalas reports that he wrote to the Romans in June 531 requesting that Justinian send the deacon Sergius be sent to discuss peace terms, al-Mundhir having previously met Sergius when negotiating the release of the *duces*.⁶⁶ Justinian honoured the request and Sergius was sent ‘with imperial

61 C. D. Gordon, ‘Procopius and Justinian’s Financial Policies’, *Phoenix*, 13.1 (1959), pp. 23–30 (p. 26).

62 Procop., *BP*, I. 17. 44: οὐ φαῦλον οὐδὲ τὸν τυχόντα πλοῦτον.

63 PLRE II, ‘Abramius 2’, p. 3. The embassy is narrated in a letter, purportedly from a companion of Abraham’s, included in Zach., *HE*, VIII. 3.

64 Zach., *HE*, VIII. 3: ‘835 of the Greeks’ = AD 535.

65 Procop., *BP*, I. 17. 44: οὐ φαῦλον οὐδὲ τὸν τυχόντα πλοῦτον.

66 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 61.

gifts'; as established in previous chapters, Malalas could conceivably include money in this phrase.⁶⁷ When the two empires' Arab allies threatened the 'Eternal Peace' in the late 530s, Justinian attempted to negotiate, as we have discussed. At the same time, however, his ambassador Summus approached al-Mundhir. He offered 'large sums of money if he went over to the Roman side' and gave a letter from the emperor as a pledge.⁶⁸ This allegation, attributed to the Persians in the published *Wars*, was endorsed by Procopius in the private *Anecdota* as the 'chief cause of the breaking of the truce'.⁶⁹ The alleged act could have been justified technically: the status of Saracen allies had not been specified in the 'endless peace' treaty and Justinian was not breaking a formal sphere of influence.⁷⁰ Such was the argument that Justinian made to Khosrow.

Throughout the 540s and the early 550s the Arab kings allied to the Romans and Persians fought a bitter war, culminating in the deaths of al-Ḥārith's son and then al-Mundhir himself. Yet even after this, the issue of payments to the Persians' allies came up again. Once the treaty of 561 had been agreed, the Persian ambassador sought to raise a complaint of al-Mundhir's son, the new king 'Amr. Yazdgushnasp argued that 'Amr 'ought to receive the hundred pounds of gold'.⁷¹ This prompted the Roman ambassador, Peter, to make a lengthy exposition of Roman thinking about subsidies. He argued that any money had been 'a free

67 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 61.

68 Procop., *BP*, II. 1. 13–14: Σοῦμμον γὰρ ἑναγχος ἐπὶ διαίτη δῆθεν τῷ λόγῳ παρ' αὐτὸν ἦκοντα ἐπαγγελίαις αὐτὸν περιελθεῖν μεγάλων χρημάτων, ἐφ' ᾧ προσχωρήσει Ῥωμαίοις, γράμματά τε προῖσχετο, ἃ δὴ πρὸς Ἀλαμούνδαρον ὑπὲρ τούτων Ἰουστινιανὸς βασιλεὺς ἔγραψε.

69 Procop., *Anecd.*, XXI. 12: καὶ Χοσρόη μὲν κεντηναρίων πλῆθος ὑπὲρ τῆς εἰρήνης προέμενος, αὐτογνωμονήσας δὲ οὐδενὶ λόγῳ αἰτιώτατος τοῦ λελύσθαι τὰς σπονδὰς γέγονεν, Ἀλαμούνδαρόν τε καὶ Οὐννοὺς τοὺς Πέρσαις ἐνσπόνδους σπουδάζων τε καὶ διατεινόμενος ἐταιρίζεσθαι, ὅπερ μοι ἐν λόγοις τοῖς ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν οὐκ ἀπαρακαλύπτως εἰρησθαι δοκεῖ. Also, Procop., *BP*, II. 3. 47 and II. 10. 16.

70 Procop., *BP*, II. 1. 4–5.

71 Men. Prot., fr. 6. 1. 289–95: εἶτα τοῦ Ζιχ τοὺς περὶ Ἀμβρου τοῦ Ἀλαμουνδάρου τοῦ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν ἡγουμένου κινήσαντος λόγους φάσκοντός τε, ὅτι γε δήπου καὶ αὐτὸν ὥσπερ καὶ τὸν πρὸ αὐτοῦ ἡγεμόνα τοῦ Σαρακηνικοῦ κομίζεσθαι χρεῶν τὰς ρ' χρυσίου λίτρας, ἀντεῖπεν ὁ Πέτρος, ὥστε τὸν πρὸ Ἀμβρου ἡγεμόνα δωρεᾷ τινὶ ἀγράφῳ καὶ ὅσῳ ἂν ἡβούλετο χρυσίῳ καὶ ὀπηνίκα ὁ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἐφιλοφρονεῖτο δεσπότης.

gift of gold, given in whatever amount and at whatever time the emperor saw fit'. In order to receive a gift, 'Amr was obliged to send gifts first.⁷²

This passage tells us firstly that al-Mundhir had been receiving 100 *librae* of gold regularly for some period to his death in 554. Secondly, it demonstrates the level of influence of the Nasrids that they were allowed to raise this formally during peace talks between the great powers. The issue was again raised when Peter travelled to Persia to meet Khosrow. Peter again insisted that 'never at any time did the Saracens subject to you receive from the Romans a fixed amount of gold, either as a result of compulsion or by agreement'. He again argued that it was a reciprocal exchange of gifts. He also pointed to a five-year gap, proving this was not an annual obligation.⁷³ Although Shahîd suggests the five-year gap was an otherwise-unattested truce, it seems far more likely that it represents the war of 540 to 545.⁷⁴ Thus it might be concluded that Justinian paid Mundhir a *centenarium* (100 *librae* of gold) every year from 532 to 540, then from 545 to 554. While Shahîd suggests the Ramla conference as the origin of the arrangement, his position stretches the evidence we have discussed. It would seem safer to accept that the money exchanged at the Ramla conference

72 Men. Prot., fr. 6. 1. 292–304: ἀντεῖπεν ὁ Πέτρος, ὥστε τὸν πρὸ Ἀμβρου ἡγεμόνα δωρεᾶ τινὶ ἀγράφῳ καὶ ὅσῳ ἂν ἠβούλετο χρυσίῳ καὶ ὀπηνίκα ὁ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἐφιλοφρονεῖτο δεσπότης. τοιγαροῦν ἐστέλλετο τῇ ταχυτῇ τῶν δημοσίων ἵππων ὀχοῦμενος ἀνὴρ ἀγγελιαφόρος ὡς τὸν Σαρακηνὸν ἀποκαταστήσῃ τὸ ὅπερ ἐτύγγανεν αὐτῷ πεμφθὲν πρὸς τοῦ Ῥωμαίου βασιλέως. οὕτω τε ἐς τοῦμπαλιν ἐκ τοῦ Σαρακηνοῦ ὡς βασιλέα τὸν ἡμεδαπὸν ἐπέμπετο δωροφορῶν πρεσβευτῆς, εἴτα ἀντιδώρῳ αὐθις ἐφιλοφρονεῖτο τὸν Σαρακηνὸν ὁ καθ' ἡμᾶς αὐτοκράτωρ. εἰ βούλεται οὖν καὶ Ἀμβρος κατὰ ταῦτα ποιεῖν, λήγεται, εἰ δοκεῖ καὶ τῷ καθ' ἡμᾶς βασιλεῖ· εἰ δέ γε οὐ βούλεται, κινεῖ τὴν ἄλλως, πρὸς γε καὶ ἡλιθιώτατα φρονεῖ. ἀποίσεται γὰρ οὐδὲν ὀτιοῦν.

73 Men. Prot., fr. 6. 1. 522–42: καὶ ὁ Πέτρος· ἐν οὐδενὶ χρόνῳ πώποτε, ἔφη, ῥητόν τι χρυσίον ἐκομίσαντο ἐκ Ῥωμαίων οἱ καθ' ὑμᾶς Σαρακηνοὶ οὔτε μὴν ἀνάγκη τινὶ οὔτε καθ' ὁμολογίαν τινά, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸ πατὴρ Ἀμβρου Ἀλαμουνδάρους ἔστελλε δῶρα τῷ Ῥωμαίων αὐτοκράτορι, καὶ ὁ γε δεχόμενος ἀντεδωρεῖτό γε αὐτόν. ὅπερ ἐφ' ἐκάστῳ ἐνιαυτῷ τὸ τοιόνδε ἐγίγνετο οὐδαμῶς, ἀλλ' ἔστιν ὅτε καὶ ἐπαρφημένων ἐτῶν. τοῦτο γοῦν διεσώθη τε καὶ διεφυλάχθη Ἀλαμουνδάρῳ τε καὶ ἡμῖν ἐπὶ χρόνον ἥκιστα ὀλίγον. ἐξεπίσταται δὲ τὸ κρεῖττον ὅτι οὐχὶ διὰ τὰ ἐρρωμένα φρονῶν ἐς Πέρσας τὰ τοιάδε ἔπρασεν Ἀλαμουνδάρους. τοιγαροῦν διεβεβαίουτο ὡς εἰ καὶ ὑμεῖς πόλεμον κινήσοιτε καθ' ἡμῶν, Ἀλαμουνδάρῳ γε ἄπρακτός τε καὶ ἀνενέργητος ἔσται ἡ μάχαιρα τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἑκατὶ πολιτείας. ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἐπὶ τινι διέμεινε χρόνον· νῦν δὲ ὁ σὸς μὲν ἀδελφός, δεσπότης δὲ ἐμός, ἔθετο ἐν νῷ ἐμφρονέστατα, οἶμαι, ὃ βασιλεῦ, ἔφη τε ὡς, εἰ βεβαίως ἔχει τὰ πολιτεύματα τὴν εἰρήνην, τί δήποτε ἄρα λυσιτελήσει μοι τοῦ λοιποῦ ὑπηκόοις τε καὶ δούλοις προσφθέγεσθαι Περσῶν, ὡς ἂν καταπρόοιντο τῶν κεκτημένων τὰ πράγματα, ἥγονιν πορίζειν τι αὐτοῖς ἢ πορίζεσθαι παρὰ σφῶν;

74 Shahîd, BASIC, 1.1., p. 276.

was a ransom to free the *duces*. Instead, the embassy of Sergius and the clearly-attested ‘gifts’ he carried are a better candidate for the commencement of a diplomatic subsidy.⁷⁵

When al-Ḥārith met Justinian in 563, he complained that the Persians’ allies had been attacking his people against the treaty. We should accept Shahîd’s sensible suggestion that ‘Amr was trying to exert pressure on Justinian to regain a subsidy.⁷⁶ Regardless of the spheres of influence demarcated in the treaty, Justinian appears to have begun sending money to ‘Amr. When a Persian embassy met Justin II in 567, it was accompanied by ‘Amr’s ambassadors who sought to discuss ‘the usual payment’, ‘the money which they had received from Justinian’.⁷⁷ The question thus arises as to how these payments could have contributed to the success of al-Ḥārith’s kingship as a buffer state against the Persians and their allies.

It is clear from the evidence that Justinian gave money to al-Ḥārith ibn Jabalah as part of his effort to establish a buffer state on the *limes Arabicus* that could protect the frontier from the Persians’ Arab allies. As has been explained, the Arab *phylarchs* are attested as receiving subsidies from the fourth to the seventh centuries. The novelty was that Justinian intended to promote al-Ḥārith as a ‘supreme *phylarch*’ in imitation of the Persians’ Saracen ally, the basileus al-Mundhir III. The first point to note is the relative lack of controversy about Justinian’s payments to al-Ḥārith. Procopius notes the payments in passing in a speech attributed to Khosrow alongside payments to the Huns. Yet in his private *Secret History*, he reprises the criticism of paying the Huns at length and does not mention payments to the Arabs.⁷⁸ Indeed, their only mention is in a list of peoples who raided the empire alongside the Persians, Sclavenes and Antae, a context which might suggest Procopius was referring to the

75 Shahîd, BASIC, 1.1., p. 271.

76 Shahîd, BASIC, 1.1., pp. 285–86.

77 Menander Protector, fr. 9.3, pp. 45–48: ὁ γὰρ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν φύλαρχος Ἄμβρος ἐκπέμψας ὑπῆρχε καὶ ὄγε ζὺν τῷ Μεβώδῃ πρεσβείαν διαλεχθησομένους περὶ ὧν χρημάτων πρὸς Ἰουστινιανοῦ ἐκομίζοντο.

78 Procop., *Anecd.*, XI. 5–9; discussed by Isaac, *The Limits of Empire*, p. 245; Fisher, *Between Empires: Arabs, Romans, and Sasanians in Late Antiquity*, p. 99.n. 108.

Persians' allies.⁷⁹ Instead, his criticisms of al-Ḥārith are made public in the *Wars* and focus entirely on his alleged character.

The institutions of alliance outlived Justinian, but with mixed results. This is demonstrated by the diplomatic incidents of the 570s and discussed above. Yet as late as the reign of Heraclius, there was a system of alliances which that emperor halted. Nikephoros quotes the sum of thirty *librae* of gold as the subsidy to the Arabs in the time of Heraclius.⁸⁰ Theophanes vividly recounted an episode from 630/1 when the 'Arabs used to take small payments from the emperors to guard the passes of the desert' met the imperial representative to claim their money. The official refused, arguing that 'when the emperor hardly gives payments for the soldiers, how much more will he give to these dogs?'.⁸¹

2.1.3. Assessment

For these reasons, Justinian's use of subsidies to the Arabs was mixed. During his own reign, he managed to navigate the internal politics of al-Ḥārith's confederation without causing major incident, with the two even agreeing a successor. The alliance was turbulent in the reigns of Justinian's successors, however. But did al-Ḥārith manage to create a buffer against the Persians' allies? The evidence is more mixed. al-Ḥārith failed to provide an early warning of the Persian invasion up the Euphrates in 540, which caught the Romans unawares. The conflict between al-Ḥārith and the Persian allies in the 530s and 540s risked drawing Justinian back into war with Persia, rather than containing the threat. Only with the killing of

79 Procop., *Anecd.*, XI. 11.

80 Nikephoros, *Historia syntomos*, XX. 15–21: αἰτίαν δὲ αὐτῷ ἐπῆγον ὥς αὐτὸς παρεσκεύασεν Ἡράκλειον μὴ συγχωρεῖν Σαρακηνοῖς ἐκ τῆς Ῥωμαίων γῆς ἐμπορεύεσθαι τὰς <τε> συνήθως παρεχομένας αὐτοῖς τριάκοντα χρυσίου λίτρας δι' ἐμπορικῆς ἀμοιβῆς ἐκ τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς πολιτείας ἐκπέμπειν· ἐντεῦθεν τε αὐτοὺς ἄρξαι τῇ Ῥωμαίων λυμαίνεσθαι χώρα.

81 Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6123: ἦσαν δὲ τινες τῶν πλησίων Ἀράβων λαμβάνοντες παρὰ τῶν βασιλέων ρόγας μικρὰς πρὸς τὸ φυλάξαι τὰ στόμια τῆς ἐρήμου. ἐν αὐτῷ δὲ τῷ καιρῷ ἦλθε τις εὐνοῦχος δίδων τὰς ρόγας τῶν στρατιωτῶν, καὶ ἐλθόντες οἱ Ἀραβες κατὰ τὸ ἔθος λαβεῖν τὴν ρόγαν αὐτῶν, ὁ εὐνοῦχος ἀπεδίωξεν αὐτούς, λέγων ὅτι “ὁ δεσπότης μόνις τοῖς στρατιώταις δίδωσι ρόγας, πόσῳ μᾶλλον τοῖς κυσὶ τοῦτοις. Note that Cyril Mango et al. translate *rhoga* as ‘subsidies’ for the Arabs and ‘stipends’ for the soldiers, which is unfaithful to the consistency of the original text: see Mango, Scott, and Greatrex, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, p. 466.

al-Mundhir in 554 and the subsequent agreement to bind the allies to the peace treaty of 561 was the *limes Arabicus* secured. That treaty was, however, premised upon annual payments to Persia. Whereas historians like Shahîd and Fisher regard the alliance as a strategic success, the evidence that it met the declared goals is more mixed.

2.2. The Theban Frontier

This section argues that while Procopius sets out a coherent and rational account of Roman policy on the Theban *limes*, Justinian pursued multiple goals in practice. Justinian demonstrably prioritised religious goals over political stability, but this was underpinned by maintaining existing subsidy arrangements. The main challenge in assessing Justinianic Egypt is the mismatch between the abundant papyri and limited narratives.⁸² In this case, brief digressions in Procopius's *Wars* and John of Ephesus's *Ecclesiastical History* both present an overall image of stability. As the introductory anecdote from Omboi shows, however, what appeared uneventful on the surface was not necessarily the experience of the people living in Justinianic Egypt. This case study argues that while his continued provision of subsidies guaranteed the essential security of the southern frontier, his actions contributed to unrest and did little to prevent endemic raiding.

2.2.1. The Nubians and Blemmyes

We must begin with a digression by Procopius, which purports to explain how the frontier had come to be established at Syene (mod. Aswan).⁸³ Scholars have long taken this at face

82 James Keenan, 'Egypt', in CAH 14, ed. by Averil Cameron, Bryan Ward-Perkins, and Michael Whitby (Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 612–37 (p. 612, n. 1).

83 Procop., *BP*, I. 19. 27–29: ἐκ δὲ Αὐξώμιδος πόλεως ἐς τὰ ἐπ' Αἰγύπτου ὄρια τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς, οὗ δὴ πόλις ἡ Ἐλεφαντίνη καλουμένη οἰκεῖται, τριάκοντα ὁδὸς ἡμερῶν ἐστὶν εὐζώνῳ ἀνδρὶ. ἐνταῦθα ἔθνη ἄλλα τε πολλὰ ἱδρύται καὶ Βλέμυες τε καὶ Νοβάται, πολυανθρωπότατα γένη. ἄλλα Βλέμυες μὲν ταύτης δὴ τῆς χώρας ἐς τὰ μέσα ὄκνηται, Νοβάται δὲ τὰ ἀμφὶ Νεῖλον ποταμὸν ἔχουσι. πρότερον δὲ οὐ ταῦτα ἐγεγόνει τὰ ἔσχατα τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς, ἀλλ' ἐπέκεινα ὅσον ἐπτὰ ἐτέρων ἐπίπροσθεν ὁδὸν ἡμερῶν.

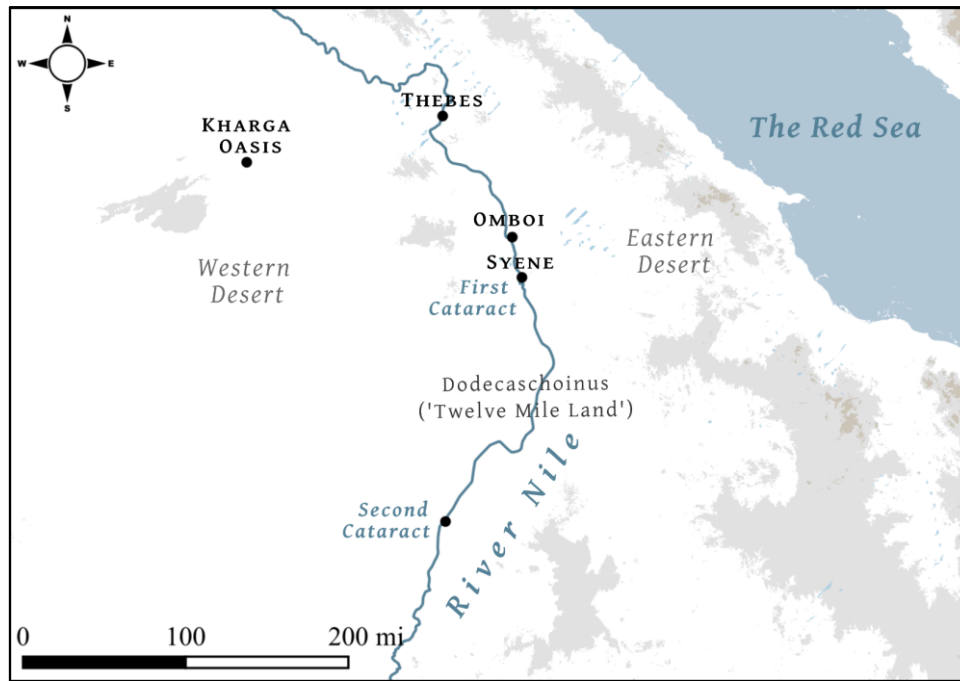


FIG. 2.2. Map of the Theban Frontier

value, and the episode continues to be cited.⁸⁴ Yet others have demonstrated clearly that Procopius combined information about the third, fifth and sixth centuries. It is important for us to deconstruct his account so we can understand the origin of Justinian's position. The territory in question is sometimes called the Dodekaschoinos or 'Twelve Mile Land'. It extended between the first and second cataracts of the River Nile. In the reign of Augustus (27 BC–AD 14) the Romans had invaded the empire of Meroë and eventually agreed a treaty in 22 BC which established the Dodekaschoinos as a frontier zone between the two empires.⁸⁵ Procopius claims that centuries later, Diocletian visited the frontier. Assessing that the area contributed too little tax (*ho phoros*) to justify such an expensive garrison, he decreed the

84 Jean Maspero, *Organisation militaire de l'Égypte byzantine* (H. Champion, 1912), pp. 25–27; James G. Keenan, 'Evidence for the Byzantine Army in the Syene Papyri', *The Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists*, 27.1/4 (1990), (p. 141); John Wilkes, 'Provinces and Frontiers', in CAH 12, ed. by Alan Bowman, Averil Cameron, and Peter Garnsey (Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 212–68 (p. 230); G. W. Bowersock, *The Throne of Adulis: Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 71–72; for a recent deconstruction, see Dijkstra, "'I, Silko, Came to Talmis and Taphis'", pp. 300–05.

85 Salim Faraji, 'Kush and Rome on the Egyptian Southern Frontier: Where Barbarians Worshipped as Romans and Romans Worshipped as Barbarians', in *Romans, Barbarians, and the Transformation of the Roman World*, ed. by Ralph W. Mathison and Danuta Shanzer (Routledge, 2011), pp. 223–32 (pp. 223–24).

border should be retracted to Elephantine.⁸⁶ Epigraphic evidence confirms the basic fact that Diocletian visited the frontier between 293 and 298.⁸⁷

At this point Procopius's account becomes less reliable. He claimed that Diocletian next struck an agreement with the 'Nobatai', who lived around the 'city of Oasis' (mod. Kharga Oasis) and plundered Roman territory.⁸⁸ They were asked to move into the Dodekaschoinos and force out another group, the Blemmyes. Procopius goes on to say that Diocletian 'arranged for a specific amount of gold to be given to them [the *Nobatai*] and to the Blemmyes every year, on the condition that they would no longer plunder Roman territory'.⁸⁹ This account was warmly endorsed by Edward Luttwak as a strategy to 'reinforce the frontier' while 'relieving Roman troops of the burden of day-to-day defense against low-intensity threats'.⁹⁰ Were this true, it would be the longest-lasting subsidy arrangement identified in this work; unfortunately, it is not.

The problem is that the term 'Nobades' only emerges in the fifth century. The form Nobadae is first attested in a petition by the Bishop Appion to the emperor Theodosius II and Valentinian II, therefore dated between 425 and 450.⁹¹ Earlier accounts, such as Strabo, attest

86 Procop., *BP*, I. 19. 29: ἡνίκα δὲ ὁ Ῥωμαίων αὐτοκράτωρ Διοκλητιανὸς ἐνταῦθα γενόμενος κατενόησεν ὅτι δὴ τῶν μὲν ἐκείνῃ χωρίων ὁ φόρος λόγου ἄξιός ὡς ἤκιστα ἦν, ἐπεὶ στενὴν μάλιστα τὴν γῆν ἐνταῦθα ζυμβαίνει εἶναι (πέτραι γὰρ τοῦ Νείλου οὐ πολλῶ ἄποθεν ὑψηλαὶ λίαν ἀνέχουσιν τῆς χώρας τὰ λοιπὰ ἔχουσι), στρατιωτῶν δὲ πάμπολύ τι πλῆθος ἐνταῦθα ἐκ παλαιοῦ ἱδρυτο, ὥνπερ ταῖς δαπάναις ὑπερφυῶς ἄχθεσθαι συνέβαινε τὸ δημόσιον.

87 CIL III 14148, see discussion by Stanley M. Burstein, 'The Roman Withdrawal from Nubia: A New Interpretation', *Symbolae Osloenses*, 73.1 (1998), pp. 125–32 (pp. 129–31), doi:10.1080/00397679808590942.

88 Procop., *BP*, I. 19. 29–31: ἅμα δὲ καὶ Νοβάται ἀμφὶ πόλιν Ὀασιν ὄκημένοι τὰ πρότερα ἡγόν τε καὶ ἔφερον ἅπαντα ἐς αἰὶ τὰ ἐκείνῃ χωρία, τούτους δὴ τοὺς βαρβάρους ἀνέπεισεν ἀναστῆναι μὲν ἐξ ἡθῶν τῶν σφετέρων, ἀμφὶ ποταμὸν δὲ Νεῖλον ἰδρύσασθαι, δωρήσασθαι αὐτοὺς ὁμολογήσας πόλεσί τε μεγάλαις καὶ χώρα πολλῇ τε καὶ διαφερόντως ἀμείνوني ἥσπερ τὰ πρότερα ὄκνητο. οὕτω γὰρ ὥτεο αὐτοὺς τε οὐκέτι τὰ γε ἀμφὶ τὴν Ὀασιν ἐνοχλήσειν χωρία καὶ γῆς τῆς σφίσι διδομένης μεταποιουμένους, ἅτε οἰκείας οὔσης, ἀποκροῦσεσθαι Βλέμυάς τε, ὡς τὸ εἰκὸς, καὶ βαρβάρους τοὺς ἄλλους.

89 Procop., *BP*, I. 19. 31–32: τότε δὴ ὁ βασιλεὺς οὗτος αὐτοῖς τε καὶ Βλέμυσιν ἔταξε δίδοσθαι ἀνὰ πᾶν ἔτος ῥητόν τι χρυσίον ἐφ' ᾧ μηκέτι γῆν τὴν Ῥωμαίων λήισωνται. ὅπερ καὶ ἐς ἐμὲ κομιζόμενοι οὐδέν τι ἥσσαν καταθέουσι τὰ ἐκείνῃ χωρία.

90 Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century A.D. to the Third* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 158–59.

91 Artur Obluski, 'Dodekaschoinos in Late Antiquity: Ethnic Blemmyes vs. Political Blemmyes and the Arrival of Nobades', *Der Antike Sudan*, 24 (2013), pp. 141–47. See also Nikolett Kanavou, 'Notes on

to the Blemmyes and the ‘*Noubai*’ as being ‘nomads’ who lived alongside the ‘Ethiopians’.⁹² Some have suggested Procopius simply applied a later name to the empire of Meroe; however, such a hypothesis is unnecessary.⁹³ In Geoffrey Greatrex’s recent translation he omitted the Nobades, translating ‘*autois te kai Blemysin*’ simply as ‘to the Blemmyes’. This cannot be correct, as the Nobades are clearly indicated by ‘*autois*’.⁹⁴ The better explanation is that Procopius has connected a true story about Diocletian retracting the border with the events attested by Priscus of Panium in the fifth century. He says the Roman governor Florus, who held civil and military offices, and the general Maximinus responded to incursions by ‘Blemmyes and Noubades’, defeating them in battle in 452.⁹⁵

Priscus depicts the two barbarian groups as acting in concert: for example, he has them send a joint embassy to agree a treaty (*spondos*) for a hundred years.⁹⁶ When Maximus died in 453, however, Priscus says the Blemmyes and Noubades regarded the agreement as void and invaded to reclaim their hostages. The account is potentially corroborated by Jordanes. He wrote that the Emperor Marcian (450–57) ‘quelled the Nubades and Blemmyes’ and ‘drove them back from the frontiers of the Romans’; however, it has been argued he was summarising Priscus.⁹⁷ These events led R. C. Blockley to argue that the subsidies must have

the Blemmyomachia (P. Berol. 5003 + P. Gen. inv. 140 + P. Phoib. fr. 1a/6a/11c/12c), *Tyche*, 30 (2015), pp. 55–60, doi:10.15661/tyche.2015.030.07.

92 Strabo, *Geography*, XVII. 1. 6–10: λοιπὰ δὲ τὰ πρὸς νότον Τρωγλοδύται καὶ Βλέμυες καὶ Νοῦβαι καὶ Μεγάβαροι οἱ ὑπὲρ Συήνης Αἰθίοπες· εἰσὶ δ’ οὗτοι νομάδες καὶ οὐ πολλοὶ οὐδὲ μάχιμοι, δοκοῦντες δὲ τοῖς πάλαι διὰ τὸ ληστρικῶς ἀφυλάκτοις ἐπιτίθεσθαι πολλάκις.

93 Ben Hendrickx, ‘On the Withdrawal of the Roman Troops from the Dodecaschoenos in AD 298: Many Questions and Few answers — The Problems in Perspective’, *Akroterion*, 59 (2014), pp. 47–65 (p. 52 and 61), doi:10.7445/59-0-944.

94 Procop., *BP*, I. 19. 31–32: τότε δὴ ὁ βασιλεὺς οὗτος αὐτοῖς τε καὶ Βλέμυσιν ἔταξε δίδοσθαι ἀνὰ πᾶν ἔτος ῥητόν τι χρυσίον ἐφ’ ᾧ μηκέτι γῆν τὴν Ῥωμαίων ληίσωνται. ὅπερ καὶ ἐς ἐμὲ κομιζόμενοι οὐδέν τι ἥσσαν καταθέουσι τὰ ἐκείνη χωρία. See Averil Cameron and Geoffrey Greatrex, *Procopius of Caesarea: The Persian Wars: Translation, with Introduction and Notes* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), p. 92.

95 PLRE II, ‘Florus 2’, pp. 481–82; PLRE II, ‘Maximinus 11’, p. 743.

96 Priscus, fr. 21: ὅτι Βλέμυες καὶ Νουβάδες ἡττηθέντες ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίων πρέσβεις παρὰ τὸν Μαξιμῖνον ἔπεμπον ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων τῶν ἔθνων εἰρήνης πέρι, βουλόμενοι σπένδεσθαι, καὶ ταύτην διατηρῆσαι ἔφασαν, ἐφ’ ὅσον ὁ Μαξιμῖνος τῇ Θηβαίων ἐγκαταμένει χώρα. τοῦ δὲ μὴ προσδεξαμένου ἐπὶ χρόνῳ σπένδεσθαι τοσοῦτω, ἔλεγον ἄχρι τῆς αὐτοῦ ζωῆς μὴ κινήσειν ὅπλα. ὡς δὲ οὐδὲ τοὺς δευτέρους τῆς πρεσβείας προσίετο λόγους, ἑκατοντούτεις ἔθεντο σπονδάς.

97 Jord., *Rom.*, 333.

been suspended during the war and renewed by this treaty.⁹⁸ That solution to the riddle is only necessary if we accept Procopius's digression.

In the reasoning he attributed to Diocletian, Procopius provides positive evidence that cost-benefit analysis about subsidies, tax, and garrisons could be imagined in the sixth century. Luttwak naturally took the account as the perfect proof of his argument that 'the frontiers of the empire that emerged from the shipwreck of the third century had been "rationalized"'.⁹⁹ This is to assume that the system worked. Indeed, it is difficult to agree with Greatrex's judgment that 'both strands of this digression can be interpreted as endorsements of contemporary imperial policy'.¹⁰⁰ Procopius concluded the digression with the evaluation that 'even though they still receive this tribute to this day, they raid those lands no less often', whence this chapter's title.¹⁰¹ In his view, 'there is no way for any barbarians to maintain loyalty to the Romans, except through fear of the soldiers who defend against them' reads as a clear criticism of Justinian's policies.¹⁰² This seems to be the main purpose of including the digression.

The account itself is problematic, though. Procopius gathered his information about this region second-hand, as demonstrated by his relatively poor sense of geography compared to regions he had visited personally.¹⁰³ Whoever his informant was, whether oral or written, felt that the antiquity of the arrangement was important, so much so that they likely projected it backwards by two hundred years. This raises the question of whether Justinian's continuation of the subsidy can be attributed to the rational basis expressed by Procopius, or

98 R. C. Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy: Formation and Conduct from Diocletian to Anastasius* (Francis Cairns, 1992), p. 208, n. 18.

99 Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, pp. 158–59.

100 Greatrex, *Procopius of Caesarea: The Persian Wars: A Historical Commentary*, p. 283. The other strand being policy in Himyar (modern Yemen).

101 Procop., *BP*, I. 19. 33: ὅπερ καὶ ἐς ἐμὲ κομιζόμενοι οὐδέν τι ἥσσον καταθέουσι τὰ ἐκείνη χωρία.

102 Procop., *BP*, I. 19. 33–34: οὕτως ἄρα βαρβάρους ἅπαντας οὐδεμία μηχανὴ διασώσασθαι τὴν ἐς Ῥωμαίους πίστιν ὅτι μὴ δέει τῶν ἀμυνομένων στρατιωτῶν.

103 Jitse H. F. Dijkstra, *Philae and the End of Ancient Egyptian Religion: A Regional Study of Religious Transformation (298–642 CE)* (Peeters, 2008), pp. 27–30.

whether it represented deference to custom. This point prompts us to turn to alternative evidence for Justinian's aims.

Justinian's own words in his laws give a strong sense of his priorities for the Theban *limes*. Through an edict of 538 Justinian reformed the administrative arrangements for Egypt as a whole.¹⁰⁴ Justinian aimed to consolidate a unitary command over the Theban *limes*.¹⁰⁵ He removed the provinces from the jurisdiction of the distant praefectus Aegypti, based at Alexandria.¹⁰⁶ Instead he gave the *dux* of the Thebaid authority over all civilian officers in the provinces.¹⁰⁷ Yet the purpose of this reform was not framed explicitly in terms of frontier security: rather, the 'first care and liability, whatever happens' of this military leader was 'to exact the grain for the auspicious shipment'; that is, the shipment to Constantinople.¹⁰⁸ Other legislation of Justinian, as we see in other chapters, discussed the foreign policy context in explicit terms. Prioritising the grain shipment was not incompatible with frontier security. The point, however, is that Justinian did not take the opportunity to justify and advocate his policy towards the Nobades and the Blemmyes.

The sense that Justinian did not make military security his foremost priority is reinforced by the narrative sources. Both Procopius and John of Ephesus attest to Justinian's

104 Date: David J. D. Miller and Peter Sarris, *The Novels of Justinian: A Complete Annotated English Translation*, 2 vols (Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 1077, n. 1; contra 554 in Gertrude Malz, 'The Date of Justinian's Edict XIII', *Byzantion*, 16.1 (1942), pp. 135–41 (p. 141).

105 Just. *Ed.*, XIII. 23: ἀκόλουθον τοίνυν ἐστὶν ἐντεῦθεν διαβῆναι ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ τὸ Θηβαϊκὸν λιμνὸν, τουτέστι δύο Θηβαΐδας, αἵσπερ ἐπέστη μὲν ὁ περίβλεπτος δοῦξ ὁ ταύτην παραλαμβάνων παρ' ἡμῶν τὴν διοίκησιν· ὑπακούσονται δὲ τούτου καὶ οἱ τούτων τῶν ἐπαρχιῶν ἐπιχώριοι ἄρχοντες, καὶ ἔσται καὶ αὐτὸς ἐπὶ τῆς τοῦ αὐγουσταλίου τιμῆς, εἰ ὥσπερ ἂν εἰ καὶ αὐγουστάλιος ἦν, ὑποκεισόμενος ταῖς διατυπώσεσι τῆς σῆς ὑπεροχῆς καὶ τῇ δικαστηρίῳ τῆς Ἑω κατὰ πάντα, ὅπως καὶ νῦν ὁ περίβλεπτος αὐγουστάλιός ἐστι. δίδομεν γὰρ καὶ πᾶσαν δικαιοδοσίαν τε καὶ ἐξουσίαν, ἣν ὁ περίβλεπτος αὐγουστάλιος ἔχει τοι ταῖς ἄνωθεν ἀφωρισμέναις αὐτῷ, τουτέστι Θηβαῖσι δύο.

106 Just. *Ed.*, XIII. preamble: ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν, εἴπερ καταλίπομεν ἐν ὁμάδι τὸ πρᾶγμα διοικούμενον, οὐκ ἂν ποτε ἰσχύσαιμεν αὐτὸ διακαθαῖραι καὶ τάξαι προσηκόντως. διὰ τοῦτο συνείδομεν τὴν ἀρχήν, ἥπερ ἐφέστηκεν τοῖς Αἰγύπτου πράγμασι (φαμέν δὲ τὴν τῶν αὐγουσταλίων), μετριωτέραις ἐπιστήσαι φροντίσιν οὐ γὰρ ἂν δύναίτο ῥαδίως εἰς ἀνθρώπου νοῦς τοσαύταις ἀρκέσαι μερίμναις καὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα οὕτως διαθεῖναι, ὥστε αἰσθησὶν ἡμῖν ἀγαθὴν ἐν αὐτῷ καταστήσαι.

107 Just. *Ed.*, XIII. 24: ἔσται δὲ αὐτῷ φροντίς τε καὶ κίνδυνος, ὥστε πρότερον μὲν παντοίως εἰσπράττειν τὸν σῖτον τῆς αἰσίας ἐμβολῆς καὶ ἐκπέμπειν καὶ παραδιδόναι τῷ περιβλέπτῳ αὐγουσταλίῳ τῆς Ἀλεξανδρέων.

108 Just. *Ed.*, XIII. 25: ἄρξει δὲ καὶ στρατιωτῶν καὶ ἰδιωτῶν, τῶν μὲν κατὰ τὸ τῆς στρατιωτικῆς ἀρχῆς δίκαιον, τῶν δὲ κατὰ τὴν τοῦ αὐγουσταλίου δικαιοδοσίαν.

concern for eradicating the perceived paganism of the Nubians and Blemmyes and converting them to Christianity. Fifty years ago, a historian could deem Justinian to ‘scarcely have hoped [to] succeed in these remote places’, remarking ‘I suspect that the imperial mission was rather a formal gesture’.¹⁰⁹ Such interpretations are now very much out of fashion, with modern accounts instead emphasising the superlative priority Justinian placed on his faith.¹¹⁰ On that basis, his actions against ‘pagans’ show a tension between priorities. Allowing access to the pagan temples at Philae had been a key term of the treaty of 452, according to Priscus.¹¹¹

Procopius says that Justinian ordered the destruction of this temple complex; he, of course, attributed the joint access arrangements to Diocletian.¹¹² The Persarmenian Narseh, whose defection we discussed earlier in this chapter, was the general tasked with the destruction of the temples at Philae. Proposed dates vary between the middle of the 530s and 540s: Greatrex sets out the case for 535.¹¹³ Procopius says Narseh arrested the pagan priests and sent pagan idols as prizes to Constantinople. Epigraphic evidence suggests that the complex had fallen into disuse already by 456/57.¹¹⁴ However, as Greatrex rightly observes, this does not invalidate the fact that Narseh and his imperial master claimed victory.

In the aftermath of the alleged destruction of the temple, Justinian sent missionaries to the Nobades. John of Ephesus reports this at length, partly to relate the story that the empress Theodora sent a rival Miaphysite missionary to compete with Justinian’s Chalcedonian.¹¹⁵ In any case, the mission was deemed a success. According to John, they were then asked to send missionaries to the neighbouring Nubian people, the Alodians.¹¹⁶ The course of John’s accounts raises some important points about politics, however.

109 Edward R. Hardy, ‘The Egyptian Policy of Justinian’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 22 (1968), pp. 21–41 (p. 36).

110 Peter Sarris, *Justinian: Emperor, Soldier, Saint* (Basic Books, 2023).

111 Priscus, fr. 21.

112 Procop., *BP*, I. 19. 34–37.

113 Greatrex, *Procopius of Caesarea: The Persian Wars: A Historical Commentary*, p. 283.

114 Dijkstra, *Philae and the End of Ancient Egyptian Religion*, pp. 214–18.

115 Joh. Eph., *HE*, IV. 6–9.

116 Joh. Eph., *HE*, IV. 49–53.

The Nobades and Blemmyes were depicted by Priscus as launching a joint invasion in the reign of Marcian. In the later fifth century, however, the Nobades fought the Blemmyes. A Nobadian leader named Silko appears pivotal but enigmatic.¹¹⁹ An inscription declared that ‘Silko, King of the *Noubades* and all the Ethiopians’ defeated the Blemmyes.¹²⁰ A papyrus letter survives from Phonen, ruler of the Blemmyes, to Aburni, Silko’s successor.¹²¹ These events have been dated variously, including to the reign of Justinian. However, as László Török argues, it seems most likely that these events took place in the later fifth century, after the treaty of 452.¹²² A piece of evidence that further reinforces Török’s argument is the statement by Joshua that Anastasius fought the Blemmyes (Syr. *blemīs*) without naming the

122 László Török, 'A Contribution to Post-Meroitic Chronology: The Blemmyes in Lower Nubia', *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, 58 (1984), pp. 201–43 (p. 234).

560s.¹²⁷ Justinian's approach to the Theban *limes* may have satisfied his desire to attack pagans and promote Christianity: it did not, however, secure his Egyptian subjects against the raids of the Blemmyes.¹²⁸

2.3. Conclusion

This chapter has examined two cases where Justinian employed subsidies. On the *limes Arabicus* he reformed the system of Saracen allies to have a 'supreme *phylarch*', reflecting the Persian structure. It had been longstanding practice to supply *phylarchoi* with money. The exact circumstances are scarce, but it seems plausible that the subsidies were channelled through the new 'supreme *phylarch*' once this position was established, as Greg Fisher has suggested. The payments had different effects, however.

It does seem that payments helped al-Ḥārith consolidate his power, to the point where he defeated and killed the Persians' ally, al-Mundhir. However, the three successors to Justinian each came into conflict with al-Ḥārith's son over his perceived power and unruliness. It seems, therefore, that channelling subsidies resulted in a polity that subsequent emperors regarded as too powerful. Justinian began giving money to the Persians' Saracen allies, whom his own ally, al-Ḥārith, was supposed to defeat. Even after al-Ḥārith bested the Persians' Saracens and killed their king, Justinian was expected to give money. To the exasperation of his ambassadors, the Persian *shāhanshāh* began raising the lack of subsidies to his Saracen subjects as a matter of dispute between the empires.

The third point of comparison is about reception. The case of al-Ḥārith does not earn Justinian the direct rebuke of any primary sources. Indeed, Procopius offers a justification of the payment to the Saracens. The money to both the Saracens is consistently presented

¹²⁷ Dijkstra, 'A Cult of Isis at Philae after Justinian? Reconsidering 'P. Cair. Masp.' I 67004', pp. 137–54.
¹²⁸ '... the raids described in these two petitions seem to specific to dismiss out of hand and suggest a continuity of raids into the Egyptian Nile valley in the sixth century,' in Dijkstra, "'I, Silko, Came to Talmis and Taphis'", p. 137.

through the discourse of ‘pay’. That Justinian ‘got away with’ making these payments without criticism by contemporaries should not, however, lead modern historians to accept the accounts on face value. His successor Justin II responded furiously to the requests from the sons of al-Ḥārith and al-Mundhir that the Romans continue the payments Justinian had started. Justin saw no difference between these demands and those of the Persians or Avars. Given the views of his own nephew, it is proof of the partial success of Justinian’s subsidies to these buffer states that contemporary sources wrote of them in such a positive light. On the Theban frontier, Justinian inherited existing arrangements. His concession to keep paying the Nobades annually, even while a source like John of Ephesus called it ‘tribute’, appears to have encouraged their stability.

One feature that has emerged strongly is how ethnographic knowledge shaped Justinianic policy. In the case of the Egyptian frontier the ‘Nobadae and Blemmyes’ were presented as a pair, but in reality had different political formations. Yet given the Blemmyes continued practising paganism, Justinian’s actions like closing the temple at Philae were provocative. The end result of his policy was the councillors of Omboi complaining that far from imperial subsidies securing their city, an imperial official could pay the Blemmyes to operate an extortion racket.

Chapter Three: ‘Only the semblance of monarchy’¹ The Caucasus, Armenia and the Caspian Steppe

In a mountain-top fortress believed to be impregnable, Justinian’s enemies had gathered their warriors, women and children.² With little prospect of storming the fort, the Romans laid siege. One day, Roman sentries spotted someone leaving the fortress to get water. Realising they could mount a surprise attack, later that night a small force of Romans crept in. Finding the guards asleep, they killed them all. Then the intruders raised the alarm. Positioning themselves in doorways, they slew anybody who woke up and ran out. They then set fire to the wooden houses. Those who had remained inside were burned alive or buried under collapsing roofs. The children who escaped, ‘crying out for their mothers’, were seized by the soldiers: ‘Some they hurled down and mangled brutally against the rocks. Others they tossed in the air, as though they were playing some sort of game, and caught them on the points of their spears.’

Even a Roman as distinguished as the historian Agathias felt obliged to confess to his readers that such a ‘sinful deed’ of ‘wanton and monstrous brutality’ was unjustified. In the language of the sixth century, he labelled it a war crime. Yet this was not action against an ancestral enemy. The people being massacred were the Misimian subjects of Justinian’s ally, the king of Lazica.³ Moreover, until their revolt the Misimians themselves had received money from the emperor, and the conflict was sparked by a misunderstanding about the

1 Procop., *BP*, I. 19. 33–34: οὕτως ἄρα βαρβάρους ἅπαντας οὐδεμία μηχανὴ διασώσασθαι τὴν ἐς Ῥωμαίους πίστιν ὅτι μὴ δέει τῶν ἀμυνομένων στρατιωτῶν.

2 This episode follows Agath., *Hist.*, IV. 18. 6–19. 6.

3 BAtlas, Map 87 G1, ‘Misimia’; Map 88 A2, ‘Lazike’.

purpose of this money. This incident was the brutal end result of a policy too often assumed to be pacific.

This chapter will consider Justinian's use of money in Lazica and the wider region of the Greater Caucasus. The first section examines the patchwork of jurisdictions in Armenia and Pontus, including self-ruling Armenian principalities and Tzan tribes and neighbouring Armenian princes subject to Sasanian Persia, known conventionally as Persarmenians. Here Justinian sought to disembed traditional relationships by removing subsidies and tax privileges from the Western Armenians and Tzans, while offering cash and tax privileges as gifts to the Persarmenians. Rather than a contradiction, these divergent policies represent a transition from relationships based on diachronic reciprocal exchanges to ones based on synchronic, transactional exchanges.

The second section moves to the kingdom of Lazica and its dependencies, where Justinian's use of cash also changed traditional structures. The alliance between the Romans and Lazica had traditionally stood on equal terms without cash payments, with the Romans instead supporting the Laz king's status as a sovereign ruler. The move to introduce subsidies represented a newly transactional relationship. As well as affecting the relationship between the Romans and the king of Lazica, it also damaged the integrity of Lazica's regional hegemony over smaller tribal groups. Rather than reinforcing Lazica, Justinian's use of payments therefore contributed to a weakening of local sovereignty and represented Roman encroachment.

Finally, the third section discusses the Caspian Steppe, home of fast-moving horsemen whom the Romans feared could cross the Caucasus Mountains to make deep inroads into imperial territory. In this area Justinian could not draw on traditional relationships, as the Romans believed the steppe to be an ever-changing kaleidoscope of tribal leaders. Instead, our primary sources describe how the imperial powers established a

quasi-market, with Romans and Persian rulers bidding at a ‘fixed rate’ for individual Hunnic warbands. Although Justinian continued this approach, once he concluded the war with Persia he encouraged the Avars to take control of the Caspian Steppe. This can be understood as reforming a market of competing warbands to a monopoly led by an individual ruler with whom the Romans could form a diplomatic relationship.

Together, these three cases offer further evidence that Justinian followed multiple, conflicting, and contextual priorities. His use of subsidies followed no ‘standard’ template. We see cash offered in terms of market exchange, but elsewhere as a tradition of reciprocity. While Roman gold won the allegiance of some, it alienated others. The Caucasus region thereby demonstrates the importance of discursive framing in determining the political valence of Roman subsidies.

3.1. Armenians and Tzani: Disembedding Traditional Rights

Discursive construction of cash exchange shaped the East Romans’ changing relationship with the Armenians and Tzani. At Justinian’s accession both lived on lands claimed by the Romans as self-ruling groups. Armenian society was based on the powerful *nakharars*, an institution of lordship through which whole villages were inherited.⁴ The *nakharars* maintained several privileges under Roman rule including immunity from taxation, the right to maintain militias, and the right to observe their own law. In contrast the Tzani were highland pastoralists, living in a number of tribes ruled by assemblies. They received Roman gold each year in return for a promise not to raid Roman lands. The provision of gold and immunity from tax therefore represented two alternate constructions of Roman relations with these semi-autonomous polities that reflected their claims to legitimacy.

4 Jairus Banaji, ‘Aristocracies, Peasantries and the Framing of the Early Middle Ages’, p. 248.



FIG. 3.1. Map of the Caucasus, Armenia and Pontus

As Justinian sought to remove traditional privileges and impose Roman rule, however, the discourse of exchange obligations changed too. The constant, structural privilege of the *nakharars*' tax immunity was replaced by contingent and transactional gifts and money. The Tzani, accused of breaking the terms of their subsidy, were instead required to pay tax. The response of both groups, who rose in armed revolt, shows the fundamental importance of this symbolism. This will be demonstrated in three subsections assessing the Western Armenians, Persarmenians and Tzani. Together these show the violent consequences of disembedding from traditional institutions and imposing new ones.

3.1.1. Western Armenian *nakharars*

The position of Armenia became increasingly important during the reign of Justin I (518–27), as the neighbouring kingdoms of Lazica and Kartli attempted to re-align from Persia to the Romans. There is good reason to believe Justinian closely followed these events, even if he lived up to Agathias's cutting description of the imperial guard as 'merely civilians in

splendid uniforms’, remaining in Constantinople and never fighting himself.⁵ He built a personal retinue of guardsmen in his role as *magister militum praesentalis* (520–25). This retinue included two officers, Belisarius and Sittas, whom Justinian later promoted as senior generals.⁶ During the reign of his uncle, the pair led two raiding parties into Persarmenia. These raids led to the first use of cash by Justinian in Armenia.

Some have assumed that Justinian did not use subsidies in Armenia.⁷ One reason why Justinian’s policy towards Armenia has been overlooked is the relative lack of sixth-century source material. Armenian-language sources attest that the Sasanians provided subsidies to the Persarmenian elite in the sixth and seventh centuries and that the Romans did to Westerners in the fifth century at least.⁸ This is potentially corroborated by an early Roman source: Ammianus describes how, in the opening moves of Julian’s invasion of Persia, the loyalty of the Transcaucasian kingdoms was of paramount concern. To guarantee it, Julian sent envoys to King Arsaces of Armenia and King Meribanes of Iberia, who they ‘bribed with splendidly adorned garments and gifts of many kinds’.⁹ This is typical of other references to Roman gifts to Armenia, including Armenian gifts to the Roman Emperor.

It is curious that Armenian sources provide such detailed information about the fifth and seventh centuries but have much less to say about the reign of Justinian. According to Roman sources, including Justinian’s own laws, he made huge changes to Roman governance

5 Agath., *Hist.*, v. 15. 2: ἦσαν δὲ οὐ μάχιμοι ὡς ἀληθῶς οὐδὲ μετρίως γοῦν τὰ τοιαῦτα πεπαιδευμένοι, ἀλλ’ ἐκ τῶν ταγμάτων ἐκείνων τῶν οἱ ἐς τὸ διημερεῦν τε καὶ διανυκτερεῦν ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ ἀπεκέκριντο, οὓς δὴ σχολαρίους ἀποκαλοῦσιν. οὗτοι δὲ στρατιῶται μὲν ὀνομάζονται καὶ ἐγγεγράφαται τοῖς τῶν καταλόγων βιβλίοις, εἰσὶ δὲ οἱ πολλοὶ ἀστικοὶ τε καὶ παιδοειμονες καὶ μόνον, οἷμαι, ὄγκου τοῦ βασιλείου ἔνεκα καὶ τῆς ἐν ταῖς προόδοις μεγαλαυχίας ἐξευρημένοι.

6 For the officers of a retinue (*doryphoroi* or ‘spear-carriers’) see Bury, *Theodosius to Justinian*, II, pp. 77–78; Heather, *Rome Resurgent*, pp. 54, 84; for general discussion David Alan Parnell, *Justinian’s Men: Careers and Relationships of Byzantine Army Officers*, 518–610 (Macmillan, 2017), pp. 17–19, doi:10.1057/978-1-137-56204-3.

7 C. D. Gordon, ‘Subsidies in Roman Imperial Defence’, *Phoenix*, 3 (1949), pp. 60–69 (p. 64), n. 31; citing Ammianus, XXIII. 2. 1–2, which is not, however, explicit.

8 Nicolas Adontz, *The Reform of Justinian in Armenia* (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1970), p. 219 citing Faustus Buzand, v. 34, and Elishe, III. 85.

9 Ammianus, XXI. 6. 7–8: cultu ambitioso indumentorum emercabantur et multiformibus donis.

of Armenia which we would expect the Armenian sources to report. The only extended narrative is from Procopius's *Wars*, supplemented by his ethnographic comments in the *Buildings*. Procopius twice claims to have consulted what he calls 'the History of the Armenians' in preparing his account.¹⁰ The value of his information from this source has been questioned. Henning Börm rejects it entirely, pointing out its inaccuracies when describing events that can be compared to the actual Armenian sources.¹¹ However, Börm does regard Procopius's account of Belisarius's activities to be more reliable.¹² Therefore we must consider the evidence about Armenia from Procopius carefully.

'Greater Armenia' had been encroached upon by the Romans and Persians for centuries before a formal partition between the great powers in the 380s.¹³ At the time of the partition both Western and Eastern Armenia had its own king, but by the sixth century both monarchies had been abolished.¹⁴ The Armenian *gens* still maintained a level of political organisation through the institution of the *nakharar*. Within Roman-controlled Armenia, the majority was ruled through regular provinces and imperial law. A large area on the frontier, however, was maintained under special arrangements. Here the Romans ruled the 'Armenian *gentes*' through the *nakharars*, whom they recognised as satraps ruling over satrapies following Persian practice.¹⁵ Justinian named the satrapies as Anzitene, Ingilene, Asthianene, Sophene, Sophanene and Balabitenene.¹⁶ The *nakharars* traditionally maintained militias with which to defend their territory. This status meant they did not pay tax. The emperor

10 Procop., *BP*, I. 5. 9: ἅπαξ δὲ ἡ τῶν Ἀρμενίων ἱστορία φησὶ νόμου τοῦ ἀμφὶ τῷ Λήθης φρουρίῳ παραλελύσθαι τὴν δύναμιν Πέρσαις τρόπῳ τοιῷδε; Procop., *Aed.*, III. 1. 6: ὥσπερ ἡ τῶν Ἀρμενίων ἱστορία φησί.

11 Henning Börm, *Prokop und die Perser: Untersuchungen zu den römisch-sasanidischen Kontakten in der ausgehenden Spätantike* (Steiner, 2007), pp. 224–26, cf. pp. 55–57.

12 Geoffrey Greatrex, *Procopius of Caesarea: The Persian Wars: A Historical Commentary* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), p. 390.

13 Adontz, *The Reform of Justinian in Armenia*, pp. 7–24.

14 R. W. Thomson, 'Eastern Neighbours: Armenia (400–600)', in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire c. 500–1492*, ed. by Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 156–72.

15 Adontz, *The Reform of Justinian in Armenia*, pp. 87–88.

16 Just. *Cod. Iust.*, I. 29. 5: gentes (Anzetenam videlicet, Ingilenam, Asthianenam, Sophenam, Sophanenam, in qua est Martyropolis, Balabitenam).

use of money to secure the loyalty of defectors, if we read the cryptic language of Procopius carefully.

The exact causes of the revolt are uncertain. To Procopius, the problem related to the character of the Armenian governor Hamazasp. An erstwhile friend of the governor, Acacius, told the emperor that Hamazasp planned to return his allegiance to Persia and hand over the Armenian satrapies in the process. With the emperor's blessing, Acacius killed Hamazasp and was appointed governor of Armenia Interior in his place.²² After Justinian's administrative reforms, Acacius became proconsul of the new Armenia Prima. Procopius blames Acacius's 'cruel' character for alienating the Armenians, to the point where he was murdered.²³ Justinian passed a law abolishing the Armenian practice of inheritance, which was a direct attack on the ability of *nakharars* to maintain their principalities.²⁴ He passed a law which abolished the special status of the satrapies and imposed regular provincial governance, taxes, and military obligations.²⁵

Sittas was responsible as *magister militum* for defeating the uprising. He believed he could win over part of the rebel coalition 'with promises of many good things'.²⁶ In particular he sought to win over the Aspetianoï clan, which is identified as the Bagratuni.²⁷ The basis of Sittas's alliance with the Bagratuni was a written pledge of Roman support promising they would keep their possessions.²⁸ The phrasing is similar to two examples in the *Vandal Wars* where Procopius used it to describe money. This first is the arrangement with the Moors. Belisarius gave the Moors money to fight with the Romans.²⁹ In the letter Procopius

22 PLRE III, 'Acacius 1', pp. 8–9.

23 Procop., *BP*, II. 3. 5–7.

24 Just., *Nov.*, XXI.

25 Just., *Nov.*, XXXI.

26 Procop., *BP*, II. 3. 11–12: πρῶτον μὲν οὖν ὑποσχέσεσι πολλῶν ἀγαθῶν ἀναπεῖθαι τε καὶ ἐταιρίζεσθαι αὐτῶν τινὰς ἐνεχείρησεν, ὅπως αὐτῷ ῥάων τε καὶ ἀπονωτέρα ἢ ἐς τοὺς λοιποὺς ἐπικράτησις γένοιτο.

27 See Anthony Kaldellis (ed.), *The Wars of Justinian / Prokopios* (Indianapolis, 2014), p. 16, n. 181; Theo van Lint, 'Bagratuni clan', in ODLA, p. 193.

28 Procop., *BP*, II. 3. 13: κακῶν παντάπασιν ἀπαθεῖς μείνωσι, τὰ σφέτερα αὐτῶν ἔχοντες.

29 Procop., *BV*, III. 25. 8–9: Βελισάριος δὲ ταῦτά τε αὐτοῖς ἔπεμψε καὶ χρήμασι πολλοῖς αὐτῶν ἕκαστον ἐδωρήσατο.

attributes to the Moors, they complain he ‘came to us with great promises and persuaded us to be subjects of Emperor Justinian’.³⁰ Secondly, Gelimer promised ‘many good things’ to the Huns in Belisarius’s army if they would defect.³¹ Suspecting this, Belisarius courted the Huns with banquets and ‘gifts’ to persuade them to disclose Gelimer’s offer.³² Finding that Gelimer offered a share of the spoils and the Huns feared the Romans would deny them any, Belisarius guaranteed their share.³³ Thus the ‘many good things’ clearly revolved around material rewards. We should therefore understand Sittas to have distributed, or promised to distribute, money to the loyalists.

The putative alliance fell apart, however. Sittas’s forces killed Bagratuni civilians.³⁴ In a subsequent battle with the Armenians, Sittas was killed.³⁵ His successor as *magister militum*, Bouzes, suppressed the Armenians with force.³⁶ Procopius associates the failed revolt with the Western Armenian *nakharars* sending an envoy to the Sasanian *shāhanshāh*, appealing for him to break the ‘Eternal Peace’ and free the peoples of Armenia and the Caucasus from the Roman yoke.³⁷

3.1.2. Persarmenian Defections

Justinian’s attention turned to the Armenian principalities beyond Roman suzerainty in the context of increasing tensions with Persia. Justinian’s own guardsmen took part in raids into

- 30 Procop., *BV*, IV. 11. 9: Βελισάριος μὲν ἐπαγγελίαις μεγάλαις ἡμᾶς περιελθὼν ἔπεισε βασιλέως Ἰουστινιανοῦ κατηκόους εἶναι.
- 31 Procop., *BV*, IV. 1. 5: πέμψαντες δὲ καὶ ἐς τῶν Οὐννων τοὺς ἄρχοντας, καὶ πολλὰ ἔσσεσθαι αὐτοῖς ἀγαθὰ πρὸς Βανδύλων ὑποσχόμενοι, ἐδέοντο φίλους τε καὶ ξυμμάχους γενέσθαι σφίσιν.
- 32 Procop., *BV*, IV. 1. 9–10: τοὺς δὲ Μασσαγέτας δώροις τε καὶ τραπέζῃ καὶ τῇ ἄλλῃ θωπεῖα μετιῶν ἡμέρα ἐκάστη ἐξενεγκεῖν εἰς αὐτὸν ἔπεισεν ὅσα αὐτοῖς ὁ Γελίμερ ὑποσχόμενος εἶη, ἐφ’ ᾧ ἐν τῇ ξυμβολῇ κακοὶ γένωνται.
- 33 Procop., *BV*, IV. 1. 10–11: καὶ μὴν καὶ περὶ τῇ λείᾳ, μὴ ἀφαιρεθῶσιν αὐτήν, ἐν φροντίδι εἶναι. τότε δὴ οὖν αὐτοῖς Βελισάριος πιστὰ ἔδωκεν ὥς, ἣν κατὰ κράτος Βανδύλοι ἡσσηθεῖεν, αὐτίκα δὲ μάλα ἐς τὰ οἰκεῖα ξὺν πᾶσι λαφύροις σταλήσονται, οὕτω τε αὐτοὺς ὅρκους καταλαμβάνει ἢ μὴν πάσῃ προθυμίᾳ ξυνδιενεγκεῖν σφίσι τὸν πόλεμον.
- 34 Procop., *BP*, II. 3. 18.
- 35 Procop., *BP*, II. 3. 19–27.
- 36 PLRE III, ‘Buzes’, pp. 254–57.
- 37 Procop., *BP*, II. 3. 31–54; for a sceptical reading, see Marion Kruse, ‘The Speech of the Armenians in Procopius: Justinian’s Foreign Policy and the Transition Between Books 1 and 2 of the “Wars”’, *The Classical Quarterly*, 63.2 (2013), pp. 866–81 (pp. 867–68).

Persarmenia in the twilight of Justin's reign. The first raid is likely to have taken place in the summer of 526. It was successful and the Romans returned with much plunder.³⁸ When they undertook a second raid in the summer of 527, however, they were challenged by the Armenian princes Nerseh and Hrahat of the Kamsarakan clan.³⁹ The Persarmenians defeated the Romans in battle.⁴⁰ This context seems relevant to the swift decision by Justinian, upon his accession as emperor, to reform the military command structure in Armenia.

When open war broke out between Justinian and Kavādh (summer 530 to summer 531), there were a number of Persarmenian defections. Narseh and Hrahat, who had defeated Belisarius and Sittas in the late 520s, at this point sought to defect to the Romans. The emperor's minister Narses was himself Persarmenian.⁴¹ He met the potential defectors and 'gifted them great sums of money' (*chrēmasí te autous dōreítai megalois*).⁴² This motivated their brother, Sahak, to also defect.⁴³ He was the commander of the fortress of Bolon, which

38 Procop., *BP*, I. 12. 20–23: Ῥωμαῖοι δὲ, Σίττα τε καὶ Βελισαρίου ἡγουμένων σφίσιν, ἐς Περσαρμενίαν τὴν Περσῶν κατήκοον ἐσβαλόντες χώραν τε πολλὴν ἐλήσαντο καὶ Ἀρμενίων πάμπολυ πλῆθος ἀνδραποδίσαντες ἀπεχώρησαν. τούτῳ δὲ τῷ ἀνδρὶ νεανία μὲν καὶ πρῶτον ὑπηνήτα ἦσθιν, Ἰουστινιανοῦ δὲ στρατηγοῦ δορυφόρῳ, ὃς δὴ χρόνῳ ὕστερον ζὺν Ἰουστίνῳ τῷ θεῷ τὴν βασιλείαν ἔσχεν. ἐτέρας δὲ ἐσβολῆς Ῥωμαίοις ἐς Ἀρμενίαν γεγενημένης Ναρσῆς τε καὶ Ἀράτιος παρὰ δόξαν ὑπαντιάσαντες ἐς χεῖρας ἦλθον. οἱ οὐ πολλῶ ὕστερον ἐς Ῥωμαίους τε αὐτόμολοι ἵκοντο καὶ ζὺν Βελισαρίῳ ἐς Ἰταλίαν ἐστράτευσαν, τότε μέντοι τοῖς ἀμφὶ Σίτταν τε καὶ Βελισάριον ξυμβαλόντες τὸ πλέον ἔσχον. Dated Geoffrey Greatrex and Samuel N. C. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars, AD 363–628* (Routledge, 2002), p. 83, doi:10.4324/9780203994542.

39 Nerseh from Armenian *Nersēh* [Ναρση] (Gk. *Narsēs* [Ναρσης]) and Hrahat from Armenian *Hrahat* [Հրահա] (Gk. *Aratios* [Ἀράτιος]) see PLRE III, 'Narses 2', pp. 928–30; PLRE III, 'Aratius', pp. 103–04. See also Ernst Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire: De la disparition de l'Empire d'Occident à la mort de Justinien (476–565)* 2 vols (Desclée de Brouwer, 1949), II, p. 292, n. 1.

40 cf. Procop., *BP*, I. 12. 31: Ναρσῆς τε καὶ Ἀράτιος, οἱ Βελισαρίῳ καὶ Σίττῳ ἐν Περσαρμενίων τῇ χώρᾳ κατ' ἀρχὰς τοῦδε τοῦ πολέμου ἐς χεῖρας ἦλθον.

41 Known conventionally as Narses from the Gk. *Narsēs* [Ναρσης], derived from the Armenian name *Nersēh* [Ναρση]; see PLRE III, 'Narses 1', pp. 912–28; see also the book-length biography by Dariusz Brodka, *Narses: Politik, Krieg und Historiographie im 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Peter Lang, 2018), doi:10.3726/b14557.

42 Procop., *BP*, I. 15. 31: Ὑπὸ δὲ τοὺς αὐτοὺς χρόνους Ναρσῆς τε καὶ Ἀράτιος, οἱ Βελισαρίῳ καὶ Σίττῳ ἐν Περσαρμενίων τῇ χώρᾳ κατ' ἀρχὰς τοῦδε τοῦ πολέμου ἐς χεῖρας ἦλθον, ὥσπερ ἔμπροσθέν μοι δεδήλωται, ζὺν τῇ μητρὶ αὐτόμολοι ἐς Ῥωμαίους ἦκον, καὶ αὐτοὺς Ναρσῆς ὁ βασιλέως ταμίης ἐδέξατο (Περσαρμένιος γὰρ καὶ αὐτὸς γένος ἐτύγχανε) χρήμασί τε αὐτοὺς δωρεῖται μεγάλοις.

43 Sahak from Armenian *Sahak* [Տահակ] (cf. Gk. *Isaakēs* [Ἰσαάκης]), see PLRE III, 'Isaaces 1', p. 718.

protected the frontier of the Persarmenian province of Sper from the Roman border at the city of Theodosiopolis.⁴⁴

The province of Sper was of interest because of its gold mines. At the same time that Sahak defected, the Persarmenian Symeon also defected.⁴⁵ Symeon oversaw gold mines in Sper on behalf of the Persians.⁴⁶ Procopius wrote that Justinian did not collect taxes from Pharangion, instead being content to deprive the Persians of them. We learn from Malalas that the Persians claimed two hundred *librae* of gold a year from these mines, and the issue became part of the negotiations between the great powers. That the Romans waived this levy could potentially be understood as an indirect form of subsidy. Justinian also rewarded Symeon with property, but this led to his downfall. When Justinian gave Symeon legal title to ‘certain villages of the Armenians’ in 530/1, the residents staged an uprising and killed Symeon.⁴⁷ Justinian awarded the villas to Symeon’s nephew Hamazasp, then appointed Hamazasp the consul of the Roman province of Armenia Interior.⁴⁸

3.1.3. Tzanica

The Romans had long ruled the Black Sea coastal province of Pontus Polemoniacus, with its capital at Trebizond.⁴⁹ The mountainous hinterland, however, was ruled by a *gens* known to fifth- and sixth-century sources as Tzani.⁵⁰ Late Antique authors associate this group with the

44 Procop., *BP*, I. 15. 32–33: ὅπερ ἐπειδὴ Ἰσαάκης, ὁ νεώτατος αὐτῶν ἀδελφός, ἔμαθε, Ῥωμαίοις λάθρα ἐς λόγους ἐλθὼν Βώλου αὐτοῖς τὸ φρούριον, ἄγχιστά πη ὄν τῶν Θεοδοσιουπόλεως ὀρίων, παρέδωκε. στρατιώτας γὰρ ἐγγύς πη ἐπέστελλε κρύπτεσθαι, οὓς δὴ τῷ φρουρίῳ νύκτωρ ἐδέξατο, μίαν αὐτοῖς λάθρα ἀνακλίνας πυλίδα· οὕτω τε καὶ αὐτὸς ἐς Βυζάντιον ἦλθεν. Hamazasp from Armenian *Hamazasp* (cf. Gk. *Amazaspes*); see PLRE III, ‘Amazaspes’, p. 54.

45 Procop., *BP*, I. 15. 26–30; PLRE III, ‘Symeon 1’, pp. 1211–12.

46 Procop., *BP*, I. 15. 26–30.

47 Procop., *BP*, II. 3. 1–3.

48 Procop., *BP*, II. 3. 3–5.

49 Trebizond (anc. Trapezus; mod. Trabzon), see *BAAtlas*, Map 87 E4, ‘Trapezus’.

50 Tzani, from Gk. *Tzanoi* [Τζάνοι] in Procop., *BP*, I. 15. 21 (cf. Lat. *Zanni* in Marcell. com., s.a. 441). First attested in the fifth century: see Pall. *Dial.*, 66. 27: Πιτυοῦντα, τόπον πανέρημον τῶν Τζάνων, ἐπικείμενον τῇ ὄχθῃ τῆς Ποντικῆς θαλάσσης; cf. Agathang., 98: ὁ δὲ τέταρτος γενεάρχης τῶν Ὀσπιτιανῶν ἐπάρχης ὅστις κατατεταγμένος ὑπῆρχεν φυλάττειν τὰ μέρη τῶν Καυκασίων ὀρέων καὶ Τζάνων.

earlier ‘Sanoi’ of Strabo and Arrian.⁵¹ They in turn identified the Sani with the ancient Macrones described in the histories of Herodotus and Xenophon and the myth of Jason and the Argonauts.⁵² In the second century Arrian described the Sanni as a people ‘of a warlike disposition, and very hostile to the Trapezuntians’; he wrote ‘they dwell in strongly fortified places, and do not live under a monarchical government’ and while ‘formerly tributary to the Romans’, had stopped paying and begun plundering.⁵³ Similarly, Procopius reports they were ‘settled autonomously in Roman land from ancient times’.⁵⁴ They were ‘anarchic’, in the sense they had no fixed political leaders.⁵⁵ He names two of their polities as the *Oxylines* and *Ōkenitae*.⁵⁶

One of Sittas’s first acts as *magister militum per Armeniam* was to campaign against the Tzani. The Tzani controlled the river valleys that connected Theodosiopolis and Roman Armenia to Anatolia and Lazica. They had long raided neighbouring states, making serious incursions into Roman territory at inopportune moments. In 451 the Tzani are recorded as having made extensive raids.⁵⁷ In the 480s the general Longinus, brother to the emperor Zeno, led an expedition against the Tzani.⁵⁸ It seems likely that an arrangement to give money to the Tzani was made at this point.⁵⁹ Procopius describes how the Tzani ‘receive each

51 Arrian, *Periplus*, XI. 1–2; Strabo, *Geog.*, XII. 3. 18: τῆς δὲ Τραπεζοῦντος ὑπέρκεινται καὶ τῆς Φαρνακίας Τιβαράνοι τε καὶ Χαλδαῖοι καὶ Σάννοι, οὓς πρότερον ἐκάλουν Μάκρωνας, καὶ ἡ μικρὰ Ἀρμενία.

52 Procopius, *BP*, I. 15. 21; Stephanus of Byzantium, M-32, pp. 257–258; Strabo, XII. 3. 8.

53 Arrian, *Periplus*, XI. 1–2: καὶ οὓς λέγει τοὺς μαχιμωτάτους καὶ ἐχθροτάτους εἶναι τοῖς Τραπεζουντίοις, ἐκεῖνος μὲν Δρίλλας ὀνομάζει, ἐμοὶ δὲ δοκοῦσιν οἱ Σάννοι οὗτοι εἶναι. καὶ γὰρ μαχιμωτάτοί εἰσιν εἰς τοῦτο ἔτι καὶ τοῖς Τραπεζουντίοις ἐχθρότατοι, καὶ χωρία ὀχυρὰ οἰκοῦσιν, καὶ ἔθνος ἀβασίλευτον, πάλαι μὲν καὶ φόρου ὑποτελὲς Ῥωμαίοις, ὑπὸ δὲ τοῦ ληστεύειν οὐκ ἀκριβοῦσιν τὴν φορὰν. ἀλλὰ νῦν γε διδόντος θεοῦ ἀκριβώσουσιν, ἢ ἐξελοῦμεν αὐτούς.

54 Procop., *BP*, I. 15. 21: αὐτόνομοι ἐκ παλαιοῦ ἴδρυντο.

55 Procop., *Aed.*, III. 6. 2: αὐτόνομοι μὲν Τζάνοι ἐκ παλαιοῦ καὶ ἄναρχοι ὄκουν.

56 Procop., *Aed.*, III. 6. 18: οὗ δὲ Τζάνων τῶν Ὤκενιτῶν καλουμένων τὰ ὄρια ἐστὶν (ἐπεὶ ἐς ἔθνη πολλὰ διακέκρινται Τζάνοι).

57 Marcell. com., a. 441: ‘Persae, Sarraceni, Zanni, Isauri, Hunni, finibus suis egressi, Romanorum sola vastarunt’.

58 PLRE II, ‘Longinus 6’, pp. 689–90. See Joh. Ant., fr., 206. 2; Priscus, fr. 51. 2; Procop., *Aed.*, III. 6. 23–24.

59 For the hypothesis of the 480s, see Emanuele E. Intagliata, ‘Rome and the Tzani in Late Antiquity: A Historical and Archaeological Review’, *Anatolian Studies*, 68 (2018), pp. 131–50 (pp. 136–37).

year a fixed amount of gold, on condition that they not plunder the country in that area'.⁶⁰

During Anastasius' Persian War, however, Tzani once again 'overran' Roman territories.⁶¹

Procopius alludes to many more, lower-level raids.⁶²

For these reasons, the Tzani were a weak link in the defence of Transcaucasia. Sittas undertook a campaign and 'defeated them in battle', after which 'by many kind words and deeds he had been able to win them over completely'.⁶³ Following this victory Sittas established four new forts across Tzanica and rebuilt three that had fallen into disrepair. He then stationed his subordinate *duces* across these forts. Thus, given the changing strategic importance of this corridor between Anatolia and Transcaucasia, Justinian shifted Roman policy from paying off the Tzani to defeating them and garrisoning Roman soldiers across the region. In 536 Justinian was to formally celebrate the pacification of the Tzani in a legal preface.⁶⁴ The historian Agathias later commented that it was unusual to note such a minor victory, observing that it illustrated the importance of the Tzani to Justinian.⁶⁵

In 558 the Tzani had resumed raiding.⁶⁶ They were defeated in a campaign led by a general called Theodorus, who was an ethnic Tzan.⁶⁷ Theodorus had led his forces to fight alongside the Romans in Lazica and marched these troops against the rebels.⁶⁸ After they were defeated Justinian imposed annual taxation, from which they had previously been

60 Procop., *BP*, I. 15. 22: διὸ δὴ αὐτοῖς χρυσίον τακτὸν ἀνὰ πᾶν ἔτος ὁ Ῥωμαίων βασιλεὺς ἐπέμπευ, ἐφ' ᾧ δὴ μήποτε λήσονται τὰ ἐκείνη χωρία.

61 Theodore Lector, *Epitome Historia Ecclesiasticae*, 466: Πέρσαι κινηθέντες κατὰ Ῥωμαίων πολλῶν κατέδραμον πόλεων καὶ μάλιστα Ἀμίδης. τοῦ δὲ βασιλέως πρὸς Πέρσας σπονδὰς ποιήσαντος καὶ Τζάνοι τοῦ Πόντου κατέδραμον.

62 Procop., *Aed.*, III. 6. 2–3: ἀλλὰ ληστεύοντές τε καὶ τοῖς φωρίοις ἀεὶ ἀποζῶντες.

63 Procopius, *BP*, I. 15. 24: καὶ Ῥωμαίων ἴσως ἐντυχόντες στρατῷ ἡσσῶντο μὲν τῇ μάχῃ, ἀλώσιμοι δὲ παντάπασι οὐκ ἐγίνοντο χωρίων ἰσχύϊ. μάχῃ τοίνυν ὁ Σίττας αὐτοὺς πρὸ τοῦδε τοῦ πολέμου νικήσας, ἐπαγωγὰ τε πολλὰ ἐς αὐτοὺς εἰπὼν τε καὶ πράξας.

64 Just. *Nov.*, I., pref. (c. 534): εἴτα ἡ Τζάνων διαδέχεται χώρα, νῦν πρῶτον ἐφ' ἡμῶν ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίων κατακτηθεῖσα καὶ πόλεις τε καὶ αὐτὴ τὰς μὲν ἄρτι γινομένης δεχομένη, τὰς δὲ ὅσον οὐπω γενησομένης δεχομένη. Cf. Just., *Nov.*, XXVIII., pref. (c. 535): εἴτα ἡ Τζάνων διαδέχεται χώρα, νῦν πρῶτον ἐφ' ἡμῶν ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίων κατακτηθεῖσα καὶ πόλεις τε καὶ αὐτὴ τὰς μὲν ἄρτι γινομένης δεχομένη, τὰς δὲ ὅσον οὐπω γενησομένης δεχομένη.

65 Agath., *Hist.*, v. 2. 4–5.

66 Agath., *Hist.*, v. 1. 1–2. 5; dated to 558 by Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, II, p. 516.

67 PLRE III, 'Theodorus 21', pp. 1251–52.

68 Agath., *Hist.*, III. 20. 9; III. 22. 4; III. 26. 3; IV. 13. 2; IV. 18. 1.

exempt.⁶⁹ Intagliata argues that Roman policy towards Tzanica developed according to wider regional priorities, not the ‘long-standing local problems’.⁷⁰ Indeed, Justinian’s approach to the Armenian and Pontic region shows a level of coherence. Throughout his reign he preferred to increase direct Roman rule through a unitary administration, removing the jumble of jurisdictions he inherited. Yet we have seen the repercussions of this approach in the satrapies, Persarmenia and Tzanica.

3.2. The Empire of Lazica: From Mutuality to Service

Justinian’s relationship with Lazica has proven difficult to categorise. To a historian like Anthony Bryer, ‘the Laz were *foederati*, clients of Justin and Justinian, charged with the guarding of the borders and granted large funds’.⁷¹ Yet this contradicts the explicit statement of Procopius that the Laz ‘kept guard without receiving money or armies from the Romans nor campaigning with the Romans abroad’.⁷² Instead, the alliance that Justinian inherited had been based on mutual respect between lawful, Christian kingdoms (*basileiai*) and a shared rejection of Persia. When Justinian did begin supplying money it is not the case, as David Braund argued, that ‘Byzantine money evidently contributed substantially to the maintenance of the Lazian empire’.⁷³ We shall proceed in three subsections to establish the traditional mutual relationship, the shift to a discourse of pay and service, and the consequences for Lazica’s hegemony over neighbouring tribes.

69 Agath., *Hist.*, v. 1. 1–2. 3.

70 Intagliata, ‘Rome and the Tzani in Late Antiquity’, p. 132.

71 Anthony Bryer, ‘Some Notes on the Laz and Tzan (I)’, *Bedi Kartlisa: Revue de Kartvélogologie*, 21–22 (1966), pp. 174–95 (p. 176).

72 Procop., *BP*, II. 15. 4: ἐφύλασσον δὲ οὔτε αὐτοὶ χρήματα ἢ στρατιὰν πρὸς Ῥωμαίων δεχόμενοι οὔτε Ῥωμαίοις πη ξυστρατεύοντες.

73 David Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity: A History of Colchis and Transcaucasian Iberia, 550 BC – AD 562* (Oxford University Press, 1994). p. 309.



FIG. 3.2. Map of Lazica

3.2.1. Traditional Mutuality: Justinian and Lazica, 527–548

Justinianic Romans regarded Lazica as having a special status as a polity that was ancient, civilized, and Christian. Known to Georgian sources as *Egrisi*, Lazica had been established in the third century AD within the ancient region of Colchis. A basin between the southwest of the Greater Caucasus and the Black Sea coast, Colchis sat at a strategically sensitive crossroads between Rome and the Caspian Steppe to the north and the Persian-aligned Caucasus to the east. Unlike the *regna* of the Western Mediterranean, Lazica was regarded as a sovereign kingdom.⁷⁴ Roman sources consistently describe the ruler of Lazica as a *basileus* whether following the ‘official’ position like Malalas, voicing criticism like Procopius, or writing decades later as in the cases of Agathias or Menander.⁷⁵ Both the Laz and several

74 Evangelos K. Chrysos, ‘The Title ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ in Early Byzantine International Relations’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 32 (1978), pp. 29–75 (p. 39). For earlier examples, see: Arrian, *Periplus*, xi. 2–3; Gelasius iii. 10.

75 For βασιλεὺς see *Vita S. Danielis Stylitae*, 51; Procop., *BP*, ii. 15. 2; Procop., *BG*, viii. 11. 23 and 12. 1; Joh. Mal., xviii. 4; Agath., *Hist.*, ii. 18. 1, iii. 3. 1, and iv. 1. 1; Men. Prot., fr. 3; for βασιλεία see Procop., *BP*, ii. 15. 2–3.

subject peoples were Christian according to Roman sources, with Lazica having converted in the fourth century.⁷⁶ To Justinian, Lazica was therefore a friendly, Christian and civilized polity.

The first aim was to deny Persia control of Lazica, from where it could threaten the imperial capital of Constantinople. When Lazica was first named by Arrian around AD 131, the Laz, Abasgians and Apsilians were listed as client peoples who ‘received kings’ (*basileis*) from the Romans.⁷⁷ In the late fourth century, the East Romans and Sasanians agreed to divide the South Caucasus and Armenia into respective spheres of influence.⁷⁸ Although Lazica was within the Roman sphere, it remained contested. In 465/6 the Laz king Gubaz I had to visit the emperor Leo I (457–474) in Constantinople to profess his loyalty after accusations of disloyalty.⁷⁹

By the sixth century, however, its king Damnazes had become a Sasanian client.⁸⁰ Upon his death in 522, his son Tsathes chose to return his allegiance to the Romans.⁸¹ This change of allegiance was disputed by Persia and, despite negotiations between Justin I and

76 Gelasius of Caesarea, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, III. 10. 1: κατὰ δὲ τὸν αὐτὸν χρόνον καὶ οἱ πρὸς τῇ κατὰ Πόντον γῇ Ἰβηρὲς τε καὶ Λαζοὶ τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐδέξαντο λόγον, μήπω πρὸ τούτου εἰς αὐτὸν πεπιστευκότες. τοῦ δὲ μεγίστου ἀγαθοῦ τούτου αἰτία κατέστη γυνὴ τις παρ’ αὐτοῖς αἰχμάλωτος οὔσα, ἄκρον δὲ βίον μετερχομένη δι’ ἐγκρατείας τε καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀγαθῶν ἔργων πάντας αὐτοὺς εἰς ἐκστασιν ἤγεν.

77 Arrian, *Periplus*, XI. 2–3: βασιλεὺς δὲ Λαζῶν Μαλάσσας, ὃς τὴν βασιλείαν παρὰ σοῦ ἔχει. Λαζῶν δὲ Ἀψίλαι ἔχονται· βασιλεὺς δὲ αὐτῶν Ἰουλιανός· οὗτος ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ σοῦ τὴν βασιλείαν ἔχει. Ἀψίλαις δὲ ὁμοροὶ Ἀβασκοί· καὶ Ἀβασκῶν βασιλεὺς Ῥησμάγας· καὶ οὗτος παρὰ σοῦ τὴν βασιλείαν ἔχει. Ἀβασκῶν δὲ ἐχόμενοι Σανίγαι, ἵνα περ καὶ ἡ Σεβαστόπολις ὥκισται· Σανιγῶν βασιλεὺς Σπαδάγας ἐκ σοῦ τὴν βασιλείαν ἔχει. See Albert Brian Bosworth, ‘Arrian (Lucius Flavius Arrianus)’, in *OCD*, p. 169.

78 Chrysos, ‘The Title ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ in Early Byzantine International Relations’, pp. 39–40; R. C. Blockley, ‘The Division of Armenia between the Romans and the Persians at the End of the Fourth Century AD’, *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 36.2 (1987), pp. 222–34.

79 *Vita S. Danielis Stylitae*, 51; preferring Gubaz, following the Georgian, to the Greek form Gubazēs or Gobazēs, see Manana Odisheli, ‘Gubaz I’, *ODLA*, p. 593; cf. *PLRE II*, ‘Gobazes’, p. 515; *PLRE II*, ‘Leo 6’, pp. 663–64.

80 Joh. Mal., XVII. 9; *Chron. Pasch.*, a. 522; *PLRE II*, ‘Damnazes’, p. 344.

81 Joh. Mal., XVII. 9; *Chron. Pasch.*, Indiction XV (AD 521/2); Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6015 (AD 522/3); Manana Odisheli, ‘Tsathes I’, in *ODLA*, p. 1529; cf. *PLRE II*, ‘Ztathius I’, p. 1207. Discussed by Chrysos, ‘The Title ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ in Early Byzantine International Relations’, p. 39.

Kavādh, was unresolved when Justinian came to power.⁸² Our sources specifically attest to a fear that the Black Sea could be a route for a Persian assault on the imperial capital.

Procopius says that Khosrow decided to invade to ‘have access to the sea of the Romans’ and ‘the palace in Constantinople’.⁸³ Agathias reiterated this point, commenting that ‘Justinian grasped clearly the alarming implications of a Persian victory’ and believed it would result in the Persians ‘sailing up the Black Sea with impunity and probing deep into the heart of the empire of the Romans’.⁸⁴ Given the Persians did besiege Constantinople via Anatolia in the seventh century, this was not an impractical proposition.⁸⁵ Regardless of whether this was truly the intention of Kavādh or Khosrow, this concern evidently shaped Roman thinking.⁸⁶

The second strategic concern was controlling the western mountain passes across the Greater Caucasus. Procopius wrote that the king of Lazica ‘and his subjects guarded the borders of the country with great care, so that hostile Huns from the neighbouring Caucasus might not travel through Lazica and invade the land of the Romans’.⁸⁷ Jordanes, writing around 551, described ‘the Caspian Gates, which the Laz people now guards as a Roman bulwark’.⁸⁸ By placing the ‘Caspian Gates’ on the border of Lazica, Jordanes differs from other sources. Procopius, for example, placed the Caspian Gates at the Darial Pass in the central Caucasus in the *Persian Wars*, but identified them as Tzur on the Caspian coast in his

82 Joh. Mal., XVII. 9; Ian Colvin, ‘Comparing Procopius and Malalas’, in *Procopius of Caesarea: Literary and Historical Interpretations*, ed. by Christopher Lillington-Martin and Elodie Turquois (Routledge, 2018), pp. 201–13; see PLRE II, ‘Cavades 1’, pp. 273–74 and ‘Iustinus 4’, pp. 648–51.

83 Procop., *BP*, II. 15. 27: μετεῖναι δὲ τῆς Ῥωμαίων θαλάσσης ὑμῖν διὰ τῆς ἡμετέρας ξυμβήσεται χώρας, ἐν ᾗ πλοῖά σοι, ὦ βασιλεῦ, ναυπηγούμενῳ βατὸν οὐδενὶ πόνῳ τὸ ἐν Βυζαντίῳ παλάτιον ἔσται.

84 Agath., *Hist.*, II. 18. 7: ἐλογίζετο γὰρ καὶ ἐδεδίδει, ὥς εἰ τῷ πολέμῳ κρατήσαιεν οἱ Πέρσαι καὶ ἀπάσης ἐπιλάβοιντο τῆς χώρας, οὐδὲν ἔσται τὸ κωλύον αὐτοὺς ἀνὰ τὸν Εὐξείνῳ Πόντῳ ἀδεῶς ναυτιλλομένους τὰ ἐνδότεα τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς ἀνιχνεύειν.

85 Christopher Haas, ‘Geopolitics and Georgian Identity in Late Antiquity: The Dangerous World of Vakhtang Gorgasali’, in *Georgian Christian Thought and Its Cultural Context: Memorial Volume for the 125th Anniversary of Shalva Nutsubidze (1888-1969)*, ed. by Tamar Nutsubidze, Cornelia B. Horn, and Basil Lourié (Brill, 2014), pp. 29–44 (p. 33).

86 A. D. Lee, *Information and Frontiers* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 23–24; cf. Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity*, pp. 297–98.

87 Procop., *BP*, II. 15. 2–3: τὰ δὲ τῆς χώρας ὅρια ξὺν τοῖς ἀρχομένοις ἐς τὸ ἀκριβὲς διεφύλασσαν, ὅπως δὴ μὴ Οὐννοὶ πολέμιοι ἐξ ὁρῶν τοῦ Καυκάσου, ὁμόρου σφίσιν ὄντος, διὰ Λαζικῆς πορευόμενοι ἐσβάλλωσιν ἐς γῆν τὴν Ῥωμαίων.

88 Jord., *Get.*, 50: Pylas Caspias, quod nunc Lazorum gens custodit pro munitione Romana.

later final volume of the *Gothic Wars*.⁸⁹ The correct location was known to be uncertain and much debated in antiquity.⁹⁰

Rather than problematic, this idiosyncratic usage illustrates the widespread and generalized sense among Justinianic Romans that the ‘Caspian Gates’ were the frontier against the steppe nomads, of which Lazica was part. These two strategic concerns of Persia and the Huns could also fuse. Procopius wrote that Khosrow believed that controlling Lazica meant ‘control of the plundering of Roman territory every year by the neighbouring barbarians’.⁹¹ The fear that the Persians sponsored Hunnic raids was persistent and, like the threat of invasion through the Black Sea, not imaginary.⁹²

For these reasons, Lazica held a special status as a sovereign kingdom located in a strategically sensitive region.⁹³ In the fifth century Theodoret of Cyrrhus had listed the Laz among peoples who ‘embraced Roman lordship’ but declined to follow Roman law.⁹⁴

Allowing the Laz to manage their own affairs, emperors ‘neither persuaded nor compelled those who were unwilling to be governed by their laws to embrace their constitution’.⁹⁵ This fits perfectly with Procopius’s claim that the Laz had never received garrisons or subsidies.

89 Procop., *BP*, I. 10. 1–19; Procop., *BG*, VIII. 3. 4; BAtlas, Map 88 G2, ‘Tzon/Tzur’; Nikoloz Aleksidze, ‘Derbent’, in ODLA, pp. 474–75.

90 Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, VI. 40: *corrigendus est in hoc loco error multorum, etiam qui in Armenia res proxime cum Corbulone gessere. namque hi Caspias appellavere portas Hiberiae quas Caucasias diximus vocari, situsque depicti et inde missi hoc nomen inscriptum habent*; for discussion see Andrew Runni Anderson, ‘Alexander at the Caspian Gates’, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 59 (1928), pp. 130–63; J.F. Standish, ‘The Caspian Gates’, *Greece & Rome*, 17.1 (1970), pp. 17–24, doi:10.1017/s0017383500017320.

91 Procop., *BP*, II. 15. 29–30: μεταξὺ γὰρ ἐναντίωμα οὐδέν ἐστι. προσθείη δ’ ἂν τις ὡς καὶ ληίζεσθαι τοὺς ὁμόρους βαρβάρους τὴν Ῥωμαίων γῆν ἀνὰ πᾶν ἔτος ἐφ’ ὧν κείσεται. ὄρεσι γὰρ τοῖς Καυκασίοις ἐπιτείχισμα μέχρι τοῦδε γεγονέναι τὴν Λαζῶν χώραν πάντως που καὶ ὁμεῖς ξυνεπίστασθε.

92 For example, see Joh. Mal., XVII. 10, XVIII. 13, and XVIII. 70.

93 ‘There is no reason to doubt Procopius’ assessment of the vital strategic importance of Lazica’, in Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity*, p. 274; cf. Benjamin Isaac, *The Limits of Empire: The Roman Army in the East* (Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 232–33.

94 Theod., *HE*, IX. 14: οὐτε γὰρ Αἰθίοπες οἱ Θηβῶν τῶν Αἰγυπτίων ὁμοτέρμονες οὔτε τὰ πάμπολλα φύλα τοῦ Ἰσμαήλ, οὐ Λαζοί, οὐ Σάννοι, οὐκ Ἀβασγοί, οὐχ οἱ ἄλλοι βάρβαροι, ὅσοι τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀσπάζονται δεσποτεῖαν, κατὰ τοὺς Ῥωμαίων νόμους τὰ πρὸς ἀλλήλους ποιοῦνται ξυμβόλαια. For the date see Brian Croke, ‘Dating Theodoret’s “Church History” and “Commentary On The Psalms”’, *Byzantion*, 54.1 (1984), pp. 59–74, doi:10.1515/BYZS.2007.13.

95 Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, IX. 13–14: τοὺς δὲ παρ’ αὐτῶν οὐ βουλευθέντας ἰθύνεσθαι οὔτε ἐπεισαν οὔτε ἠνάγκασαν τὴν σφῶν πολιτείαν ἀσπάζασθαι.

Despite Kavādh's protests, the status of Lazica remained a matter of dispute between the two empires when Justinian became sole ruler in the summer of 527.⁹⁶ The tension had indeed intensified between the imperial powers after the king of the neighbouring country of Iberia (Georgian *Kartli*), named by Procopius as Gurgenes, also attempted to pledge allegiance to the Romans in 524/5.⁹⁷ While Justinian was *Caesar* (525–27), Justin had tried to recruit an army of Pontic and Caspian Huns for Iberia's defence.⁹⁸ When this failed, he despatched a smaller force of Huns under the general Peter.⁹⁹ These reinforcements were not enough and Kavādh completed his conquest of Iberia by 527.¹⁰⁰ As a consequence, Sasanian troops were on the border of Roman-aligned Lazica by Justinian's accession.

Justinian responded by quickly escalating Roman deployment in Lazica, even though this compromised its sovereign status. He sent the general Irenaeus to take control of two forts, Scanda and Sarapanis, which had previously been garrisoned by Laz.¹⁰¹ The forts guarded the western side of the Surami Pass, which linked Lazica and Iberia across the Likhi Mountains. In 528 Kavādh resolved to invade Lazica and wrest back control. Initially Romans were defeated, due to the divided leadership of three *magistri militum*.¹⁰² After the appointment of Peter as the sole commander, they managed to halt the Persian advance.¹⁰³

96 For the defection see Joh. Mal., XVII. 9; *Chron. Pasch.*, Indiction XV (AD 521/2); Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6015 (AD 522/3); for the protests see Procop., *BP*, I. 11. 28–31.

97 Procop., *BP*, II. 12. 1–6; PLRE II, 'Gurgenes', p. 527. Debate continues over how to reconcile Procopius's account with the later Georgian tradition, centred on Toumanoff's identification of 'Gurgenes' as the legendary king Vakhtang Gorgasali: see Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History*, pp. 368–72; Cyril Toumanoff, 'Chronology of the Early Kings of Iberia', *Traditio*, 25 (1969), pp. 1–33 (pp. 28–29); for a recent supportive assessment, see Stephen H. Rapp, 'The Iranian Heritage of Georgia: Breathing New Life into the Pre-Bagratid Historiographical Tradition', *Iranica Antiqua*, 44 (2009), pp. 645–92 (pp. 678–79, n. 91), doi:10.2143/IA.44.0.2034389; for a recent rejection, see Frank Schleicher, 'Die Chronologie der k'art'velischen Könige und das Ende des iberischen Königtums', in *Iberien zwischen Rom und Iran: Beiträge zur Geschichte und Kultur Transkaukasiens in der Antike*, ed. by Udo Hartmann, Timo Stickler, and Frank Schleicher (Steiner, 2019), pp. 69–98 (pp. 81–83). for the date see Greatrex, *Procopius of Caesarea: The Persian Wars: A Historical Commentary*, p. 163.

98 Procop., *BP*, I. 12. 6

99 PLRE II, 'Petrus 27', pp. 870–71.

100 Procop., *BP*, I. 12. 14–19; also dated by Greatrex, *Procopius of Caesarea: The Persian Wars: A Historical Commentary*, p. 163.

101 PLRE II, 'Irenaeus 7', pp. 625–26; Procop., *BP*, I. 12. 14–19; for these forts' importance, see Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity*, pp. 287–88; this was during the reign of Justinian, see Procop., *BG*, VIII. 13. 17.

102 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 4; *Chron. Pasch.*, a. 528; Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6020.

103 Ibid.

Finding Scanda and Sarapanis impossible to defend, Procopius says they were ceded to the Persians; this is most likely to have occurred during Kavādh's invasion.¹⁰⁴

The importance Justinian attributed to these forts is illustrated by the negotiations of the 'Eternal Peace' with Persia. After agreeing the terms of the treaty in early 532, Justinian's ambassadors had already begun transferring the money to the Persians when, suddenly, new orders arrived. Justinian had decided to cancel the treaty, having decided he could not allow Scanda and Sarapanis to remain in Persian hands.¹⁰⁵ With these forts, Justinian prioritised military thinking over diplomatic relations with either Lazica or Persia.

Although Justinian had ordered the occupation of Lazica in response to the threat of Persian invasion, the agreement of 'Eternal Peace' did not occasion a Roman withdrawal. Rather, Justinian intensified his rule both in ideology and in practice. In a law of July 535, he listed the cities of 'our Lazica' which had been 'acquired from the Laz'.¹⁰⁶ The cornerstone was the city of Petra, which controlled the southwestern coast and thus the routes to Pontus and Armenia.¹⁰⁷ Fortified and re-christened 'Iustinianopolis', Petra became the headquarters of an officer described by Procopius as the 'governor' (*archōn*) of the Laz.¹⁰⁸ This is highlighted among the crimes of Justinian enumerated in the speech of the Armenian ambassador, calling it 'an action neither fitting with the nature of the circumstances nor easy to explain rationally'.¹⁰⁹

104 Procop., *BP*, I. 12. 19; Procop., *BG*, VIII. 13. 15–19; Procopius's claim that the forts were impossible to supply is dismissed, but the difficult logistics accepted, by David Braund, 'Procopius on the economy of Lazica', *Classical Quarterly*, 41 (1991), pp. 221–25 (p. 223).

105 Procop., *BP*, I. 22. 10

106 Just. *Nov.*, XXVIII. *proemium*: μεθ' οὗς ἡ τε ἡμετέρα καθέστηκε Λαζική, ἐν ἣ καὶ ἡ Πετραίων ἐστὶ πόλις, ὑφ' ἡμῶν τὸ πόλις εἶναι τε καὶ ὀνομάζεσθαι προσλαβοῦσα κεχρημένη τε τῷ τῆς ἡμετέρας εὐσεβείας ὀνόματι καὶ Ἰουστινιανῇ καλουμένη, Ἀρχαιοπόλις τε καὶ Ῥοδόπολις, φρούρια τε μέγιστα καὶ ἀρχαῖα. ἐν οἷς δὴ καὶ τὰ παρ' ἡμῶν ἐστὶν ἐκ Περσῶν ἀναληφθέντα φρούρια Σκάνδης τε καὶ Σαραπανίς, καὶ τὸ Μουρίσιός τε καὶ Λύσιρις, καὶ εἴ τι ἕτερον ἡμῖν ἐν Λαζοῖς ἐκπεπόνηται.

107 Mod. Tsikhisdziri, see BAtlas, Map 87 G3, 'Tsikhisdziri/Petra Pia Iustiniana'.

108 Procop., *BP*, II. 3. 39: ὃ δὲ βασιλεῖ τῶν ἀθλίων Λαζῶν ἄρχοντα Ῥωμαῖον ἐπέστησε;

109 Procop., *BP*, II. 3. 39: πρᾶγμα οὔτε τῇ φύσει τῶν πραγμάτων ξυμβαῖνον οὔτε λόγῳ ῥάδιον ἐρμηνεύεσθαι.

In the esoteric reading of Procopius advocated by Anthony Kaldellis, the speech of the Armenians is a prime example of how he advanced critique of the emperor.¹¹⁰ Going further than Kaldellis, Marion Kruse has argued that Procopius criticised a ‘mirage of a fully realized Justinianic foreign policy’ for narrative purposes.¹¹¹ In actuality the speech of the Armenians introduces the annexation of Bosporus, an event omitted from Procopius’s main narrative but attested by Malalas.¹¹² This suggests Procopius does indeed use the technique of the ‘barbarian speech’ to include sensitive information. Therefore, Kruse’s claim that the speech of the Armenians ‘cannot withstand comparison with Procopius’ own narrative’ goes too far.¹¹³ Moreover Procopius’s excoriating criticism of the Roman governor, John Tzibus, was written not in his private *Anekdotia* but his public-facing *Wars*.¹¹⁴ As Dariusz Brodka has argued, Procopius criticised Justinian’s method in these speeches, he did not necessarily dispute the overall objectives.¹¹⁵ Therefore, when Procopius claims Justinian held Lazica in too tight a grip, we should take him seriously.

The result of this oppression was the ‘revolt’ of the Laz. Their king appealed to the Persians to invade and liberate them.¹¹⁶ In 541, Khosrow obliged: the Laz king, Gubazes II, met the *shāhanshāh*, who was personally leading the invasion force, and swore fealty.¹¹⁷ Procopius summarises two causes of the Laz returning to the Persian fold. The first was that ‘Roman soldiers began to be stationed among the Lazi, and these barbarians were annoyed by

110 Anthony Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 91, doi:10.9783/9780812202410.

111 Kruse, ‘The Speech of the Armenians in Procopius’, p. 881.

112 Procop., *BP*, II. 3. 40: οὐ Βοσπορίταις μὲν τοῖς Οὐννων κατηκόοις στρατηγοὺς ἐπεμψε καὶ τὴν πόλιν προσεποιήσατο οὐδὲν αὐτῷ προσήκον, ὁμαιχμίαν δὲ πεποιήται πρὸς τὰς τῶν Αἰθιοπῶν ἀρχὰς, ὧν καὶ ἀνήκοοι τὸ παράπαν Ῥωμαῖοι ἐτύγγανον ὄντες;

113 Kruse, ‘The Speech of the Armenians in Procopius’, p. 881.

114 PLRE III, ‘Ioannes 20’, pp. 638–39; Procop., *BP*, II. 15. 9: ὕστερον δὲ βασιλεὺς Ἰουστινιανὸς ἄλλους τε ἐς Λαζικὴν ἀρχοντας ἐπεμψε καὶ Ἰωάννην, ὃν Τζίβον ἐκάλουν, ἀνδρα ἐξ ἀφανῶν μὲν καὶ ἀδόξων ἀρχὴν γεγονότα, ἐς στρατηγίαν δὲ ἀναβεβηκότα κατ’ ἄλλο οὐδὲν ἢ ὅτι πονηρότατός τε ἦν ἀνθρώπων ἀπάντων καὶ πόρους χρημάτων ἀδίκους ἱκανώτατος ἐξευρεῖν.

115 Dariusz Brodka, *Die Geschichtsphilosophie in der spätantiken Historiographie* (Peter Lang, 2004), pp. 131–132.

116 Procop., *BP*, II. 15. 1.

117 PLRE III, ‘Gubazes’, pp. 559–60.

them'. The second was how the Roman commanders extracted taxes and imposed their will on the Laz.¹¹⁸ For the next seven years, Lazica was under Persian occupation.

With Roman armies committed in the Western Mediterranean and confronting the parallel Persian invasion of Syria, Justinian's regime was incapable of responding militarily. A Roman embassy in late 544 demanded the restoration of Lazica to Roman suzerainty with little success.¹¹⁹ When a five-year truce was agreed the following spring, it effectively signalled Roman acceptance of Sasanian suzerainty over Lazica.¹²⁰ The absence of subsidies had indicated the traditional strength of a relationship based on solidarity between sovereign kings. By occupying, fortifying and taxing the Laz, Justinian 'left to our king only the semblance of monarchy'.¹²¹ That was exactly his purpose.

3.2.2. New Discourses of Service: Lazica, 548–565

The discursive conception of the relationship changed fundamentally when Lazica returned to Roman allegiance in the late 540s. The Romans once again sent in occupying forces and became increasingly embroiled in the politics of the Laz court.

Procopius explains that the Laz decided to switch allegiance again after finding Sasanian rule more oppressive than Roman.¹²² The catalyst for the revolt was a plot by the Sasanian garrison to depose Gubaz, deport the population of Lazica and resettle it with Persians.¹²³ When the assassination failed, Gubaz sent word to Justinian that he would return

118 Procop., *BP*, II. 15. 6–7: ἐπειδὴ δὲ τὰ ἀμφὶ Γουργένει τῷ Ἰβήρων βασιλεῖ γενέσθαι ξυνέπεσεν, ὥσπερ μοι ἐν τοῖς ἔμπροσθεν λόγοις ἐρρήθη, στρατιῶται Ῥωμαίων ἐπιχωριάζειν Λαζοῖς ἤρξαντο, οἷς δὴ οἱ βάρβαροι οὗτοι ἤχθοντο, καὶ πάντων μάλιστα Πέτρῳ τῷ στρατηγῷ, ἐπηρεάζειν τοῖς ἐντυγχάνουσιν εὐπετῶς ἔχοντι.

119 Procop., *BP*, II. 28. 6: ἐνταῦθα ἐντυχόντες Χοσρόη οἱ πρέσβεις ἠξίουσαν μὲν τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς Λαζικῆς χωρία Ῥωμαίοις ἀποδοῦναι, βεβαιότατα δὲ πρὸς αὐτοὺς τὰ ἀμφὶ τῇ εἰρήνῃ κρατύνασθαι.

120 Procop., *BP*, II. 28. 6.

121 Procop., *BP*, II. 15. 21–22: τῷ μὲν γὰρ ἡμετέρῳ βασιλεῖ τὸ σχῆμα μόνον τῆς βασιλείας ἀπολιπόντες. τῷ μὲν γὰρ ἡμετέρῳ βασιλεῖ τὸ σχῆμα μόνον τῆς βασιλείας ἀπολιπόντες αὐτοὶ τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἔργων ἀφήρηνται, καὶ κάθηται βασιλεὺς ἐν ὑπηρέτου μοίρᾳ, τὸν ἐπιτάττοντα στρατηγὸν δεδιώς.

122 Procop., *BP*, II. 15. 6–13, II. 28. 30 and II. 29. 6–8. II. 28. 30.

123 Procop., *BP*, II. 28. 16–30; for a sceptical view, see Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity*, p. 297.

to the Roman side.¹²⁴ The date is not secure but generally accepted as around 547.¹²⁵ Gubaz also asked Justinian for money on three grounds. Firstly, Gubaz had made an agreement with the Alans and Sabirs that they would protect Lazica and devastate Persian-occupied Iberia in return for three *centenaria* (21,600 *solidi*).¹²⁶ Secondly, he asked for ‘consolation to the sorely afflicted Lazi’. Both of these are straightforward: the request for money to hire mercenaries was expressed in the discourse of market exchange, while the money for the Laz as charitable giving.¹²⁷

More curious is the third request: for ‘ten years’ salary’ (*syntaxeis*) as a member of Justinian’s palace guard.¹²⁸ Gubaz complained he had received nothing from the moment that Khosrow had entered Colchis’.¹²⁹ Notwithstanding that Gubaz had invited Khosrow into Colchis, given this occurred only six or seven years before makes the claim to ten years arrears a chronological puzzle.¹³⁰ J. R. Martindale suggested that Gubaz may have received the title of *silentarius* as an honorific upon becoming king.¹³¹ This would explain his salary, but does not explain the initial arrears. Guillaume Sartor proposed the money was simply to fund Laz troops.¹³² This was met with scepticism by Geoffrey Greatrex, who argued that the salary of the *silentarius* was insufficient and ‘doubtless he would have expected additional

124 Procop., *BP*, II. 29. 1–9.

125 Greatrex, *Procopius of Caesarea: The Persian Wars: A Historical Commentary*, p. 647.

126 Procop., *BP*, II. 29. 29: ἐτύγχανε δὲ πολλῶ πρότερον Ἀλανούς τε καὶ Σαβείρους ἐς ξυμμαχίαν ἐπαγόμενος, οἵπερ ὁμολόγησαν κεντηναρίων τριῶν οὐχ ὅσον ἀδήωτον Λαζοῖς ξυμφυλάξιν τὴν γῆν, ἀλλὰ καὶ Ἰβηρίαν οὕτω καταστήσεσθαι ἀνδρῶν ἔρημον ὡς μηδὲ Πέρσαις ἐνθένδε τὸ λοιπὸν ἰέναι δυνατὰ ἔσεσθαι. ταῦτά τε σφίσι τὰ χρήματα βασιλέα Γουβάζης ὑπέσχετο δώσειν. αὐτὸς μὲν οὖν ἀνενεγκὼν ἐς βασιλέα Ἰουστινιανὸν τὰ ξυγκείμενα τοῖς τε βαρβάροις τὰ χρήματα ταῦτα ἰκέτευε πέμπειν.

127 Procop., *BP*, II. 29. 30: Λαζοῖς ἄγαν κεκακωμένοις παραψυχὴν προέσθαι τινά. ἔφασκε δὲ καὶ οἱ αὐτῶ τὸ δημόσιον τὰς συντάξεις ὀφείλιν ἐνιαυτῶν δέκα, ἐπεὶ ἐν τοῖς σιλεντιαρίοις ἐν παλατίῳ τασσόμενος οὐδὲν κεκομισμένος ἐνθένδε εἶη, ἐξ οὗ δὴ ἐς γῆν τὴν Κολχίδα Χοσρόης ἦλθε.

128 Procop., *BP*, II. 29. 31. ἔφασκε δὲ καὶ οἱ αὐτῶ τὸ δημόσιον τὰς συντάξεις ὀφείλιν ἐνιαυτῶν δέκα, ἐπεὶ ἐν τοῖς σιλεντιαρίοις ἐν παλατίῳ τασσόμενος.

129 Procop., *BP*, II. 29. 31: οὐδὲν κεκομισμένος ἐνθένδε εἶη, ἐξ οὗ δὴ ἐς γῆν τὴν Κολχίδα Χοσρόης ἦλθε.

130 Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, II, pp. 505–06, n. 2; Greatrex, *Procopius of Caesarea: The Persian Wars: A Historical Commentary*, pp. 647–48.

131 See PLRE III, ‘Gubazes’, p. 559.

132 Guillaume Sartor, ‘Les Lazes, des fédérés de l’Empire dans l’oeuvre de Procope’, in *Le monde de Procope / The world of Procopius*, ed. by Geoffrey Greatrex and Sylvain Janniard (Éditions de Boccard, 2018), p. 272, n. 91; Greatrex, *Procopius of Caesarea: The Persian Wars: A Historical Commentary*, pp. 647–48.

Roman contributions to ensure the defence of Lazica'.¹³³ Yet this scepticism is only necessary if the statement is read narrowly.

If we read it instead as a discursive statement, then Justinian announcing he was giving money to Gubaz for service as a *silentarius* framed the relationship as one of pay and service rather than mutual obligation. In any case, though Justinian promised to send the money (*chrēmata*), he initially failed to do so.¹³⁴ Eventually he sent money to the Sabirs and to 'Gubaz and the Laz' in c. 549.¹³⁵ The relationship with Lazica thus changed from solidarity between equals, to the patronage of the imperial purse.

When the great powers agreed a further five-year armistice for the Mesopotamian frontier in 551, Lazica was excluded.¹³⁶ The war continued until an armistice in 557 and only formally ended by the full treaty with Persia in 561. In the meantime, there continued to be unease within the Laz polity. In 551 a Laz general, Theophobius, defected to Persia and betrayed a strategic fort of Outhimereos.¹³⁷ This allowed the Sasanians to consolidate their grip on the north-east of Lazica.¹³⁸ The biggest crisis came after the end of Procopius's writings and is instead related by Agathias.

Gubaz had tired of disagreements with the Roman generals Bessas and Martin and the paymaster Rusticus.¹³⁹ Gubaz complained directly to the emperor, who responded by

- 133 Sartor, 'Les Lazes, des fédérés de l'Empire dans l'oeuvre de Procope', p. 272, n. 91; Greatrex, *Procopius of Caesarea: The Persian Wars: A Historical Commentary*, pp. 647–48.
- 134 Procop., *BP*, II. 29. 32: βασιλεὺς δὲ Ἰουστινιανὸς ἐπιτελέσειν μὲν διανοεῖτο τὴν αἴτησιν, ἐπιγενομένης δὲ οἱ ἀσχολίας τινὸς οὐκ ἔπεμψε τῷ καθήκοντι χρόνῳ τὰ χρήματα.
- 135 Procop., *BP*, II. 30. 28–29: βασιλεὺς δὲ Ἰουστινιανὸς Σαβείρων μὲν τῷ ἔθνει τὰ ξυγκείμενα χρήματα ἔπεμψε, Γουβάζην δὲ καὶ Λαζοὺς χρήμασιν ἄλλοις δεδώρηται. ἐτύγχανε δὲ πολλῷ πρότερον καὶ ἄλλο στρατεύμα λόγου ἄξιον ἐς Λαζικὴν πέμψας, οἱ οὐπω ἀφικόμενοι ἐνταῦθα ἔτυχον; see Ian Colvin, 'Reporting Battles and Understanding Campaigns in Procopius and Agathias: Classicising Historians' Use of Archived Documents as Sources', in *War and Warfare in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Alexander Sarantis and Neil Christie (Brill, 2013), pp. 569–59 (p. 583), doi:10.1163/9789004252585_018.
- 136 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 15. 1–20; Agath., *Hist.*, II. 18. 3
- 137 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 16. 4–7; PLRE III, 'Theophobius', p. 1309; Outhimereos remains unlocated, see Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity*, p. 305; however, a location is proposed by Marcin Wiczorek, 'War at the Eastern Border of Late Ancient Lazica According to *de bellis* of Procopius of Caesarea: Several Questions', *Institute of Georgian History Proceedings*, 17 (2021), pp. 67–78 (p. 74).
- 138 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 16. 4–7.
- 139 Agath., *Hist.*, III. 2. 4; PLRE II, 'Bessas', pp. 226–29; PLRE III, 'Martinus 2', pp. 839–48; PLRE III, 'Rusticus 4', pp. 1103–04.

ordering the demotion of Bessas. Martin was promoted to *magister militum per Armeniam* with oversight of Lazica. Aggrieved at the reshuffle, the trio plotted to remove the Laz king. The plotters sent a report to Constantinople that Gubaz had intended to defect back to the Sasanians. After receiving assent to arrest the king and escort him to Constantinople for questioning, they took him into custody and killed him, intending to claim it was an accident.

The murder of their king by Roman soldiers triggered a crisis of confidence amongst the Laz elite. Rather than seek immediately to return to the Sasanians, however, the Laz notables petitioned the emperor. They sought a judicial inquiry into the killing and his endorsement of their nomination of Gubaz's brother as the new king. Justinian appointed the senator Athanasius to undertake the inquiry, which found in favour of the Laz.¹⁴⁰ Justinian therefore dismissed his generals and gave Gubaz's brother imperial accreditation as King Tsathes II at a ceremony in Constantinople.¹⁴¹ Yet achieving justice through petition to the emperor only serves to illustrate how Justinian's relationship with Lazica had changed from a relationship between fellow kings to a profound power disparity.

3.2.3. Roman Gold and the Fragmentation of Lazica's Empire

There were a number of smaller peoples (*ethnē*) including the Suanians, Scymnians, Apsilians and Abasgians, whose rulers were subjects (*katēkooi*) of the emperor of Lazica.¹⁴² Their rulers are titled variously by Procopius: he calls the kings of the Abasgians 'sovereign king' (*basileus*), but the rulers of the Suanians and Scymnians 'chieftains' (*archontes*).¹⁴³ As

140 PLRE III, 'Athanasius 2', pp. 144–45.

141 PLRE III, 'Tsathes 2', p. 1347.

142 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 2. 23: μετὰ δὲ αὐτοὺς κατὰ τὴν μεσόγαιαν Σκυμνία τε καὶ Σουανία ἐστί. ταῦτα δὲ τὰ ἔθνη Λαζῶν κατήκοα τυγχάνει ὄντα; Procop., *BG*, VIII. 2. 33: Λαζῶν δὲ κατήκοοι εἰσι καὶ Χριστιανοὶ γεγόνασιν ἐκ παλαιοῦ οἱ ψίλιοι, ὥσπερ καὶ τὰλλα ξύμπαντα ἔθνη, ὥνπερ ἐμνήσθην ἐς τόδε τοῦ λόγου.

143 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 3. 19: τὰ τε γὰρ Χριστιανῶν δόγματα εἴλοντο καὶ αὐτοῖς Ἰουστινιανὸς βασιλεὺς τῶν τινα ἐκ Παλατίου εὐνούχων στεῖλας, Ἀβασγὸν γένος, Εὐφρατᾶν ὄνομα, τοῖς αὐτῶν βασιλεῦσι διαρρήδην ἀπέπε μὴδένα τὸ λοιπὸν ἐν τούτῳ τῷ ἔθνει τὴν ἀρρενωπίαν ἀποψιλοῦσθαι, σιδήρῳ βιαζομένης τῆς φύσεως; cf. Procop., *BG*, VIII. 2. 23–24: καὶ ἄρχοντας μὲν οἱ τῆδε ἄνθρωποι τῶν ὁμογενῶν τινας ἔχουσιν, ἐπειδὴν δὲ τῶν ἀρχόντων τινὶ ἐπιγένηται ἡ τέλειος ἡμέρα τοῦ βίου, ἕτερον αὐτοῖς ἀντικαθίστασθαι πρὸς τοῦ Λαζῶν βασιλεῶς ἐς αἰεὶ εἴθισται.

part of Justinian's changing relationship with Lazica, he began payments to the client peoples. Rather than consolidate Roman rule, however, the symbolism of this practice appears to have hastened the fragmentation of the Laz empire and allowed Sasanian influence to grow. The kings of Lazica had counted a number of gentes in the foothills of the Caucasus as their own clients: the Abasgians, Apsilians, Suanians and Scymnians the principal four highlighted by Roman sources.¹⁴⁴ In the narratives of Procopius and Agathias, each of these clients attempted to break loose from Laz and Roman control one by one.

Firstly, the Abasgians revolted in 550 because Justinian's soldiers treated them as 'slaves of the Romans'.¹⁴⁵ A Roman expedition 'rendered the land desolate to a great distance'.¹⁴⁶ But this did not dissuade the Apsilians from revolting around the same time. They returned after negotiation.¹⁴⁷ In the case of the Suanians, we are told by Menander that the kings of Lazica maintained the allegiance of the Suanians by sending annual subsidies of grain.¹⁴⁸ In the political turmoil that absorbed Lazica in the 550s, however, these payments were missed. In retaliation the Suanians defected to the Sasanians, beginning a decades-long dispute over their status.

Alongside the new king of Lazica, Tsathes II, Justinian dispatched a new Roman commander in 556. This was the *magister militum*, Soterichus, who was sent with 28,800 *solidi*.¹⁴⁹ He was 'bearing gold from the emperor for distribution among the neighbouring

144 Just., *Nov.*, XVIII., proemium.

145 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 9. 11–12: δέξαντες οὖν μὴ Ῥωμαίων δοῦλοι τὸ λοιπὸν ἔσονται, τοὺς ἄρχοντας αὐτοῖς κατεστήσαντο σφίσι· ὧσίτην μὲν ὄνομα ἐς τῆς χώρας τὰ πρὸς ἀνίσχοντα ἦλιον, Σκεπαρνᾶν δὲ ἐς τὰ πρὸς ἑσπέραν.

146 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 9. 30–31: τοῖς δὲ δὴ ἄλλοις ἢ ζὺν ταῖς οἰκίαις ἐξηνθρακωμένοις τετεφρωῖσθαι ξυνέβη, ἢ ὑπὸ ταῖς τῶν πολέμιων γεγονέναι χερσίν.

147 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 10. 6–7: Ἀψίλιοί τε Κόλχων διὰ τοῦτο ἀπέστησαν, ἐπικαλοῦντες ὅτι δὴ σφᾶς πρὸς Περσῶν κακουμένους προσποιεῖσθαι οὐδαμῇ ἠθέλον. ἀλλὰ Γουβάξης Ῥωμαίων χιλίους καὶ Ἰωάννην τὸν Θωμᾶ υἱὸν, οὐπὲρ ἑναγχος ἐπεμνήσθην, ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ἐπεμψεν· ὅσπερ αὐτοὺς πολλὰ τιθασσεύων ἐπαγαγέσθαι ἀμαχητὶ ἔσχε καὶ Λαζῶν κατηκόους κατεστήσατο αὐτοῖς.

148 Men. Prot., fr. 6, 253–57: δυσμενείας δὲ τινος γενομένης μεταξὺ τοῦ Λαζῶν βασιλέως καὶ Μαρτίνου τοῦ Ῥωμαίου τῆνικαῦτα ἐκεῖσε στρατηγοῦντος, τούτου ἔνεκα ὁ Κόλχος οὐκ ἀπέστειλε Σουάνους τὸ σύνηθες σιτηρέσιον· ἔθος γὰρ πέμπεσθαι σῖτον ἐκ τοῦ Κόλχων βασιλείως.

149 Agath., *Hist.*, IV. 20. 9; PLRE III, 'Soterichus 1', pp. 1180–81.

barbarians according to the treaty of alliance since this had been the custom for a very long time and occurred annually'.¹⁵⁰ Without any positive evidence that this was a longstanding Roman custom, this payment should instead be connected with Menander's statement that the Suanians received grain annually from the king of Lazica. It could be hypothesised that Justinian began fulfilling responsibilities previously held by the king of Lazica towards subject kings, in line with his increasing involvement in the internal affairs of Lazica. In the event, however, Soterichus's mission failed spectacularly when he reached the Misimians, whose sorry story began this chapter.

The Misimians guarded one of the sensitive mountain passes across the Greater Caucasus as subjects of Lazica and neighbours of the Apsilians.¹⁵¹ They maintained a fortress named Buchlous.¹⁵² Its exact location remains unclear, but there is general consensus it guarded the Klukhur Pass.¹⁵³ The Misimians questioned the motives of Soterichus's mission, and the ambassador reacted furiously. He had the Misimian representatives flogged. When news reached the rest of the tribe, the Misimians rose in revolt. They massacred the Roman diplomatic party, including Soterichus's sons, whom he had brought on the embassy. The tribesmen seized all the money Soterichus had intended to distribute to the other tribes and sent word to the Sasanians that they would submit in return for protection.¹⁵⁴ It took three years until the Romans could free up troops from central Lazica to retake the region, a process made even harder by the mountainous terrain and well-placed fortresses on crags. The Roman forces sought to make an example of the Misimians through the massacre with which this chapter began.¹⁵⁵

150 Agath., *Hist.*, III. 15. 6: χρυσίον γὰρ ἐκ βασιλέως ἐκόμιζεν, ἐφ' ᾧ τοῖς προσοίκοις βαρβάροις κατὰ τὸ ξυμμαχικὸν διανέμοι, εἰθισμένον γε τοῦτο ἐκ πλείστον καὶ ἂν' ἔτος γιγνόμενον.

151 Agath., *Hist.*, III. 15. 6: τῶν καλουμένων Μισιμιανῶν... οἱ δὲ κατήκοοι μὲν τοῦ βασιλέως τῶν Κόλχων τυγχάνουσιν ὄντες καθά πού καὶ οἱ Ἀψίλοι, γλώττη δὲ ὁμῶς χρῶνται ἀποκεκρμένη καὶ νόμοις ἐτέροις.

152 Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity*, pp. 46–47, 309–10.

153 Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity*, pp. 46–47, 309–10; BAtlas, Map 87 H1, 'Klukhor Pass'.

154 Agath., *Hist.*, III. 15. 6.

155 Agath., *Hist.*, IV. 19. 6.

We are given a clear rationale for the Misimian revolt by Agathias. The Misimians were convinced that the only reason a senior Roman general like Soterichus would come to their valley was to betray their fortress to the king of the Alans who ruled the other side of their mountain pass.¹⁵⁶ The Romans could then use Buchlous as a meeting point ‘so that the ambassadors of the more distant peoples might gather there to receive their pay’.¹⁵⁷ This fear was not without basis. As we have seen, Justinian gave money to the Laz king to hire Alan and Sabir mercenaries. At the same time, however, he had also been forming a direct relationship with the king of the Alans. These people are known as the ‘Caucasian Alans’, to distinguish them from their nomadic forebears and their distant cousins in the Vandal Kingdom of Africa. Settling in the river valleys of the northern foothills, the Alans lived in ‘in five cities’ according to Zachariah. Archaeological fieldwork confirms the picture of cattle-rearing, terraced agriculture, and a network of forts.¹⁵⁸

The conflicting testimony of our sources makes the origin of the alliance difficult to firmly locate. In his earlier work, Procopius names the Alans as ‘Christians and friends of old to the Romans’.¹⁵⁹ In his final volume of the *Wars* he described ‘an autonomous nation, who are for the most part allied with the Persians and march against the Romans’.¹⁶⁰ Agustí Alemany suggests that the initial reference to the Alans is mistaken given Procopius’s confusion of the rivers Boas and Phasis in the same passage.¹⁶¹ However, subsequent events described by other sources point in the opposite direction. Towards the end of Justinian’s

156 Agath., *Hist.*, III. 15. 9.

157 Agath., *Hist.*, III. 15. 9: ὥς ἂν οἱ τῶν ἐθνῶν πρέσβεις τῶν ἀπωτέρω οἰκούντων αὐτοῦ ἀγειρόμενοι τὸν μισθὸν ἀποφέροιντο καὶ μηκέτι ἀνάγκη τις εἴη τῷ τὰ χρήματα παρεχομένῳ τὰς τοῦ Καυκάσου περινοστεῖν ὑπωρείας καὶ αὐτὸν ἐπ’ ἐκείνους ἰέναι.

158 Zach., *HE*, XII. 712; Dmitry S. Korobov and Alexander V. Borisov, ‘The Origins of Terraced Field Agriculture in the Caucasus: New Discoveries in the Kislovodsk Basin’, *Antiquity*, 87 (2013), pp. 1086–103, doi:10.1017/S0003598X00049887.

159 Procop., *BP*, II. 29. 15.

160 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 3. 4: ὥνπερ ἀτέρα μὲν Τζοῦρ ἐπικέκληται, ἡ δὲ δὴ ἐτέρα Πύλη ἐκ παλαιοῦ Κασπία ἐκλήθη. ταύτην δὲ τὴν χώραν ἡ ἐξ ὄρους τοῦ Καυκάσου ἄχρι ἐς τὰς Κασπίας κατατείνει Πύλας Ἀλανοὶ ἔχουσιν, αὐτόνομον ἔθνος, οἱ δὲ καὶ Πέρσαις τὰ πολλὰ ξυμμαχοῦσιν, ἐπὶ τε Ῥωμαίους καὶ ἄλλους πολεμίους στρατεύουσι. τὰ μὲν οὖν ἀμφὶ τῷ ὄρει τῷ Καυκασίῳ ταύτη πη ἔχει.

161 Agustí Alemany, *Sources on the Alans* (Brill, 2021), p. 196, doi:10.1163/9789004491212.

reign, the Alans received the first embassies of the Avars and directed the Avars on to the Romans.¹⁶²

The context of the Alans' behaviour in the reign of Justin II confirms the depth of the alliance Justinian had cultivated. When Justin went to war with Persia in 572 over Armenia, Saroes rallied the allies to the Roman cause along with the Laz and Abasgians.¹⁶³ This was not without the Persians having tried to win over the Alans. John of Epiphania wrote that 'the Persians wished to bribe the Alans with money', but were unsuccessful.¹⁶⁴ A similar grievance is remembered by Theophylact, who writes that 'the Persians had tried to corrupt the Alans by bribes'.¹⁶⁵ In the account of Menander, however, Tiberius II still had to ask the Alans and Sabirs how much the Persians paid them, then promise double to win them over.¹⁶⁶ Together, these sources all suggest that the Alans had ended Justinian's reign as friends and allies of the Romans. Even if the cultivation of the Alans helped project Roman power across the Greater Caucasus, the policy detracted from the existing alliances with Lazica and its dependents. The fear the Alans inspired in their southern neighbours led to the massacre of the Misimians.

3.2.4. Discourses of Exchange and Lazica's Changing Status

I have argued in this section that Justinian's use of subsidies was a symptom of growing Roman involvement in Lazica, but also the growing instability of that realm. The Roman relationship with the king of Lazica had been premised on its status as a sovereign polity (*basileia*) of ancient standing and Christian faith, which had voluntarily chosen to align with

162 Men. Prot., fr. 5.

163 Theoph., Byz., fr. 4 (in Photius, *Bibliotheca*, 64. 26): καὶ τοῖς μὲν Ἀρμενίοις συνεμάχουν Κόλχοι, Ἀβασγοὶ καὶ Σαρώης ὁ Ἀλανῶν βασιλεὺς, τῷ δὲ μισάνῃ Σάβιροι καὶ Δάγανες καὶ τὸ Διλμαῖνόν ἔθνος.

164 Joh. Epiph., fr. 1. 2: Πέρσαι τοὺς Ἀλανοὺς χρήμασι διαφθεῖραι βουλευθέντες, δι' ὧν ἐκεῖνοι τὴν πορείαν ἔμελλον ποιήσασθαι.

165 Theoph., Sim., III. 9. 7: ὑποφθεῖρουν τοὺς Ἀλανοὺς χρήμασιν ἐπειράθησαν Πέρσαι.

166 Men. Prot., fr. 18. 5: πυθόμενός τε παρ' αὐτῶν, ὅποσα χρήματα αὐτοῖς ἐδίδου ὁ Περσῶν βασιλεὺς, δεδοκώς τε ἐξουσίαν σφίσιν ἐς ὅσον ἡβούλοντο ἐξῆραι τῇ ψευδολογίᾳ τὸ χρήμα καὶ τῷ κόμπῳ τάληθες ἐπικαλύψαι, διπλάσια τούτων ἔγωγε παρέξω, ἔφη, τοῖς τε ἐν τέλει ὑμῶν, πρὸς δὲ δὴ καὶ ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς. PLRE III, 'Tiberius 1', pp. 1323–26.

the Romans. Justinian's actions progressively undermined the foundations of that state. In the first phase of his overlordship, the Laz were supposedly on equal terms as an allied state and received no money. The behaviour of the Roman occupying forces alienated the Laz to the point that they defected to Persia.

The introduction of subsidies to the Laz king in the second period (548–65) might appear to show greater respect to a Roman ally. In fact, it represented the diminishment of that ally. The culmination of this was the assassination of his ally, king Gubaz, after he complained about the conduct of the Roman army. Unlike Peter Heather's model, whereby subsidies promote the strengthening of allied kings, Justinian's use of money here was symptomatic of a weakening Laz state and growing Roman domination. The end result was that only a few decades after Justinian, the Laz monarchy had ended completely: it was replaced by a 'presiding prince' (*curopalates*) appointed by the Romans.¹⁶⁷

The second key feature of the Laz state was its local empire across the Caucasian foothills. Early Justinianic sources list the Laz hegemony over the Suanians, Scymnians, Abasgians and Apsilians; we later learn of the Misimians from Agathias. The way that Justinian undermined the Laz state also undermined the bonds keeping these tribes within the Laz empire. As a result, in the 550s Roman forces became increasingly involved in preventing the defection of individual tribes and even began paying the subsidies that the Laz had previously maintained to them. Yet far from solidifying their support, it drove them away: with bloody massacres of the Abasgians and Misimians, and the Suanians remaining within the Persian sphere of influence.

The third feature of the Laz state was its ability to provide troops to defend Colchis against the Huns from the north and the Persians from the east. Far from strengthening this capacity, however, Justinian's subsidies undermined it. By paying for Sabir and Alan

167 Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History*, pp. 255–56, n. 395.

warbands to cross the Caucasus and fight in Lazica, he promoted the very ingress that he was aiming to stem. It is telling that the Misimians believed the arrival of a Roman *magister militum* heralded the surrender of their territory to the Alans.

In summary, therefore, the case of the Laz offers a clear set of strategic principles in our sources which were not followed in practice by Justinian. If he had intended subsidies to promote Lazica as a ‘bulwark against barbarians’, this was not achieved. Instead, the introduction of a discourse of pay helped to destabilise the bonds that had held the Romans and Laz together, as well as the imperial power that Lazica extended over the Abasgians, Apsilians, Scymnians and Suanians. That the Misimians feared their Roman allies would pay the Alans to take their land is a sad indictment of the mistrust that Justinian had fostered through his use of subsidies in Lazica.

3.3. The Caspian Steppe: From Market to Monopoly

Managing the Huns of the Caspian Steppe was a priority for Justinian in terms of protecting his own provinces and client kingdoms and fighting Persia. For most of his reign, Justinian accepted the political division of the Huns between different tribal leaders and maintained a system of purchasing support for a fixed tariff. Through this approach, he sought to redirect raiding away from his own empire, combat Persian influence, and reinforce his armies in the East. In the last years of his reign, however, he changed his approach. He instead promoted the Avar *qağanate* to take over the whole Caucasian steppe. This section argues that Justinian’s policy was informed by a distinct ethnographic account of the Sabirs as a nomadic, avaricious people split between multiple rulers.

3.3.1. The Sabir and the Caucasian Huns

To understand Justinian’s aims, we must first understand how the Sabirs and other Huns of the Caspian Steppe were conceptualised by sixth-century ethnography. Roman sources

described a group of Hunnic peoples (*ethnē*) descended from the Scythians or Massagetae described by Herodotus. Agathias explains that ‘all these peoples were referred to by the general name of Scythians or Huns, whereas individual tribes had their own particular names, rooted in ancestral tradition’.¹⁶⁸ Thus, although writers often employed ‘Hun’ as a general term, they were capable of distinguishing individual groups.¹⁶⁹ The Hunnic *ethnē* were understood to be a community of descent, but also a shared culture. They were understood as typically nomadic, although Procopius named the Hephthalites as an exception.¹⁷⁰ Another example is given by Justinianic-era text, which was incorporated into the Syriac compilation of Zachariah.¹⁷¹ This text lists thirteen peoples of the North Caucasus as ‘tent-dwellers, living on the meat of cattle, fish, and wild animals and by weapons’.¹⁷²

One of these peoples were the Sabir Huns, about whom there has been limited scholarship.¹⁷³ The Sabirs first emerge in the textual record in a fragment from Priscus of Panium, the fifth-century author famous for his first-hand account of meeting Attila the

168 Agath., *Hist.*, v. 11. 2: οὗτοι δὲ ἅπαντες κοινῇ μὲν Σκύθαι καὶ Οὐννοὶ ἐπωνομάζοντο· ἰδίᾳ δὲ κατὰ γένη τὸ μὲν τι αὐτῶν Κοτρίγουροι, τὸ δὲ Οὐτίγουροι, ἄλλοι δὲ Οὐλτίζουροι καὶ ἄλλοι Βουρούγουνδοι, καὶ ἄλλοι ὥς ἂν αὐτοῖς πάτριόν τε ἦν καὶ εἰθισμένον.

169 Walter Pohl, ‘Ethnicity and Empire in the Western Eurasian Steppes’, in *Empires and Exchanges in Eurasian Late Antiquity: Rome, China, Iran, and the Steppe, ca. 250–750*, ed. by Nicola di Cosmo and Michael Maas (Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 189–205 (p. 193).

170 Procop., *BP*, I. 3. 1–3.

171 The compilation dates from c. 568/569, but the section on Justinian appears to have been written under the emperor Justinian: Geoffrey Greatrex, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor: Church and War in Late Antiquity* (Liverpool University Press, 2011), p. 32. The Christian missions to the North Caucasus attested in Zach., *HE*, XII. 7 provide a plausible source of information: see Greatrex, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor*, pp. 55–56 and 431, n. 27. Cf. a sceptical interpretation that the text simply copies Priscus’s fifth-century account: Károly Czeglédy, ‘Pseudo-Zacharias Rhetor on the nomads’, in *Studia turcica*, ed. by L. Ligeti (Akademia Kiado, 1971), pp. 133–48 (p. 141).

172 Zach., *HE*, XII. 9:
 .ܠܠܐܬܐ .ܠܠܐܬܐ .ܠܠܐܬܐ .ܠܠܐܬܐ .ܠܠܐܬܐ .ܠܠܐܬܐ .ܠܠܐܬܐ .ܠܠܐܬܐ .ܠܠܐܬܐ .ܠܠܐܬܐ .ܠܠܐܬܐ .ܠܠܐܬܐ .ܠܠܐܬܐ .ܠܠܐܬܐ
 ܠܠܐܬܐ ܠܠܐܬܐ ܠܠܐܬܐ ܠܠܐܬܐ ܠܠܐܬܐ ܠܠܐܬܐ ܠܠܐܬܐ ܠܠܐܬܐ ܠܠܐܬܐ ܠܠܐܬܐ ܠܠܐܬܐ ܠܠܐܬܐ ܠܠܐܬܐ ܠܠܐܬܐ ܠܠܐܬܐ ܠܠܐܬܐ

173 Modern scholarship on the Sabirs is limited, with no dedicated studies since Henry H. Howorth, ‘The Sabiri and the Saroguri’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1892), pp. 613–36, doi:10.1017/s0035869x00021973; Omeljan Pritsak, ‘From the Sabirs to the Hungarians’, in *Studies in Medieval Eurasian History*, ed. by Omeljan Pritsak (Variorum, 1981), pp. 17–30. The Sabirs have most often been discussed within wider studies of Hunnic or Turkic peoples, such as Otto J. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns: Studies in Their History and Culture* (University of California Press, 1973), p. 54; Peter B. Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples: Ethnogenesis and State Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East* (Harrassowitz, 1992), pp. 104–06; Hyun Jin Kim, *The Huns, Rome and the Birth of Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 132–39, doi:10.1017/cbo9780511920493.

Hun.¹⁷⁴ He relates how the Sabirs were defeated in Central Asia by the Avars, causing them to move westwards c. 463 and oust the Oghur tribes from the Caspian Steppe.¹⁷⁵ Priscus's account is affirmed by Justinianic writers.¹⁷⁶ Procopius positively identifies the Sabirs as living to the north of the Caucasus mountains.¹⁷⁷ They next appear in the reign of the emperor Anastasius (491–518), with Malalas attesting to a raid into Roman territory in c. 506.¹⁷⁸ Thus the first concern of contemporary Romans about the Sabirs was about their capacity to launch raids.

The Sabirs were thus distinguished as a distinct *gens* within the Hunnic peoples.¹⁷⁹ They were, however, politically divided. Procopius regarded them as one people (*ethnos*) divided between multiple 'polities' (*archa*) led by different 'rulers' (*archontes*).¹⁸⁰ He tells us further that several chieftains were allies (*enspondoi*) 'of old' with the Roman emperor, while others were allied to the Persians. Both rulers were 'accustomed to grant a fixed sum of gold'

174 See Warren Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 96–102.

175 Priscus, fr. 40. 1. 1–10: Ἐπρεσβεύσαντο δὲ κατ' ἐκείνους τὸν χρόνον κατὰ τοὺς ἐφόους Ῥωμαίους Σαράγουροι καὶ Οὐρωγοὶ καὶ Ὀνόγουροι, ἔθνη ἐξαναστάντα τῶν οἰκείων ἡθῶν, Σαβίρων ἐς μάχην σφίσιν ἐληλυθότων, οὓς ἐξήλασαν Ἄβαροι μετανάσται γενόμενοι ὑπὸ ἐθνῶν οἰκούντων μὲν τὴν παρωκεαντίν ἀκτὴν, ὥσπερ καὶ οἱ Σαράγουροι ἐλαθέντες κατὰ ζήτησιν γῆς πρὸς τοῖς Ἀκατίροις Οὐννοῖς ἐγένοντο, καὶ μάχας πρὸς ἐκείνους πολλὰς συστήσαντες τὸ τε φύλον κατηγωνίσαντο καὶ πρὸς Ῥωμαίους ἀφίκοντο, τυχεῖν τῆς αὐτῶν βουλόμενοι ἐπιτηδειότητος. Cf. Priscus, fr. 40. 2, expanding on the Sabir defeat by the Avars. The date is based on Priscus stating the events were contemporaneous with Gelimer's attacks on the Romans.

176 Jord., *Get.*, 37; Peter Van Nuffelen and Lieve Van Hoof (eds), *Jordanes: Romana and Getica* (Liverpool, 2020), pp. 238–39, n. 164 suggest Jordanes followed Priscus directly.

177 Procop., *BP*, II. 29. 15–16: καταντικρὺ δὲ τελευτᾷ ὄρος ὁ Καύκασος. ἐνταῦθα ἔθνη ἄλλα τε πολλὰ καὶ Ἀλανοὶ τε καὶ Ἀβασγοὶ ὄκνηται Χριστιανοὶ τε καὶ Ῥωμαῖοι φίλοι ἐκ παλαιοῦ ὄντες, Ζήχοι τε καὶ μετ' αὐτοὺς Οὐννοὶ, οἱ Σάβειροι ἐπικαλοῦνται. Procop., *BG*, VIII. 3. 4–5: τὰ μὲν οὖν ἀμφὶ τῷ ὄρει τῷ Καυκασίῳ ταύτη πη ἔχει. Οὐννοὶ δὲ, οἱ Σάβειροι ἐπικαλούμενοι, ἐνταῦθα ὄκνηται καὶ ἄλλα ἅττα Οὐννικὰ ἔθνη. Although the ODLA cites the latter quote as evidence dating the Sabir's settlement there to 506, the passage does not contain such chronological information; Michael Roberts, 'Sabirs (Suwar)', in ODLA, p. 1316.

178 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 17: ἐν δὲ τοῖς χρόνοις τοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἀναστασίου βασιλέως οἱ Οὐννοὶ Σάβειροι περάσαντες τὰς Κασπίας πύλας, ἔθνος πολεμικώτατον, ἦλθον ἕως Καππαδοκίας, καὶ πραιδεύσαντες αὐτὴν καὶ ὅσας παρῆλθον χώρας Ῥωμαίων, καὶ ἐφόνευσαν πολλοὺς καὶ ἔκαυσαν τὰ κτήματα καὶ λαβόντες αἰχμαλωσίαν πολλὴν ἀνεχώρησαν. ἦλθον δὲ οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς αἰχμαλωσίας πραιδευθέντες, καὶ πολλὰ παρέσχεν ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῖς πραιδευθεῖσιν ἐκάστης πόλεως. ἔκτισεν δὲ καὶ τείχη ταῖς μεγάλαις κόμαις Καππαδοκίας καὶ ἡσφαλίσατο τὰς δύο Καππαδοκίας· καὶ συνεχώρησε πάσαις ταῖς πραιδευθεῖσαις ἐπαρχίαις τὰς συντελείας εἰς τέλειον ἐπὶ ἔτη γ'. See Hyun Jin Kim, *The Huns* (Routledge, 2016), p. 506.

179 Agath., *Hist.*, IV. 13. 7–9; cf. Procop., *BP*, I. 15. 1–2: Οὐννοὶ τε αὐτοῖς οἱ Σάβειροι καλούμενοι τρισχίλιοι ξυνῆσαν, μαχιμώτατον ἔθνος.

180 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 11. 23–24: ἀμπολὺ πλῆθος μὲν ἐσάγαν ὄντες, ἐς ἀρχὰς δὲ πολλὰς ἐπιεικῶς διηρημένοι. τούτων δὲ τῶν ἀρχόντων [...].

when they required the service of their allies.¹⁸¹ We might detect a note of approval in his parenthetical explanation that these were ad hoc rather than annual payments. Thus, the second and third aims of Justinian emerge from this context. The occasional payments required more active intervention and management to ensure the Persians did not gain an upper hand. The benefit though, as Procopius implies, was that Justinian was not bound to an annual payment to a client king.

The first example of this system in practice was an alliance Justinian made with a Sabir queen named Boa.¹⁸² Dating this episode is difficult because our only sources, Malalas and Theophanes, struggled to reconcile different calendar systems.¹⁸³ By cross-referencing its placement by Malalas in Justinian's second consulship in 528 with its placement by Theophanes in Justinian's first regnal year (April 527 to April 528), we arrive at an overlap of early 528.¹⁸⁴ In calling Boa 'queen' (*rhēgissa*), Malalas elevated her to a higher tier than the 'chieftains' (*archontes*) of Procopius's account, but a lower tier than the sovereign kings of Rome and Persia.¹⁸⁵ Malalas wrote that in return for her forces fighting on behalf of the Romans, Justinian gave Boa clothes, silver and 'not a small amount of money' (*chrematōn ouk oligōn*).¹⁸⁶

181 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 11. 23–24: οἱ Σάβειροι ἔθνος μὲν ἐστὶν Οὐννικόν, ὥκηνται δὲ ἀμφὶ τὰ Καυκάσια ὄρη, πάμπολυ πλῆθος μὲν ἐσάγαν ὄντες, ἐς ἀρχὰς δὲ πολλὰς ἐπιεικῶς διηρημένοι. τούτων δὲ τῶν ἀρχόντων οἱ μὲν τινὲς εἰσι τῷ Ῥωμαίων αὐτοκράτορι, οἱ δὲ τῷ Περσῶν βασιλεῖ ἐκ παλαιοῦ γνῶριμοι. τοῖν τε βασιλείοιν ἐκάτερος χρυσίον εἰώθει τακτὸν τοῖς αὐτοῦ ἐνσπόνδοις προῖσθαι, οὐκ ἐπέτειον μέντοι, ἀλλ' ἡνίκα ἂν ἐς τοῦτο αὐτὸν ἡ χρεία ἐνάγοι.

182 Boa, from Gk. *Bōa* [Βώα] in Joh. Mal., XVIII. 13. 1 (cf. Gk. *Bōarēx* [Βωαρήξ] in Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6020, combining name and rank); see PLRE III, 'Boa', p. 234.

183 Malalas gives the year in question as Justinian's second consulship (January to December 528) and the 7th Indiction (September 529 to August 530); see Joh. Mal., XVIII. 12.

184 Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6020.

185 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 13. 1–2: Ἐν αὐτῷ δὲ τῷ χρόνῳ προσερρῶν Ῥωμαίοις ῥήγισσα ἐκ τῶν Σαβείρων Οὐννων, γυνή τις βάρβαρος ἀνδρεία καὶ πλήθει καὶ φρονήσει, ὀνόματι Βώα ῥήγισσα, χήρα, ἔχουσα δὲ μικροὺς υἱοὺς δύο καὶ ὑπ' αὐτὴν χιλιάδας ἐκατόν. See Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns: Studies in Their History and Culture*, pp. 195–96.

186 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 13. 5–7: προτραπεῖσα ὑπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως Ἰουστινιανοῦ ξενίοις πολλοῖς μαργαρίτων καὶ βασιλικῆς φορεσίας καὶ σκευῶν διαφόρων ἐν ἀργύρῳ καὶ χρημάτων οὐκ ὀλίγων.

Kavādh was, however, also recruiting allies from ‘another more inland *ethnos* of the Huns’.¹⁸⁷ These were led by two kings (*rhēga*), Glon and Styra^x.¹⁸⁸ Because these are described baldly as ‘Huns’ in contrast to the description of Boa’s followers as ‘Sabir Huns’, it is generally inferred these were distinct.¹⁸⁹ Speculation on their identity has been wide-ranging: it has been suggested they were Kutrigurs and Utigurs, or even Hephthalites.¹⁹⁰ It has been proposed that these were a remnant of Attila’s empire, separated from the Oghuric tribes by the migration of the Sabirs. This may be the origin for the later Hunnic sub-kingdom within the Khazar Empire, based on similar territory on the River Sulak in modern Dagestan.¹⁹¹

These Huns should be associated with the figure of Ambazuces, whom Procopius names as ‘a Hun by birth, but a friend of the Romans’.¹⁹² He relates that Ambazuces offered to sell the fortress guarding the Darial Pass to the emperor Anastasius.¹⁹³ Anastasius declined and after Ambazuces had died, Kavādh ‘overpowered his sons and took possession of the Gates’. These events probably took place around the conclusion of Anastasius’s Persian War

187 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 13. 8–11: ἄλλους ῥῆγας δύο ἀπὸ ἄλλου ἔθνους Οὐννων ἐνδοτέρων ὀνόματι. Τύραγχα καὶ Γλώμην, οὗστινας ἦν προτρεψάμενος Κωάδης ὁ τῶν Περσῶν βασιλεὺς εἰς τὸ συμμαχεῖσθαι αὐτῷ κατὰ Ῥωμαίων.

188 Glon, from Gk. *Glōnēs* [Γλώνης] in Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6020 (cf. Gk. *Glōmēs* [Γλώνης] in Joh. Mal., XVIII. 13. 9); see PLRE III, ‘Glom’, p. 538. Styra^x, from Gk. *Styrax* [Στύραξ] in Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6020 (cf. Gk. *Tyrax* [Τύραξ] in Joh. Mal., XVIII. 13. 9); see PLRE III, ‘Tyrax’, p. 1346.

189 Both names have been identified etymologically as Iranian, whereas Sabir names can be identified as Turkic: Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns: Studies in Their History and Culture*, pp. 391–92 and 442.

190 Howorth, ‘The Sabiri and the Saroguri’, p. 616: ‘probably the leaders of the Utigurs and the Kotrigurs’.

191 Kim, *The Huns*, pp. 135–37.

192 Procop., *BP*, I. 10. 9–12: ὅπερ ἐπειδὴ ὁ Φιλίππου Ἀλέξανδρος κατενόησε, πύλας τε ἐν χώρῳ ἐτεκτήνατο τῷ εἰρημένῳ καὶ φυλακτήριον κατεστήσατο. ὃ δὴ ἄλλοι τε πολλοὶ προϊόντος χρόνου ἔσχον καὶ Ἀμβαζούκης, Οὐννος μὲν γένος, Ῥωμαίοις δὲ καὶ Ἀναστασίῳ βασιλεῖ φίλος. οὗτος Ἀμβαζούκης ἐπειδὴ ἔς τε γῆρας ἀφῖκτο βαθὺ καὶ τελευτᾶν ἔμελλε, πέμψας παρὰ τὸν Ἀναστάσιον, χρήματά οἱ δοθῆναι ἤτει, ἐφ’ ᾧ τὸ τε φυλακτήριον καὶ πύλας τὰς Κασπίας ἐνδώσει Ῥωμαίοις. βασιλεὺς δὲ Ἀναστάσιος (δρᾶν γὰρ ἀνεπισκέπτως οὐδὲν οὔτε ἠπίστατο οὔτε εἰώθει) λογισάμενος ὅτι οἱ στρατιώταις ἐνταῦθα ἐκτρέφειν ἀδύνατα ἦν ἐν χωρίῳ ἐρήμῳ τε ἀγαθῶν ἀπάντων καὶ οὐδαμῇ ἐν γειτόνων ἔχοντι ἔθνος Ῥωμαίοις κατήκοον, χάριν μὲν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ τῆς ἐς αὐτὸν εὐνοίας πολλὴν ὡμο λόγει, τὸ δὲ ἔργον τοῦτο οὐδενὶ λόγῳ προσέειτο. Ἀμβαζούκης μὲν οὖν οὐ πολλῷ ὕστερον ἐτελεύτα νόσῳ, Καβάδης δὲ βιασάμενος τοὺς αὐτοῦ παῖδας τὰς πύλας ἔσχεν.

193 Procop., *BP*, I. 10. 9–12; see PLRE II, ‘Ambazuces’, p. 68. For the connection to Darial, see Eberhard W. Sauer and others, *Dariali: The ‘Caspian Gates’ in the Caucasus from Antiquity to the Age of the Huns and the Middle Ages: The Joint Georgian-British Dariali Gorge Excavations and Surveys of 2013–2016* (Oxbow Books, 2020), p. 876, doi:10.2307/jj.1544770.

in 505, when Kavādh is reported to have withdrawn from the frontline with the Romans to fight ‘Huns’ in the north.¹⁹⁴

Procopius’s description of Ambazuces simply as *Ounnos* has prompted multiple theories. Presumably based on geographical proximity, Henry Howorth asserted he was ‘doubtless a Sabirian Hun’.¹⁹⁵ Given the later Arabic name for the fortress was ‘Gate of the Alans’ (*Bāb-Al-lān*), Károly Czeglédy assumed him to be an Alan.¹⁹⁶ This hypothesis was recently reiterated by Eberhard Sauer *et al.*¹⁹⁷ Yet the most elegant proposal was made by Otto Maenchen-Helfen. If we identify Ambazuces with the ‘Caucasian Huns’ of Malalas, we can reconcile his Iranic name and Procopius’s label of *Ounnos*.¹⁹⁸ If we then date Kavādh’s conquest of Ambazuces’s territory to the period 504 to 518, the chronology fits with the reappearance of the Caucasian Huns as Persian allies in the reign of Justin I (518–27).¹⁹⁹ These episodes demonstrate the risk to Justinian’s influence posed by Persian competition.

3.3.2. Subsidies to the Sabir and Caucasian Huns

Having thus established the rivalry between Boa’s Sabirs and the Persian-aligned Huns, we can return to the outcome of Justinian’s diplomacy. When the Persian allies were moving southwards to cross the Caucasus, Boa’s forces attacked and won victory. Her army killed one enemy leader in battle and sent another as prisoner to Constantinople. Malalas’s use of imperial propaganda is likely to explain his choice of the higher-status term *rhēx* to describe both Roman and Persian allies. Securing the service of a *rhēgissa* and having a *rhēx* as prisoner would have been more prestigious than the *archōn* described by Procopius. The

194 R. C. Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy: Formation and Conduct from Diocletian to Anastasius* (Francis Cairns, 1992), p. 215, n. 32.

195 Howorth, ‘The Sabiri and the Saroguri’, p. 614.

196 Károly Czeglédy, ‘Khazar Raids in Transcaucasia in 762–764 AD’, *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 11 (1960), pp. 75–88 (p. 77).

197 Sauer and others, *Dariāli*, p. 876.

198 Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns: Studies in Their History and Culture*, p. 442.

199 Sauer and others, *Dariāli*, pp. 876–77.

exact political unit of Boa is unfortunately invisible after Malalas's notice. This shows the contingency of political formations of steppe peoples.

The Sabirs' role in Justinian's Persian Wars shows the risks and rewards of their political division. Procopius describes the Persian army that invaded Armenia in 530 as including 'three thousand *Ounnoi* with them, the so-called *Sabeiroi*, a most warlike *ethnos*' within its ranks.²⁰⁰ In 531, a Roman spy had heard *Massagetai* were preparing to reinforce the Persians laying siege to Martyropolis; Justinian had the spy go to the Persian besiegers and tell them that the Romans had won the *Massagetai* over using money (*chrēmata*).²⁰¹ Once this Persian army had heard of Kavādh's death in September 531, they gave in to the fear of the *Ounnoi* and lifted the siege. The *Ounnoi* arrived and launched a raid instead.²⁰² I have included the Greek names Procopius employs to show that he uses three different terms in a single chapter. Certainly many, like Kaldellis, are happy to identify these as the same group of Sabir Huns, referred to poetically as *Massagetai*.²⁰³

Malalas, however, placed the same raid later in the year, during the three-month truce between Justinian and Khosrow in late 531. Malalas reports that a group of 'Sabir Huns' passed through the Caspian Gates, 'plundering as far as the land of the Armenia', before

200 Procop., *BP*, I. 15. 1–2: Οὔννοι τε αὐτοῖς οἱ Σάβειροι καλούμενοι τρισχίλιοι ξυνῆσαν, μαχिमώτατον ἔθνος.

201 Procop., *BP*, I. 21. 13–16: τότε οὖν ἐκ Περσῶν κατάσκοπός τις ἐς Ῥωμαίους σταλεις ἐς ὅσιν τε Ἰουστινιανῷ βασιλεῖ ἦκων, ἄλλα τε πολλὰ ἐξεῖπεν ἐν τοῖς βαρβάροις πρᾶσσόμενα καὶ ὡς γένος Μασσαγετῶν ἐπὶ τῷ Ῥωμαίων πονηρῷ αὐτίκα δὴ μάλα ἐς τὰ Περσῶν ἦθη ἐξίασιν, ἐνθένδε τε ἐς Ῥωμαίων τὴν γῆν ἰόντες τῷ Περσῶν στρατῷ ἔτοιμοί εἰσιν ἀναμίγνυσθαι. ὁ δὲ ταῦτα ἀκούσας, πείραν τε ἡδὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀληθείας περὶ ἐς αὐτὸν ἔχων, χρήμασιν αὐτὸν ἀδροῖς τισι χαρισάμενος πείθει ἐς τε τὸ Περσῶν στρατόπεδον ἰέναι, ὃ δὴ Μαρτυροπολίτας ἐπολιόρκει, καὶ τοῖς ταύτῃ βαρβάροις ἀγγεῖλαι, ὅτι δὴ οἱ Μασσαγέται οὗτοι χρήμασιν ἀναπεισθέντες τῷ Ῥωμαίων βασιλεῖ μέλλουσιν ὅσον οὐπω ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ἤξειν. ὁ δὲ κατὰ ταῦτα ἐποίησεν, ἐς τε τὸ τῶν βαρβάρων στρατόπεδον ἀφικόμενος τῷ τε Χαναράγγῃ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀπήγγελλε στράτευμα Οὔνων πολέμιον σφίσιν οὐκ ἐς μακρὰν ἐς τοὺς Ῥωμαίους ἀφίξεσθαι. οἱ δὲ ἐπεὶ ταῦτα ἤκουσαν, κατωρρώδησάν τε καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς παροῦσι διηποροῦντο.

202 Procop., *BP*, I. 21. 27: καὶ ἅπ' αὐτοῦ τοὺς Ῥωμαίων λόγους οἱ στρατηγοὶ ἄσμενοι ἤκουσαν, ἅτε καὶ τὴν Οὔνων ἔφοδον δεῖσαντες. Ῥωμαῖοι μὲν οὖν ἐν ὁμήρων λόγῳ εὐθὺς ἔδοσαν Μαρτίνον τε καὶ τῶν Σίττα δορυφόρων ἕνα, Σενέκιον ὄνομα. Πέρσαι δὲ διαλύσαντες τὴν προσεδρεῖαν εὐθυωρὸν τὴν ἀναχώρησιν ἐποίησαντο. οἱ τε Οὔννοι οὐ πολλῷ ὕστερον ἐσβαλόντες εἰς γῆν τὴν Ῥωμαίων, ἐπεὶ τὸν Περσῶν στρατὸν ἐνταῦθα οὐχ εὔρον, δι' ὀλίγου τὴν ἐπιδρομὴν ποιησάμενοι ἐπ' οἴκου ἀπεκομίσθησαν ἅπαντες.

203 Kaldellis (ed.), *The Wars of Justinian / Prokopios*, p. 55, n. 123.

entering the Roman provinces of Cilicia and Euphratensis.²⁰⁴ Justinian's response was twofold. He sent Dorotheus, *magister militum* for Armenia, to combat the raiders.²⁰⁵ He then dispatched Rufinus, who had been negotiating the armistice with Persia, to find out if the Huns had acted on Persian orders.²⁰⁶ Malalas reports Rufinus as being satisfied the Persians were not responsible.

In contrast, the third account by Zachariah does not make the specific identification of Sabirs. He simply described Huns (*Hōnāyē*) 'hired by the Persians'.²⁰⁷ He later describes them as 'mercenaries'.²⁰⁸ The most economical reading of these texts is to identify the same group of Sabir Huns fighting with the Persians, just described variously in our sources. This, however, undermines the firm distinction attempted in the first section between 'Sabir Huns' and 'Caucasian Huns'. In any case, it is notable how similar the dynamics were with the Sasanians' use of the Nasrid kings discussed in Chapter Two. With both the Nasrid kings and the Huns, the Persians could instigate attacks on the Romans while denying responsibility. The position between two great powers is thus a key structural feature of payments to the Sabir Huns.

Procopius claims that the Huns of the North Caucasus were central to the outbreak of Justinian's Second Persian War, having Khosrow allege Justinian had encouraged Huns to

204 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 70: καὶ αὐτῷ τῷ χρόνῳ Οὐννοὶ Σάβηρες περάσαντες διὰ τῶν Κασπίων πυλῶν ἀνεφάνησαν ἐν τοῖς Ῥωμαϊκοῖς μέρεσιν, πραιδεύοντες ἐπὶ τὴν Ἀρμενίων χώραν· καὶ ἀπλώσαντες ἑαυτοὺς κατέσχον ἕως τῆς Εὐφρατησίας καὶ τῆς δευτέρας Κιλικίας καὶ τῶν Κυρηστικῶν. καὶ γνοὺς τοῦτο ὁ βασιλεὺς Ῥωμαίων, μεταστειλόμενος τὸν πατρίκιον Ῥουφίνον ἐκέλευσεν αὐτῷ ἐξελθεῖν ἐπὶ τὰ ἀνατολικά μέρη καὶ μαθεῖν, εἰ ἀπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως Περσῶν ἦλθον κατὰ Ῥωμαίων. καὶ ἐξελθὼν Ῥουφίνος καὶ μηνύσας τῷ βασιλεῖ Περσῶν εὗρεν, ὅτι οὐ κατὰ γνώμην τοῦ βασιλέως Περσῶν οἱ αὐτοὶ Οὐννοὶ παρήλθον· καὶ γράψας Δωροθέῳ τῷ στρατηλάτῃ Ἀρμενίας ὀπίσασθαι κατὰ τῶν αὐτῶν Οὐννων, καὶ ἀκούσαντες οἱ Οὐννοὶ, λαβόντες τὴν πραιδὶν πᾶσαν ὑπέστρεψαν δι' ὧν ἐπανήλθον τόπων. καὶ καταδιώξας αὐτοὺς ὁ στρατηλάτης Δωρόθεος ἀφείλατο παρ' αὐτῶν οὐκ ὀλίγην πραιδὶν.

205 PLRE III, 'Dorotheus 2', pp. 420–21.

206 PLRE II, 'Rufinus 13', pp. 954–56.

207 Zach., *HE*, IX. 6:

... καὶ αὐτῷ τῷ χρόνῳ Οὐννοὶ Σάβηρες περάσαντες διὰ τῶν Κασπίων πυλῶν ἀνεφάνησαν ἐν τοῖς Ῥωμαϊκοῖς μέρεσιν, πραιδεύοντες ἐπὶ τὴν Ἀρμενίων χώραν· καὶ ἀπλώσαντες ἑαυτοὺς κατέσχον ἕως τῆς Εὐφρατησίας καὶ τῆς δευτέρας Κιλικίας καὶ τῶν Κυρηστικῶν. καὶ γνοὺς τοῦτο ὁ βασιλεὺς Ῥωμαίων, μεταστειλόμενος τὸν πατρίκιον Ῥουφίνον ἐκέλευσεν αὐτῷ ἐξελθεῖν ἐπὶ τὰ ἀνατολικά μέρη καὶ μαθεῖν, εἰ ἀπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως Περσῶν ἦλθον κατὰ Ῥωμαίων. καὶ ἐξελθὼν Ῥουφίνος καὶ μηνύσας τῷ βασιλεῖ Περσῶν εὗρεν, ὅτι οὐ κατὰ γνώμην τοῦ βασιλέως Περσῶν οἱ αὐτοὶ Οὐννοὶ παρήλθον· καὶ γράψας Δωροθέῳ τῷ στρατηλάτῃ Ἀρμενίας ὀπίσασθαι κατὰ τῶν αὐτῶν Οὐννων, καὶ ἀκούσαντες οἱ Οὐννοὶ, λαβόντες τὴν πραιδὶν πᾶσαν ὑπέστρεψαν δι' ὧν ἐπανήλθον τόπων. καὶ καταδιώξας αὐτοὺς ὁ στρατηλάτης Δωρόθεος ἀφείλατο παρ' αὐτῶν οὐκ ὀλίγην πραιδὶν.

208 Zach., *HE*, IX. 6:

... καὶ αὐτῷ τῷ χρόνῳ Οὐννοὶ Σάβηρες περάσαντες διὰ τῶν Κασπίων πυλῶν ἀνεφάνησαν ἐν τοῖς Ῥωμαϊκοῖς μέρεσιν, πραιδεύοντες ἐπὶ τὴν Ἀρμενίων χώραν· καὶ ἀπλώσαντες ἑαυτοὺς κατέσχον ἕως τῆς Εὐφρατησίας καὶ τῆς δευτέρας Κιλικίας καὶ τῶν Κυρηστικῶν. καὶ γνοὺς τοῦτο ὁ βασιλεὺς Ῥωμαίων, μεταστειλόμενος τὸν πατρίκιον Ῥουφίνον ἐκέλευσεν αὐτῷ ἐξελθεῖν ἐπὶ τὰ ἀνατολικά μέρη καὶ μαθεῖν, εἰ ἀπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως Περσῶν ἦλθον κατὰ Ῥωμαίων. καὶ ἐξελθὼν Ῥουφίνος καὶ μηνύσας τῷ βασιλεῖ Περσῶν εὗρεν, ὅτι οὐ κατὰ γνώμην τοῦ βασιλέως Περσῶν οἱ αὐτοὶ Οὐννοὶ παρήλθον· καὶ γράψας Δωροθέῳ τῷ στρατηλάτῃ Ἀρμενίας ὀπίσασθαι κατὰ τῶν αὐτῶν Οὐννων, καὶ ἀκούσαντες οἱ Οὐννοὶ, λαβόντες τὴν πραιδὶν πᾶσαν ὑπέστρεψαν δι' ὧν ἐπανήλθον τόπων. καὶ καταδιώξας αὐτοὺς ὁ στρατηλάτης Δωρόθεος ἀφείλατο παρ' αὐτῶν οὐκ ὀλίγην πραιδὶν.

attack Persia during the ‘Eternal Peace’.²⁰⁹ The exact circumstances are unclear. Procopius also has Khosrow state that Justinian gave ‘an annual payment of gold to some of the Huns and to the Saracens’ so they would ‘guard your land unplundered for all time’.²¹⁰ The significance of this claim is difficult to judge. As we have seen, Procopius may have been referring to the Sabirs in generic terms, or to other Caucasian Huns. He may even have referred to Pontic Huns for literary effect. He is clearer about the involvement of the Sabirs in the Second Persian War. The king of Lazica, Gubaz, made an agreement whereby for the price of three *centenaria* of gold (3000 *librae*), the ‘Alans and Sabirs’ agreed to refrain from raiding Lazica and to instead target Iberia.²¹¹ Gubaz then expected Justinian to provide this money.²¹² Procopius says Justinian agreed to this and sent money to the ‘nation of the Sabirs’; the absence of the Alans here implies the Sabirs were the main force.²¹³

When the narrative continued in the eighth volume of the *Wars*, Procopius wrote that Justinian had formed a direct alliance with the Sabirs. He related a digression about how a small number of Sabirs who contributed their expertise in siege warfare to the Roman army in Lazica and helped seize a Persian fortress.²¹⁴ This group was an advance party. Because Justinian’s envoy felt it was too dangerous to cross the Caucasus with cash, he had summoned the Sabirs to collect their money from the camp of the Roman general Bessas in Lazica.²¹⁵

- 209 Procop., *BP*, II. 1. 14–15: καὶ πρὸς Οὐννων δέ τινας ἰσχυρίζετο αὐτὸν ἐπιστολὴν πέμψαι, ἐγκελευομένην αὐτοῖς ἐσβαλεῖν τε ἐς τὴν Περσῶν γῆν καὶ τοῖς ἐκείνη χωρίοις ἐπὶ πλεῖστον λυμήνασθαι. ἦν δὴ οἱ τοὺς Οὐννους αὐτοὺς ἔφρασκεν ἐγχειρίσαι ἐς ὅσιν ἐλθόντας.
- 210 Procop., *BP*, II. 10. 23.
- 211 Procop., *BP*, II. 29. 29: ἐτύγγανε δὲ πολλῶ πρότερον Ἀλανούς τε καὶ Σαβείρους ἐς ξυμμαχίαν ἐπαγόμενος, οἷπερ ὡμολόγησαν κεντηναρίων τριῶν οὐχ ὅσον ἀδήωτον Λαζίοις ξυμφυλάξιν τὴν γῆν, ἀλλὰ καὶ Ἰβηρίαν οὕτω καταστήσεσθαι ἀνδρῶν ἔρημον ὥς μηδὲ Πέρσαις ἐνθένδε τὸ λοιπὸν ἰέναι δυνατὰ ἔσεσθαι. ταῦτά τε σφίσι τὰ χρήματα βασιλέα Γουβάζης ὑπέσχετο δώσειν; cf. Procop., *BP*, II. 3. 47 and II. 10. 16.
- 212 Procop., *BP*, II. 29. 31–32.
- 213 Procop., *BP*, II. 30. 28.
- 214 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 11. 22–28.
- 215 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 11. 23–25.

Unfortunately for Justinian, the Sabirs would fight for the highest bidder. When the Persian general Mihr-Meroe heard of how the Sabir had breached the fortress, he quickly employed his own Sabirs to repeat the same tactics against Roman fortifications.²¹⁶ Procopius even claims the Persians paid the Sabirs with Roman gold. He says that when Khosrow's ambassador returned with the payment for the truce of 552 he 'actually used this money to purchase an alliance of a vast horde of the Sabir Huns'.²¹⁷ Even if this exact detail were a literary embellishment to show the irony of the situation, it establishes that the Sasanians were paying the Sabirs too.

A similar picture is given by Agathias, who describes the Sabirs as 'a mercenary force' that was 'serving with the Persians'.²¹⁸ He complains that they 'often helped the Romans against the Persians and vice versa, changing sides and paymasters in a very short space of time'.²¹⁹ In particular, he alleges that when 'discharged by the Romans after they had received the amount of pay agreed upon', they then 'offered their services to the very people whom they had but recently been fighting'.²²⁰ He does then qualify this, admitting it may have been a different group of Sabirs, but insisted that 'Sabirs they were all the same, and they had been sent by their own people to fight in the Persian army'.²²¹ In this account, Agathias demonstrates a more limited grasp on the political structure of the Sabirs than

216 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 14. 4–5; see also the 'vast multitude of barbarian Sabirs' described in Procop., *BG*, VIII. 16. 8: βαρβάρους Σαβείρους παμπληθεῖς.

217 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 17. 10.

218 Agath., *Hist.*, IV. 13. 7: παρήσαν δὲ τοῖς Πέρσαις καὶ Οὐννοὶ Σάβειροι ἐπὶ μισθοφορᾷ προσβοηθήσαντες. τοῦτο γὰρ τὸ γένος μέγιστόν γε ἐστὶ καὶ πολυάνθρωπον φιλοπόλεμόν τε ἐς τὰ μάλιστα καὶ ἀρπαλέον καὶ οἷον δὴ οὖν αἰετὴν τὴν ὀθνεῖαν ἐφίεσθαι ἐπιτρέχειν μισθοῦ τε ἔνεκα μόνου καὶ τῆς ἐπὶ τῇ λείᾳ ἐλπίδος νῦν μὲν τούτοις, νῦν δὲ ἐκείνοις, νῦν δὲ ἄλλῳ τῷ συμμαχεῖν καὶ συνδιακινδυνεύειν ἐς τὰναντία μεταβαλλόμενον.

219 Agath., *Hist.*, IV. 13. 8: πολλάκις μὲν γὰρ τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις, πολλάκις δὲ τοῖς Πέρσαις κατ' ἀλλήλων παραταττομένοις ξυνήραντο τοὺς ἀγῶνας, ἐν ὀλίγῳ τῷ μεταξὺ χρόνῳ ἐφ' ἑκατέρους τραπέντες καὶ μισθαρνήσαντες. καὶ οὖν ἢ προτέρα μάχῃ κατὰ Περσῶν αὐτοῖς ἐπολεμήθη, ὅτε πολλοὺς τῶν διλιμνιτῶν ἐπελθόντας σφίσι κατέκτειναν ἐν τῇ νυκτομαχίᾳ, ὥς μοι ἕκαστα προδεδιγῆται.

220 Agath., *Hist.*, IV. 13. 9. ἐκείνου δὲ τοῦ ἔργου πέρας λαβόντος ἀφίεντο μὲν ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίων τὰ ζυγκείμενα κομισάμενοι, πάλιν δὲ τοῖς ὀλίγῳ ἔμπροσθεν πολεμιοτάτοις ξυνείποντο, τυχὸν μὲν οἱ αὐτοί, τυχὸν δὲ ἕτεροι, Σάβειροι δὲ ὅμως ὄντες καὶ ἐκ τοῦ σφετέρου ἔθνους ἐς τὴν συμμαχίαν ἀπεσταλμένοι.

221 Ibid.

Procopius or even Malalas. He seems to assume that the Sabir gens functioned as a single political unit.

By the end of Justinian's reign, however, he abandoned his previous approach to the Sabirs. Having exploited the political division of the Sabirs, he promoted a unified polity on the Caspian Steppe. Menander tells us that after Justinian formed an alliance with the Avars, he sent a general to direct their campaigns against other steppe nomads. These directions apparently included 'destroying' (*katheilon*) the Sabirs.²²² He appears to have decided that the 'fickle' Sabirs were better replaced by a reliable partner, even if that partner would require paying.

This section has shown that Justinian used subsidies differently on the Caspian Steppe to other regions. According to Procopius, he did not establish a single buffer state or client manager. Instead, he exploited the political division of the Sabirs to recruit individual tribes. Rather than pay an annual subsidy, he gave a fixed tariff for particular campaigns. Even if Agathias did not express the dynamic as clearly as Procopius, his account provides corroboration. On the other hand, the episode of Boa in Malalas appears as a more conventional relationship with a 'client king', or in this case, 'client queen'. This is likely to be the result of Malalas's method. He compiled his text from imperial notices that passed over his desk as a civil servant in Antioch, often reflecting imperial propaganda. It is interesting, therefore, to consider that imperial propaganda emphasised the relationship with Boa, but in practice continued to work with fragmentary Sabir tribes.

In Justinian's final years, however, he changed his approach. The Avar *qağanate* was directed to conquer the North Caucasian steppe and provide a single hegemon and point of contact. If this was intended to prevent Sabir tribes allying with Persia, it was unsuccessful. Yet the destruction of the Sabirs cannot have been complete. Menander later states that

222 Men. Prot., fr. 5. 2.

Tiberius II met representatives of the Sabirs and offered to pay double the amount of money (*chrēmata*) they were receiving from the Persians to win them over.²²³ This did not work, and the Sabirs later fought for the Persians in Syria.²²⁴ This appears to be their final mention in Roman sources.²²⁵ Justinian's attempt to reform the North Caucasus under a unified Avar polity was thus incomplete: his successors were still forced into the bidding war for the loyalty of the Sabirs.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the use of cash across the Caucasus in the reign of Justinian had different meanings and functions according to its discursive construction. In the first section the discussion of Armenia and Pontus showed how Justinian sought to move from relationships based on diachronic reciprocity to transactional exchanges or direct imperial rule. There was a similar course in Lazica, discussed in the second section. There, the introduction of cash into Roman policy contributed to the disestablishment of the traditional basis of Roman and Laz alliances. In contrast, however, on the Caspian Steppe there had been a fragmented political landscape with the imperial powers creating a quasi-market of cash transactions for military service. In that case, Justinian promoted an Avar hegemony that would allow a single relationship to emerge, secured by cash.

223 Men. Prot., fr. 18. 5: πυθόμενός τε παρ' αὐτῶν, ὅποσα χρήματα αὐτοῖς ἐδίδου ὁ Περσῶν βασιλεὺς, δεδωκώς τε ἐξουσίαν σφίσιν ἐς ὅσον ἡβούλοντο ἐξῆραι τῇ ψευδολογίᾳ τὸ χρήμα καὶ τῷ κόμπῳ τάληθές ἐπικαλύψαι, διπλάσια τούτων ἔγωγε παρέξω, ἔφη, τοῖς τε ἐν τέλει ὑμῶν, πρὸς δὲ δὴ καὶ ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς. See PLRE III, 'Tiberius 1', pp. 1323–26.

224 Theoph., Byz., fr. 4 (in Photius, *Bibliotheca*, 64. 26): καὶ τοῖς μὲν Ἀρμενίοις συνεμάχουν Κόλχοι, Ἀβασγοὶ καὶ Σαρῶης ὁ Ἀλανῶν βασιλεὺς, τῷ δὲ μιράνῃ Σάβιροι καὶ Δάγανες καὶ τὸ Διλμαϊνὸν ἔθνος.

225 See Howorth, 'The Sabiri and the Saroguri', p. 621. Even if they could be securely identified with the Suwār who appear in later Arabic sources as subjects of the Khazars and Bulgarians, those sources do not shed any light on their sixth-century history: Peter Golden, 'The Peoples of the South Russian Steppes', in *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, ed. by Denis Sinor (Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 256–84 (p. 259), doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521243049.011.

Chapter Four: ‘Let no man take what belongs to another’¹ The Reconquest of the Western Mediterranean

Justinian granted the general Belisarius a unique honour for conquering Vandal Africa.² He was allowed to lead a triumphal procession into Constantinople, the first private citizen to perform what had always been an imperial privilege.³ Crowds gathered to see the conquering army and spoils of war. Amidst gold and silver were artefacts from the Jewish temple of Jerusalem. Stolen by the Romans in AD 70, they were seized in turn when the Vandals sacked Rome in 455.⁴ The triumph thus presented the ‘reconquest’ of the former Western Roman Empire as bringing riches to the people of the Eastern Roman Empire.

Narrating the triumph, Procopius maintained his keen sense of irony. He related how Justinian felt obliged to send ‘a share of the spoils’ to the Persians, because the emperor could never have succeeded without the ‘Eternal Peace’.⁵ This is a rare occasion on which modern scholars agree with Procopius: whether by accident or design, paying Persia for an ‘Eternal Peace’ was a necessary condition for reconquering the West.⁶ In this chapter I want to move beyond this to consider how Justinian used money in the Western Mediterranean

- 1 Just., *Nov. App.*, VII. 5: ‘non praesumat quis alienum’. This is the so-called ‘Pragmatic Sanction’, which established governance post-conquest governance for Italy; see Geoffrey Greatrex, ‘Pragmatic Sanction’, in ODLA, p. 1224.
- 2 PLRE III, ‘Belisarius 1’, pp. 181–224.
- 3 Procop., *BV*, IV. 9. 1–16; discussed by Rene Pfeilschifter, *Der Kaiser und Konstantinopel: Kommunikation und Konfliktaustrag in einer spätantiken Metropole* (De Gruyter, 2013), p. 335, doi:10.1515/9783110266887.
- 4 Procop., *BV*, IV. 9. 5; some had also been captured by the Visigoths in 410, see Procop., *BG*, v. 12. 42.
- 5 Procop., *BP*, I. 26. 3: πέμψας τε ὁ Χοσρόης ἐς Βυζάντιον πρέσβεις, συγχαίρειν τε Ἰουστινιανῷ τῷ βασιλεῖ ἔφασκε καὶ τὸ μέρος λαβεῖν ξὺν γέλωτι δῆθεν τῶν ἐκ Λιβύης λαφύρων ἡξίου, ὅτι δὴ οὐκ ἂν ποτε Βανδύλων τῷ πολέμῳ περιέσεσθαι ἴσχυσεν, εἰ μὴ αὐτῷ Πέρσαι ἐσπείσαντο. For Khosrow’s demand see Chapter One.
- 6 A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey*, 3 vols (Blackwell, 1961), I, p. 273.

itself. If the ‘Eternal Peace’ was a necessary condition, it was not by itself sufficient: the payments in the West were integral to Justinian’s approach.

This chapter presents evidence of Justinian using money in this region that is often omitted from discussion of subsidisation.⁷ This is partly because our sources do not code these payments as tax (*phoros*) or tribute (*dasmós*) in the same way as other examples. I shall demonstrate that these cases both confirm patterns identified in other regions and shed new light on certain dynamics. There were three distinct uses of money in the Western Mediterranean. Firstly, Justinian offered payments to royalty to encourage defections. Secondly, he paid neighbouring groups to participate in his wars. Thirdly, he discussed offers of tribute by the Ostrogoths in return for the partial independence of their kingdom. Justinian also made an ideological claim to sovereignty over the former Western Roman Empire which was distinct from the other regions. This shaped the discursive strategies of both the emperor and foreign powers.

Justinian did not offer conventional state-to-state subsidies to the Vandal and Ostrogothic kingdoms. As a result, those studying subsidies have often overlooked these cases. But Justinian did offer money and make payments as part of his policy towards these kingdoms. Rather than to the corporate kingdom, the *regnum*, these payments were offered to individual royal family members. Justinian’s claim about the conditional sovereignty of these kingdoms necessitated this approach. This section shall therefore begin by situating the Vandal and Ostrogothic kingdoms within the sixth-century foreign relations, then set out the evidence for the payments.

Justinian inherited a delicate set of relationships between the Eastern Roman Emperor and the kings of the Western Mediterranean. In principle, the East Romans did not recognise

7 For example, Iluk does not discuss Justinian’s subsidies to the Merovingians, Moors, Gepids or Heruls: Jan Iluk, ‘The Export of Gold from the Roman Empire to Barbarian Countries from the 4th to the 6th Centuries’, *Münstersche Beiträge zur Antiken Handelgeschichte*, 4.1 (1985), pp. 79–102 (pp. 91–92).

that the imperium Romanum had ended in these regions. Instead, former Roman client peoples (*gentes*) from across the limes had moved into the empire and established kingdoms (*regna*) on Roman territory. In Greek terms, these kings were *rhēges*, distinguished clearly from the Roman or Persian *basileis*. It has been demonstrated that the conceptualisation of 476 as the ‘fall of the Western Roman Empire’ was an invention of the early Justinianic period.⁸

Generations of historians interpreted the reconquest of the Western Roman Empire as Justinian’s driving purpose. For J. W. Barker, Justinian found wars with Persia to be ‘distractions’ and welcomed a peace treaty that allowed him to turn to the west.⁹ Ernst Stein wrote that ‘Justinien put se dire qu’il avait mis de l’ordre dans les relations avec le grand voisin oriental de l’Empire avant de se jeter dans la guerre vandale’.¹⁰ To Ze’ev Rubin, ‘he was prepared to pay an enormous sum of money’ to have ‘his hands free to tackle the western problem’.¹¹ ‘Grand strategy’ has fallen out of favour and instead historians have argued that Justinian policy aims were contingent and iterative. For example, one interpretation has argued that Justinian’s ‘overarching objective’ in the Vandal War was not political, but ‘an economic strategy, pursued partly by war, to control the trade routes of the Mediterranean’.¹² It only developed into a policy of territorial conquest in response to military success. In Chapter One I argued against both these frameworks. Justinian’s initial policy of

8 Brian Croke, ‘AD 476: The Manufacture of a Turning Point’, *Chiron*, 13 (1983), pp. 81–119 (pp. 118–19), doi:10.34780/6478-7wo2; Mark Humphries, ‘Late Antiquity and World History: Challenging Conventional Narratives and Analyses’, *Studies in Late Antiquity*, 1.1 (2017), pp. 8–37 (pp. 14–15), doi:10.1525/sla.2017.1.1.8.

9 J. W. Barker, *Justinian and the Later Roman Empire* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), p. 118.

10 Ernst Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire: De la disparition de l’Empire d’Occident à la mort de Justinien (476–565)* 2 vols (Desclée de Brouwer, 1949), II, p. 295.

11 Ze’ev Rubin, ‘The Mediterranean and the Dilemma of the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity’, *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 1.1 (1986), pp. 13–62 (p. 48).

12 Christopher Lillington-Martin, ‘Procopius, πάρεδρος / quaestor, Codex Justinianus, 1.27 and Belisarius’ strategy in the Mediterranean’, in *Procopius of Caesarea: Literary and Historical Interpretations*, ed. by Christopher Lillington-Martin and Elodie Turquois (Routledge, 2017), pp. 157–85 (p. 157), doi:10.4324/9781315602288-11. Cf. Miranda Williams, ‘The African Policy of Justinian I’, DPhil thesis (University of Oxford, 2015), p. 116.

confrontation discounts the traditional claim that he sought to settle wars in the East at the earliest opportunity. His change in policy to paying Persia in the 530s, however, was demonstrably the result of changing circumstances in the West.

4.1. The Vandal Kingdom of Africa

For centuries the economic heart of the Western Roman Empire had been the agricultural region of Africa Proconsularis in modern Tunisia.¹³ Later emperors divided the northern province of Zeugitana, ruled from Carthage, from the southern province of Byzacena, ruled from Hadrumetum. This region was flanked in the east by Tripolitania and in the west by Numidia, where settlement was limited by the mountainous and desert hinterlands respectively. Further to the west was the region of Mauretania. In the early fifth century the followers of Gaiseric seized these territories from the Romans. He established the Kingdom of the Vandals and Alans, later incorporating Sardinia, Corsica and the Balearic Islands.¹⁴ After failed attempts by eastern and western Roman emperors to reclaim the lost territory, the emperor Zeno (474–91) agreed a treaty of recognition.¹⁵

13 For an overview of the economic geography, see Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800* (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 17–22.

14 For the title of *Regnum Vandalorum et Alanorum* see Roland Steinacher, ‘Who is the Barbarian? Considerations on the Vandal Royal Title’, in *Post-Roman Transitions: Christian and Barbarian Identities in the Early Medieval West*, ed. by Walter Pohl and Gerda Heydemann (Brepols, 2013), pp. 437–85, doi:10.1484/M.CELAMA-EB.1.101671. For an overview of the Vandal Kingdom, see Andy Merrills and Richard Miles, *The Vandals* (Blackwell, 2010), pp. 56–82, doi:10.1002/9781444318074.

15 Malchus, fr. 5; Procop., *BV*, III. 9. 19; for the date see Merrills and Miles, *The Vandals*, p. 123; see also PLRE II, ‘Zeno 7’, pp. 1200–02.



FIG. 4.1. Map of Vandal Africa

The Vandal Kingdom of Africa did not initially appear an obvious target. Unlike the Ostrogoths, whose Illyrian territories directly bordered Roman provinces, the Vandals were distant. Moreover, Justinian and Hilderic, the Vandal king, enjoyed warm relations.¹⁶ It is this friendship that gives us our first case. According to Procopius, the two men ‘sent large gifts of money to each other’ while Justin was still emperor.¹⁷ Because of this imprecision, modern historians offer wide-ranging estimates of date, including as early as 518.¹⁸ Because of how Justinian’s position was described in relation to Justin, the event is best located while he held office as *Caesar* (525 to April 527).¹⁹ This exchange has usually been distinguished from subsidies.²⁰ It is plausible that these ‘gifts of money’ marked Hilderic’s accession and

16 PLRE II, ‘Hildericus’, pp. 564–65.

17 Procop., *BV*, III. 9. 5: Ἰλδέρικος δὲ φίλος ἐς τὰ μάλιστα Ἰουστινιανῷ καὶ ξένος ἐγένετο, οὐπὼ μὲν ἤκοντι ἐς βασιλείαν, διοικουμένῳ δὲ αὐτὴν κατ’ ἐξουσίαν, ἐπεὶ οἱ ὁ θεῖος Ἰουστίνος ὑπὲρ γηρώς τε ὢν ἐβασίλευε καὶ τῶν κατὰ τὴν πολιτείαν πραγμάτων οὐ παντελῶς ἔμπειρος. χρήμασί τε μεγάλοις ἀλλήλους ἐδωροῦντο.

18 Peter Sarris, *Justinian: Emperor, Soldier, Saint* (Basic Books, 2023), pp. 78 and 112–13.

19 For a wider discussion of how Justinian’s reign intersected with Justin, see Brian Croke, ‘Justinian Under Justin: Reconfiguring a Reign’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 100.1 (2007), pp. 15–56 (pp. 47–48).

20 Williams, ‘The African Policy of Justinian’, p. 81; Williams cites Iluk, ‘The Export of Gold’, pp. 91–92.

Justinian's accession as Caesar or Augustus.²¹ It differs from other examples in the Western Mediterranean because the gift of money recognised Hilderic's kingship, rather than disputed it. It represents a conciliatory policy that was not to last. When Hilderic was overthrown by his spurned heir, Gelimer, in May 530, Justinian immediately protested.²² The Roman invaders in 533 declared Justinian's intent to restore Hilderic to the throne.²³

The Romans' swift success in that invasion has often been remarked upon. The Roman expeditionary force was dispatched in June 533, resupplying in Ostrogothic Sicily with the consent of Queen Amalasuintha.²⁴ The Romans feared destruction at sea by the Vandals before they could make landfall, as happened in the disastrous expedition of 468.²⁵ In September, having learned Gelimer was abroad, they made the crossing. Landing unhindered, Belisarius routed the Vandal army at Ad Decimum on 13 September and then captured Carthage.²⁶ On 15 December he inflicted a second defeat on the Vandals at Tricamarum.²⁷ This caused Gelimer to retreat to the highlands to take refuge amongst the Moors.²⁸ He lasted there until the spring of 534, but in May surrendered to the Romans and was then transported as a captive to Constantinople.²⁹ The rapid success has often been explained by tactical considerations.³⁰ This section demonstrates the conditions for victory were created through the strategic use of money.

21 Williams, 'The African Policy of Justinian', p. 81, n. 350

22 PLRE III, 'Gelimer', pp. 506–08.

23 Merrills and Miles, *The Vandals*, pp. 59–60.

24 Procop., *BV*, III. 12. 1. I follow Williams in reading this as the summer equinox, see Williams, 'The African Policy of Justinian', p. 30, n. 33; contra the translation as 'spring equinox' (i.e. March) in Anthony Kaldellis (ed.), *The Wars of Justinian / Prokopios* (Indianapolis, 2014).

25 Michael Whitby, *The Wars of Justinian* (Pen & Sword, 2021), p. 174.

26 BAtlas, Map 32 F3, 'Carthago'; BAtlas, Map 32 F3, 'Ad Decimum?'

27 Procop., *BV*, IV. 2. 1–4. 41.

28 Procop., *BV*, IV. 5. 26–27.

29 Procop., *BV*, III. 19.

30 'So in large measure, the Vandals' defeat comes down to the fact that they were caught fighting a sixth-century war with a fifth-century army,' in the view of Peter Heather, *Rome Resurgent: War and Empire in the Age of Justinian* (Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 146.

The first factor was the position of the Moors. Procopius tells us that Gelimer twice sought aid from the Moors against Belisarius' invasion. His first request followed his defeat at Ad Decimum and was declined because the Moors favoured the Romans.³¹ However, when he fled to the highlands, he was protected for three months by friendly and allied Moors. Given the length and difficulty of Justinian's wars against the Moors over subsequent decades, Belisarius would have faced greater difficulty had the Moorish rulers united behind Gelimer in 533.

One immediate gain of the Vandal war was the capture of the Vandal treasury.³² Gelimer had a contingency plan to take asylum with Theudis, the Visigothic king of Spain.³³ Procopius wrote that Gelimer prepared a ship with the 'money' of 'the whole royal treasury', which he would share with Theudis.³⁴ After Gelimer fled to the Aurès, he never enacted this plan and the Romans seized the ship.

This first case study has shown several uses of money in the reconquest of Africa. The first was the subsidy to Persia which enabled the Roman military to reorientate towards the west. The second were the offers of money to Vandal royals, first Hilderic and then Gelimer, to attempt to win their loyalty. The third were the subsidies offered to the Moorish leaders. Finally, the capture of the Vandals' royal treasury gave the Romans an immediate gain from the conquest.

4.2. The Ostrogothic Kingdom of Italy

As with the Vandal Kingdom, the internal politics of Ostrogothic royal succession shaped Justinian's approach to the Ostrogothic Kingdom. His predecessor Justin had initiated a

31 Procop., *BV*, III. 25. 1.

32 Procop., *BV*, IV. 3. 25–27; Procop., *BV*, IV. 4. 4–41

33 PLRE II, 'Theudis', pp. 1111–12.

34 Procop., *BV*, IV. 4. 34–41: τὰ χρήματα [...] ἅπαντα τὸν βασιλικὸν πλοῦτον.

détente with King Theoderic by recognising his heir Eutharic.³⁵ Justin and Eutharic shared the consulship in 519 and the emperor then ‘adopted him by arms’.³⁶ After Eutharic’s untimely death in the early 520s, however, Justin seems to have withheld the same endorsement from the infant Athalaric.³⁷ Justin did not resolve the impasse with Theoderic and upon the latter’s death in 526, his infant son Athalaric and widow Amalasuintha became king and queen regent without the same endorsement Eutharic had received. This has been interpreted as ‘a calculated manoeuvre to help destabilize the situation at the Gothic court’.³⁸ This is not, however, overtly attested by the sources. The end result was that Justinian inherited a relationship with the Ostrogothic Kingdom that could be taken in several directions.

4.2.1. Justinian’s Early Policy: Friendship and Justice

One side of this ambiguity was how Justinian and the queen made expressions of ‘friendship’ (Lat. *amicitia*, Gk. *philia*). Procopius wrote that Amalasuintha ‘cultivated the friendship of Justinian very carefully’ after Theoderic’s death.³⁹ Later, she declared herself to be a ‘friend and ally’.⁴⁰ Cassiodorus’s state papers, prepared on behalf of the Ostrogothic rulers, further confirm this. He described Justinian as an ‘allied prince’ (*socialis princeps*).⁴¹ Multiple ‘Gothic’ sources further attest to Justinian taking Athalaric and Amalasuintha under his formal protection (*commendatio*). Jordanes, who consulted Cassiodorus’ lost *Gothic History*,

35 PLRE II, ‘Eutharicus Cilliga’, p. 438.

36 Cassiod. *Var.*, VIII. 1. 3

37 Cassiod. *Var.*, VIII. 1. 3

38 Heather, *Rome Resurgent*, pp. 156–57; cf. Peter Heather, *The Restoration of Rome: Barbarian Popes and Imperial Pretenders* (Macmillan, 2014), pp. 87–102.

39 Procop., *BV*, III. 14. 6

40 Procop., *BG*, V. 4. 23.

41 Cassiod. *Var.*, XI. 1. 11; see also *Liber Pontificalis*, LIX. 2; Shane M. Bjornlie, *The Variae: The Complete Translation* (University of California Press, 2019), p. 426, doi:10.2307/j.ctvnwc0pv.



FIG. 4.2. Map of Ostrogothic Italy

wrote that: ‘as Athalaric grew up to the promise of youth, he put both his adolescence and his mother’s widowhood under the protection of the emperor of the East’.⁴² In his other work, he wrote that Amalasuintha ‘had previously put herself and her son under the protection of the Emperor Justinian’.⁴³ *Commendatio* is also attested in Cassiodorus and the *Liber Pontificalis*.⁴⁴ Massimiliano Vitiello has argued persuasively that we should take these

42 Jord., *Get.*, 305: dum ergo ad spem iuventutis Athalaricus accederet, tam suam adulescentiam quam matris viduitatem Orientis principi commendavit.

43 Jord., *Rom.*, 368: et quia dudum se suoque filio commendaverat principi Iustiniano, is mortem eius audiens doluit nec passus est inultum transire.

44 Cassiod. *Var.*, X. 32. 2; see also *Liber Pontificalis*, LX. 2: hoc indignatus domnus imperator Iustinianus Augustus, quia reginam sibi commendatam occidisset Theodatus, misit Vilisarium patricium cum exercitum, ut liberaret omnem Italia a captivitate Gothorum.

accounts seriously.⁴⁵ Therefore not only was Justinian bound to Amalasuintha by a declared friendship, but a morally-binding declaration of protection.

On the other hand, Justinian tested the strength and will of the Ostrogoths to defend their possessions. Between 527 and 533 Justinian's Gepid allies attacked the city of Sirmium in Illyria but failed to dislodge the Ostrogoths.⁴⁶ Another example was the city of Lilybaeum in Sicily.⁴⁷ This city had been part of Ostrogothic Italy before being lost to the Vandals. When Belisarius was fighting the war in Africa, the Ostrogoths recaptured Lilybaeum. Belisarius asserted it was Justinian's by virtue of his conquest of the Vandals and threatened to seize it. This diplomatic incident was ongoing until the Gothic War.⁴⁸

These early tests laid the groundwork for a three-pronged strategy of envelopment when Justinian declared war. Belisarius invaded Sicily, while the *magister militum* Mundo led a Roman army reinforced by Gepids and Heruls into Illyria, and the Franks attacked Provence.⁴⁹ These latter campaigns will be discussed in Chapter Five. When Belisarius took full control of Sicily with the capture of Syracuse on 31 December 535, Theodahad was tempted to surrender.⁵⁰ This would have been a victory almost as swift as that in Africa.

The Ostrogothic king met Justinian's ambassador, Peter the Patrician.⁵¹ They drafted a written agreement that Sicily would be annexed by the Romans, the Ostrogoths would contribute 3000 soldiers on demand, and the Ostrogoths would send Justinian 'every year a golden crown weighing three hundred *librae*'.⁵² This was equivalent to nearly 10,000 *solidi*. To complicate negotiations, however, Peter agreed with Theodahad that he would bear a

45 Massimiliano Vitiello, *Amalasuintha: The Transformation of Queenship in the Post-Roman World* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), pp. 79–88, doi:10.9783/9780812294347.

46 Mod. Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia; see BATlas, Map 21 B5, 'Sirmium'. This incident is discussed in full in Chapter Five.

47 Mod. Marsala, Italy; see BATlas, Map 47 A3, 'Lilybaeum'.

48 Procop., *BV*, IV. 5. 11–25; Procop., *BG*, v. 3. 15–27

49 PLRE III, 'Mundo', pp. 903–05.

50 Procop., *BG*, v. 6.

51 PLRE III, 'Petrus 6', pp. 994–98; Dariusz Brodka, 'Procopius of Caesarea, Peter the Patrician, and the Outbreak of the Gothic War', *Mnemosyne*, 77.2 (2023), pp. 314–334, doi:10.1163/1568525x-bja10199

52 Procop., *BG*, v. 6. 2: πέμψει δὲ αὐτῷ στέφανον χρυσοῦν ἀνὰ πᾶν ἔτος κατὰ τριακοσίας ἑλκοντα λίτρας.

second letter. This contained an offer to retire and surrender his kingdom if the first proposal was not accepted.⁵³ Justinian declined the first offer and accepted the second. He sent word to Belisarius to travel to the mainland to assume control from Theodahad. Meanwhile Peter and Athanasius were sent as ambassadors to the king to draw up a formal agreement and receive oaths.⁵⁴

This is an alternate way of using wealth to conduct diplomacy: Theodahad was offered lands from the royal estate to fund his exile.⁵⁵ In the meantime, however, Theodahad had learned of the death of Mundo and, encouraged by his army's greater success in Illyricum, resolved to keep fighting.⁵⁶ When Peter and Athanasius reached Theodahad, probably in mid-536, they were placed under arrest.⁵⁷ By the end of the year, however, the Romans had once again gained the military upper hand, and when Belisarius captured Naples in November, the Ostrogothic army ousted and killed Theodahad.⁵⁸

The army then moved to elect a leader from outside the Amal family, the general Vitigis.⁵⁹ Vitigis came to power promising to prosecute and win the war. The letter announcing his accession declared that 'our Gothic kinsmen have conferred on us the royal dignity in the ancestral fashion, by being elevated on a shield among the swords of soldiers'. In contrast to Theodahad, who engaged in the 'refined exchanges of flattering courtiers', Vitigis promised to be a war leader.⁶⁰ In this he initially enjoyed success, resisting the Roman advance and pinning Belisarius down in a year-long siege of Rome. There were no attempts at negotiations in his first year.

53 Procop., *BG*, v. 6. 11–21.

54 PLRE III, 'Athanasius 1', pp. 142–43; Procop., *BG*, vi. 29. 1–3.

55 Procop., *BG*, v. 6. 26.

56 Procop., *BG*, v. 6. 11.

57 Procop., *BG*, v. 7. 11–25.

58 Procop., *BG*, vi. 11. 5; Marcell. com., a. 536; Jord., *Get.*, 309–10.

59 PLRE III, 'Vitigis', pp. 1382–84

60 Cassiod. *Var.*, x. 32. 1–2

By the end of 537, however, Vitigis lost confidence in the siege of Rome and made a serious peace offer. In December 537, the Ostrogoths came forward to request a peace treaty: alongside other proposals, the Ostrogoths offered ‘the payment of a fixed sum of money every year’.⁶¹ Belisarius and Vitigis agreed a three-month truce to allow an Ostrogothic delegation to travel to Constantinople.⁶² Documents relating to this period are preserved in Cassiodorus’s *Variae*. The first is a plea from Vitigis for peace.⁶³ The second is a letter of introduction to the *magister officiorum* at Constantinople requesting an imperial audience for his legates.⁶⁴ Further letters requested safe passage from bishops and the prefect of Thessalonica, respectively.⁶⁵ During the three months, however, skirmishes between the two sides led to a resumption of conflict.

Vitigis lifted the siege of Rome, which allowed Belisarius to meet the *magister militum* Narses and a fresh army.⁶⁶ Together they pushed Vitigis northwards to his capital of Ravenna, where they besieged him over the winter of 539/40. During that siege the embassy of Domnicus and Maximinos arrived with a letter from Justinian.⁶⁷ This letter proposed that ‘Vitigis was to receive half of the royal treasury and to rule over the territory that is north of the river Po’.⁶⁸ In return, Justinian would take the other half of the treasury and ‘make subject and tributary to himself all that lay south of the Po’.⁶⁹ This is usually interpreted as meaning the Romans would reoccupy Italy south of the Po, leaving the Ostrogoths to rule to the north. Marco Cristini has recently argued that ‘subject and tributary’ is a mistranslation, the text

61 Procop., *BG*, VI. 6. 31: τὰς ξυνθήκας [...] χρήματα ῥητὰ φέρειν βασιλεῖ ἐφ’ ἕκαστον ἔτος ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς τάξωμεν.

62 Procop., *BG*, VI. 6. 33: ἐκεχειρίαν.

63 Cassiod. *Var.*, X. 32.

64 Cassiod. *Var.*, X. 33.

65 Cassiod. *Var.*, X. 34; Cassiod. *Var.*, X. 35.

66 PLRE III, ‘Narses 1’, pp. 912–28; see also the book-length biography by Dariusz Brodka, *Narses: Politik, Krieg und Historiographie im 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Peter Lang, 2018), doi:10.3726/b14557.

67 PLRE III, ‘Fl. Domnicus 3’, pp. 415–16; PLRE III, ‘Maximinus 2’, pp. 865–66.

68 Procop., *BG*, VI. 29. 1–3: Οὐίτιγιν μὲν πλούτου τὸ ἡμισυ τοῦ βασιλικοῦ φέρεσθαι, χώρας τε ἄρχειν ἢ ἐκτὸς Πάδου ποταμοῦ ἐστὶ.

69 Procop., *BG*, VI. 29. 1–3: τῶν δὲ δὴ χρημάτων τὸ ἡμισυ βασιλέως εἶναι, καὶ αὐτὸν ὅσα ἐντὸς Πάδου ποταμοῦ ἐστὶν ὑπήκοα ἐς ἀπαγωγὴν φόρου ποιήσασθαι.

really meaning ‘subject to bringing tribute’.⁷⁰ Hence the offer was for Vitigis to retain full sovereignty over the north but share sovereignty with Justinian in the south, with Justinian claiming tax revenues from the latter.⁷¹ This hypothesis is unlikely: it does not seem plausible that Justinian would surrender control of the city of Rome in return for future payments.

Vitigis was willing to accept this agreement, but Belisarius felt total victory was within reach.⁷² Procopius narrates how Belisarius deceived the Ostrogoths into believing he would break from Justinian and declare himself emperor, only to arrest Vitigis upon his entry into the city. He then took the king and the entire royal treasury back to Constantinople.⁷³ This brought the first phase of the war to an end with the formal victory of the Romans over the Ostrogothic kingdom.

4.2.2. Justinian’s Later Policy: ‘Hating the Gothic name’⁷⁴

Belisarius’s decision to seize Vitigis rather than agree a treaty had fateful consequences. Had he agreed the treaty, the war in Italy would have been concluded and a buffer would have been created against further Frankish incursions. Instead, the Romans remained in a state of war with numerous Ostrogothic lords in northern Italy. The remaining Ostrogoths elected Ildibad, lord of Verona, as their new king.⁷⁵ Ildibad apparently believed that Belisarius could be persuaded to become western emperor and sent envoys to him.⁷⁶ The proposal was flatly refused and Belisarius left for Constantinople in December 540. Ildibad then set about uniting the remaining Ostrogoths. It began promisingly: he defeated the Roman commander Vitalius

70 The Greek phrase in question is: ὑπήκοα ἐς ἀπαγωγὴν φόρου, from Procop., *BG*, VI. 29. 1–3; see Marco Cristini, ‘Justinian, Vitiges and the Peace Treaty of 540’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 114.3 (2021), pp. 1001–12 (p. 1002).

71 Cristini, ‘Justinian, Vitiges and the Peace Treaty of 540’, p. 1005.

72 Procop., *BG*, VI. 29. 4–16.

73 Procop., *BG*, VI. 30. 2.

74 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 24. 3–5: ἀλλὰ βασιλεὺς μάθησιν οὐδεμίαν τῶν λεγομένων ποιούμενος τοὺς πρέσβεις ἅπαντας ἀπεπέμπετο, πρὸς τὸ Γότθων ὄνομα χαλεπῶς ἔχων, ἄρδην τε αὐτὸ τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς ἐξελάσαι διανοούμενος.

75 PLRE III, ‘Ildebadus’, pp. 614–15.

76 Procop., *BG*, VI. 30. 25–30; PLRE III, ‘Vitalius 1’, pp. 1380–81; Treviso (anc. Tarvisium), see *BAtlas*, Map 40 C1, ‘Tarvisium’.



FIG. 4.3. Map of Northern Italy

at Treviso in Venetia.⁷⁷ In the summer of 541, however, Ildibad was killed in a blood feud.⁷⁸ This combination of military success and political instability would continue to characterise the Ostrogothic resistance for the next decade.

The Rugi, a tribe within the Ostrogothic coalition, declared their leader Erarich to be king.⁷⁹ In Erarich's five-month reign, Procopius says he 'called all the Goths together and persuaded them to send envoys to the emperor Justinian to beg him to make peace with them on the same terms on which he had previously been willing to conclude a treaty with Vitigis'.⁸⁰ Once again, however, Procopius claims that Erarich wanted to make a secret offer to surrender Italy in return for asylum, money and a title.⁸¹ While the embassy, led by

77 Procop., *BG*, VII. 1. 25–39.

78 Procop., *BG*, VII. 1. 37–49.

79 Procop., *BG*, VII. 2. 1–6; PLRE III, 'Erarichus', pp. 447–48.

80 Procop., *BG*, VII. 2. 15: Ἐράριχος δὲ Γότθους ἅπαντας συγκαλέσας πρέσβεις ἀνέπεισε πρὸς Ἰουστινιανὸν βασιλέα πέμψαι, δεησομένους ἐφ' ᾧ εἰρήνην πρὸς αὐτοὺς θήσεται, ἐφ' οἷσπερ Οὐιτιγίδι τὰ πρότερα σπένδεσθαι ἤθελεν ὥστε τὰ ἐκτὸς Πάδου ποταμοῦ Γότθους ἔχοντας ἀπαλλάσσεσθαι Ἰταλίας τῆς ἄλλης.

81 Procop., *BG*, VII. 2. 17.

Caballarius, was travelling to Constantinople, Erarich was overthrown by the nephew of Ildibad, Totila, in late 541.⁸² Unlike Erarich, Totila wanted to oust the Romans by force.

Totila led a spirited resurgence in Ostrogothic fortunes and by 546 he had taken most of the Italian peninsula.⁸³ After capturing the city of Rome he began diplomatic initiatives, sending ambassadors to Justinian in 546. His letter to the emperor called him ‘father’ and promised that he would have the Ostrogoths ‘as allies against whomever you want’ in return for peace.⁸⁴ Justinian refused to discuss this offer, informing the ambassadors that Belisarius had full competence to negotiate, reversing his earlier position in order to rebuke Totila.⁸⁵ If Totila’s strategy was, as Peter Heather says, to use the capture of Rome ‘not an overture to total victory but a means to bring Justinian to the negotiating table’, then it failed.⁸⁶ In 547 he sent as an ambassador the bishop of Assisi, Aventius, with no further success.⁸⁷ This did not stop Totila trying again in 550, when he sent ‘a Roman named Stephanus’.⁸⁸ Again, he requested the emperor make a treaty, ‘the terms being that they would fight as his allies against his other enemies’. Justinian refused to meet Stephanus.⁸⁹ Over many years Totila had thus sought to negotiate.

82 Procop., *BG*, VII. 3. 7–18; PLRE III, ‘Caballarius’, p. 257; PLRE III, ‘Totila’, pp. 1328–32.

83 For the narrative, see J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire: From the Death of Theodosius I to the Death of Justinian* 2 vols (Macmillan, 1923), II, pp. 229–44.

84 Procop., *BG*, VII. 21. 22–24: ὧν δὲ ἕνεκα τοὺς πρέσβεις ἀπέσταλκα τούσδε αὐτίκα εἶσι. αἰτούμεθα τὰ ἐκ τῆς εἰρήνης καλὰ σέ τε προσίεσθαι αὐτὸν καὶ ἡμῖν συγχαρεῖν. ὥνπερ μνημεῖά τε καὶ παραδείγματα κάλλιστα ἔχομεν Ἀναστάσιόν τε καὶ Θεοδέρικον, οἱ βεβασιλεύκασι μὲν οὐ πολλῷ πρότερον, εἰρήνης δὲ καὶ ἀγαθῶν πραγμάτων ἅπαντα ἐνεπλήσαντο τὸν κατ’ αὐτοὺς χρόνον. ἦν γάρ σοι ταῦτά ποτε βουλομένῳ εἶη, πατήρ τε ἂν ἐμὸς εἰκότως καλοῖο καὶ συμμαχοὺς ἡμᾶς ἐφ’ οὓς ἂν βούλοιο τὸ λοιπὸν ἔξει.

85 Procop., *BG*, VII. 21. 25.

86 Heather, *Rome Resurgent*, p. 261.

87 Marcell. com., a. 547; *PCBE* II, ‘Aventius 1001’, p. 220; Assisi (anc. Asisium - cf. civitas Asisinatium in Marc. Comes), see *BAtlas*, Map 42 D2 ‘Asisium’; discussed Brian Croke, *The Chronicle of Marcellinus: A Translation and Commentary* (Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1995), p. 137.

88 Procop., *BG*, VII. 37. 6: Στέφανόν τε ἄνδρα Ῥωμαῖον παρὰ βασιλέα πρεσβευτὴν ἔπεμψε, τὸν μὲν πόλεμον τόνδε καταλύειν αἰτῶν, ἐνσπόνδους δὲ Γότθους ποιῆσθαι, ἐφ’ ᾧ δὴ αὐτῷ συμμαχήσουσιν ἐπὶ πολεμίους τοὺς ἄλλους ἰόντι; see PLRE III, ‘Stephanus 11’, p. 1186.

89 Procop., *BG*, VII. 37. 7: βασιλεὺς δὲ Ἰουστινιανὸς οὔτε τὸν πρεσβευτὴν οἱ ἐς ὧσιν ἐλθεῖν συνεχώρησεν οὔτε τινὰ τῶν λεγομένων ἐντροπὴν τὸ παράπαν πεποιήται.

Justinian's refusal to engage is similar to his stance towards Kavādh, discussed in Chapter One. Unlike his war with Kavādh, however, Justinian's hopes for military success were fulfilled. In July or August of 552, Narses routed the Ostrogoths at the Battle of Busta Gallorum and killed Totila.⁹⁰ The remaining Ostrogoths briefly raised one of Totila's generals, Theia, as king.⁹¹ He too was killed in battle, at Mons Lactarius in October 552.⁹² In 554, Justinian felt able to publish his 'Pragmatic Sanction' normalizing administration in Italy, from which this chapter takes its title.⁹³

The case of the Ostrogoths has confirmed several patterns from Vandal Africa, but also additional dynamics. Firstly, Justinian tried to secure the defection of Ostrogothic royals using money to give him a legitimate claim to Italy. When this failed, he instituted payments to the Franks and called on his longstanding allies the Gepids to invade Italy. Thirdly, in contrast to the disappearance of the Vandals as a political force after the surrender of Gelimer, a series of Ostrogoths were declared king after 540 and tried to negotiate. These leaders consistently proposed to pay a tribute to Justinian in exchange for maintaining a vestigial kingdom in the lands north of the River Po. Justinian had been willing to accept this proposal from Vitigis to end the war in 540. That he refused to even meet with the later ambassadors shows how he shifted to an absolute position.

4.3. The Visigothic Kingdom of Spain

This third case study is our shortest, because there is no attested use of foreign payments in Justinian's invasion of the Iberian Peninsula and establishment of the province of Hispania. It is, however, useful to briefly discuss the factors that might explain this absence. The most

90 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 116.

91 PLRE III, 'Theia', p. 1224.

92 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 35. 20–31.

93 Just. *Nov. App.*, VII. 5.

basic facts and chronology of Justinianic Spain remain contested. The reason for such divergent interpretations is the paucity of sources. Procopius makes only a few scattered references to Spain in the context of the African and Italian campaigns. His last word on Spain still names the king as Theudis (531–48).⁹⁴ If Procopius' final volume of the *Wars* can be securely dated to 552 and we assume he would definitely have written about such a campaign, this would provide a cut-off date. Jordanes does report the Spanish expedition, however, and was writing at a similar time.⁹⁵

The minimalist position is that Justinian's army secured a handful of coastal enclaves with no intention of further expansion.⁹⁶ Maximalist positions include the claim that a full frontier system was established within the Spanish interior.⁹⁷ Similarly, it has been argued that a treaty was agreed between Justinian and the Visigoths securing his possessions.⁹⁸ There have been recent attempts to develop a median position: acknowledging the evidence that Hispania extended inland, while expressing scepticism about the maximalist claims.⁹⁹

The circumstances of Justinian's intervention were similar to Africa and Italy. In the late 540s the Visigothic kingdom underwent a series of assassinations. Theudis was killed by Theudegisel in 548. Theudegisel became king, only to be killed and replaced by Agila in

94 Procop., *BG*, v. 12. 50–54; PLRE II, 'Theudis', pp. 1111–12.

95 Jord., *Get.*, 302–03: non minore trofeo de Francis per Ibbam, suum comitem, in Galliis adquisivit plus triginta milia Francorum in proelio caesa. Nam et Thiudem suum armigerum post mortem Alarici generi tutorem in Spaniae regno Amalarici nepotis constituit. qui Amalaricus in ipsa adulescentia Francorum fraudibus inretitus regnum cum vita amisit. post quem Thiudis tutor eodem regno ipse invadens, Francorum insidiosam calumniam de Spaniis pepulit, et usque dum viveret, Vesegothas contenuit. post quem Thiudigisglosa regnum adeptus, non diu regnans defecit occisus a suis. cui succedens hactenus Agil continet regnum. contra quem Atanagildus insurgens Romani regni concitat vires, ubi et Liberius patricius cum exercitu destinatur. nec fuit in parte occidua gens, quae Theodorico, dum adviveret, aut amicitia aut subiectione non deserviret. Note that *Thiudigisglosa* is interpreted as *Theudegisel*, see PLRE III, 'Theudegiselus', p. 1234.

96 Gisela Ripoll López, 'On the Supposed Frontier between the Regnum Visigothorum and Byzantine Hispania', in *The Transformation of Frontiers From Late Antiquity to the Carolingians*, ed. by Walter Pohl, Ian N. Wood, and Helmut Reimitz (Brill, 2001), pp. 95–115, doi:10.1163/9789004476394_008.

97 Jamie Wood, 'Defending Byzantine Spain: Frontiers and Diplomacy', *Early Medieval Europe*, 18.3 (2010), pp. 292–319.

98 Margarita Vallejo Girvés, 'The Treaties Between Justinian and Athanagild and the Legality of the Byzantine Possessions on the Iberian Peninsula', *Byzantion*, 66.1 (1996), pp. 208–18.

99 Jason Fosella, "'Waiting only for a pretext": A New Chronology for the Sixth-century Byzantine Invasion of Spain', *Estudios bizantinos*, 1 (2013), pp. 30–38.

549.¹⁰⁰ In 551 Athanagild declared himself king and sent to Justinian for support. The emperor dispatched a Roman army under the leadership of Liberius in 552.¹⁰¹ This account is confirmed by later Visigothic sources, with added nuance. Isidore of Seville says that Athanagild did request Roman support for his coup. Once he became king, however, he tried to oust the Romans from Spain.¹⁰²

Justinianic Spain is generally agreed to have been limited, although the exact extent is disputed. What we can say for certain is that it was an incomplete ‘reconquest’ compared to Italy and Africa. Why was this the case? It is worth considering the absence of subsidies. This can be explained by two factors. The first is that even a hostile source like Isidore admits that the Romans intervened on the invitation of the Visigothic claimant to the throne, Athanagild. Unlike Africa and Italy, there was no need to offer money to royalty to gain legitimate grounds to intervene.

The second difference between the Visigoths and the Vandals or Ostrogoths was the lack of a meaningful third force. It is not that the Visigoths were the sole power on the Iberian Peninsula: the Sueves had formed a kingdom in modern Galicia.¹⁰³ The East Roman sources show little knowledge or interest in the Sueves, however. It has been argued by Luis García Moreno that Justinian encouraged the Franks to intervene in 541.¹⁰⁴ This incident is only attested by Isidore of Seville, writing in the later sixth or early seventh centuries.¹⁰⁵ He reported that the Franks did attack the Visigoths, only to be defeated by the future king

100 PLRE III, ‘Theudegiselus’, p. 1234; PLRE III, ‘Agila’, pp. 26–27.

101 PLRE III, ‘Athanagildus 1’, pp. 140–41; PLRE II, ‘Liberius 3’, pp. 677–81.

102 Isidore of Seville, *Historia*, XLVI–XLVII.

103 A. Barbero and M. I. Loring, ‘The Formation of the Sueve and Visigothic Kingdoms in Spain’, in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, ed. by Paul Fouracre (Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 162–92, doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521362917.009.

104 Luis A. García Moreno, ‘The Creation of Byzantium’s Spanish Province: Causes and Propaganda’, *Byzantion*, 66.1 (1996), pp. 101–19 (pp. 101–19).

105 Graham Barrett and Faith Wallis, ‘Isidore of Seville’, in ODLA, pp. 790–92.

Theudegisel, who obliged them to ‘pay huge amounts of money’ as compensation.¹⁰⁶ Moreno’s argument is that this event was ‘contemporary to Byzantine petitions to the Merovingian kings to attack the Ostrogoths in Italy from the north’.¹⁰⁷ Yet this interpretation is a stretch: as shall be discussed in Chapter Five, Justinian’s alliance with the Franks had already broken down by 541. It might be speculated that the Spanish expedition was connected with Theudebert’s retreat from Italy, but the sources are too fragmented to draw this link securely. In summary, then, Visigothic Spain was distinct from the rest of the Western Mediterranean in lacking neighbours that Justinian could involve in his wars.

4.4. Conclusion

Subsidies to Persia were traditionally understood as the key to Justinian’s ‘reconquest’ of the Western Mediterranean. This chapter has argued for the importance of payments within the region itself, although Justinian’s policy changed over time. He never offered state-to-state subsidies, because of the Roman ideology that the barbarian reges held conditional sovereignty within Roman land. Instead, he used direct payments and offers to befriend Vandal and Ostrogothic royals and, later, to encourage their defection. The lightning conquest of Africa and the offer of a pension to Gelimer drew a line under the Vandal Kingdom. The conquest of Italy was incomplete by 540; but by capturing the king, capital and treasury, Justinian had a strong claim to legitimacy.

The case of Visigothic Spain provided a valuable comparison. In some respects, it followed the same pattern as Africa and Italy. In all three cases Justinian used a succession

106 Isidore of Seville, *Historia*, XLI: dum Francorum reges cum infinitis copiis in Hispaniam convenissent, et Tarraconensem provinciam bello depopularent, Gothi, duce Theudisclo, obicibus Hispaniae interclusis, Francorum exercitum multa cum admiratione victoriae prostraverunt. Dux idem, prece atque ingenti pecunia sibi oblata, viam fugae hostibus residuis unius diei noctisque spatio prae-buit. Caetera infelicium turba, cui transitus collati temporis non occurrit, Gothorum perempta gladio concidit.

107 Moreno, ‘The Creation of Byzantium’s Spanish Province’, pp. 101–19.

dispute as lawful grounds for war. He sought to win over factions of the Visigothic elite but then moved to establish Roman territories. With the caveat that our sources are few, there is no evidence that any subsidies were employed. This negative case clarifies the circumstances in which money was used. A 'pincer movement' was achieved in Africa and Italy by supplying money to ethnically-distinct third parties: the Moors, Franks and Gepids. There was no such group on the eastern coast of Spain. In contrast, the Visigothic nobles who had invited Justinian's forces into the kingdom changed their position and consolidated with their opponents to present a united front. This was a very different course of events to Gelimer and Vitigis eventually submitting and giving Justinian a claim to legitimate rule.

A further unique case was the Ostrogothic 'resistance' which formed in their heartland of the Po Valley. The series of kings who emerged from this region made constant attempts to end the war by offering to pay Justinian a tribute. Even Totila, who achieved dramatic military success, proposed to end the war on these terms. Had Justinian followed a rationalist strategy, we would expect him to have accepted this. The proposal allowed the Romans to claim the Ostrogoths as tributary subjects, while redeploying his armies to the ongoing wars in the Eastern, African and the Danubian theatres. Justinian's insistence on full reconquest is instructive. It demonstrates the complexity of how the emperor and his ministers calculated the price of empire.

Chapter Five: ‘Deluded by great promises’ Subsidies and the Post-Conquest West

For Justinian to dispatch a Roman army to North Africa might not seem remarkable. Yet why did the emperor dispatch an expedition in 563, almost three decades since the Vandal king Gelimer had been led in chains through the streets of Constantinople?¹ After the lightning victories of 533 and 534, Justinian had indeed destroyed the Vandal kingdom. The leaders of the Moors remained, however, and fought a series of wars until the late 540s. Peace was ultimately achieved through a political solution reminiscent of al-Ḥārith ibn Jabalah in Chapter Two. The Moorish leader Cusina, himself a former rebel, was elevated to a position where he was described as exarchos over all Moors.² As part of this arrangement, Cusina was accustomed to receiving ‘a certain quantity of gold’ from the Roman governor.³ Yet when Cusina arrived to claim that money in December 562, something went wrong. Cusina was slain by the Roman official he was meeting, John ‘Rogathinos’ (the red-headed). His sons immediately rose in revolt, and thus Justinian was obliged to send his nephew Marcian at the head of an expedition to restore control.

1 PLRE III, ‘Gelimer’, pp. 506–08. See above, Chapter Four.

2 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 145: καὶ τῷ αὐτῷ μηνὶ παρελήφθη μέρη τινὰ τῆς Ἀφρικῆς ὑπὸ τῶν Μαυριτανῶν· Κουτζίνης γὰρ ὁ ἑξαρχὸς τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἔθνους ἔθος εἶχε λαμβάνειν ἀπὸ Ῥωμαίων διὰ τοῦ κατὰ καιρὸν ἄρχοντος <τῆς Ἀφρικῆς> ποσὸν τι χρυσίον, ἐπειδὴ ἦρχεν τοῦ ἔθνους τῶν Μαύρων. καὶ κατελθόντος Ἰωάννου τοῦ ἐπικλῆν Ῥογαθινοῦ, καὶ μηδὲν αὐτῷ δεδωκότος κατὰ τὸ πρῶην ἔθος, ἀλλὰ τοῦναντίον καὶ δολοφονήσαντος αὐτόν, ἀνέστησαν τὰ τέκνα τοῦ αὐτοῦ Κουτζίνη, ἐκδικοῦντες τὸ πατρῶον αἷμα. καὶ ἐπαναστάντες τοῖς μέρεσι τῆς Ἀφρικῆς παρέλαβόν τινας τόπους φονεύσαντες καὶ πραιδεύσαντες. ὁ δὲ αὐτὸς βασιλεὺς Ἰουστινιανὸς ἔπεμψε Μαρκιανὸν τὸν ἴδιον αὐτοῦ ἀνεψιὸν καὶ στρατηλάτην, μετὰ ἐξερκέτου πρὸς τὸ εἰρηνεῦσαι τοὺς Μαύρους. καὶ προσερρύησαν αὐτῷ, καὶ εἰρήνευσεν ἡ Ἀφρικὴ; for a biography see PLRE III, ‘Cutzinas’, pp. 366–68.

3 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 145: ἔθος εἶχε λαμβάνειν ἀπὸ Ῥωμαίων διὰ τοῦ κατὰ καιρὸν ἄρχοντος <τῆς Ἀφρικῆς> ποσὸν τι χρυσίον.

The previous chapter showed how Justinian's 'reconquest' of the Western Mediterranean was underpinned by his use of money. The window of opportunity was set by the 'Eternal Peace' he bought from Persia and the tactical use of cash incentives to drive division among the enemy elite. One of the key factors was how Justinian won over third parties in both theatres to support his invasions. This chapter turns to the long-term consequences of that decision. In all three cases the Romans mishandled the relationships, and their erstwhile allies became difficult opponents. The first case is of the Moors in Africa.⁴ I argue that subsidies were crucial to winning the support of Moorish leaders during the initial invasion and maintaining it right through Justinian's reign. The emperor and his representatives, however, did not believe themselves bound by any agreements and attempted to assert absolute imperial discretion over payments. On three occasions subsidies were cancelled: in each case the decision led to revolts and ultimately required subsidies to be reinstituted.

In contrast, in our second case, it was Justinian and the Romans pleading that the receipt of money imposed moral obligations. He had given money to the Franks to secure their aid against the Ostrogothic kings. In the longer term, the decision of the Frankish kings

4 There is no perfect answer to the vexed question of an appropriate ethnonym for this people. Our sixth-century sources employ the Greek exonym *Μαυρός* and its Latin derivative *Mauri*. The connotations of 'Moor' in an Anglophone context have led some to reject its use: see Williams, 'The African Policy of Justinian', p. 28. Yet the alternate term 'Berber' is hardly unproblematic. An Arabic exonym derived from the Greek *βάρβαρος*, modern imperialism and post-imperial politics give controversial connotations in Francophone and Arabophobe contexts: Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, *The Berber Identity Movement and the Challenge to North African States* (University of Texas Press, 2011), pp. 2–3, doi:10.7560/725874. There is also the intellectual problem of whether the *Mauri* of our sources can indeed be identified with later Berbers: Ramzi Rouighi, 'The Berbers of the Arabs', *Studia Islamica*, 106.1 (2011), pp. 49–76 (pp. 49–76), doi:10.1163/19585705-12341252. Indeed, the idea of 'timeless Berbers' was a French colonial trope: Andy Merrills, *War, Rebellion and Epic in Byzantine North Africa: A Historical Study of Corippus' Iohannis* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 132–33, doi:10.1017/9781009392013. The modern people identify themselves with the endonym 'Imazighen', but as it was first attested in the 1940s, its use would risk the same problem: see Michael Brett and Elizabeth Fentress, *The Berbers* (Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 5–6. In contrast, epigraphic evidence attests to at least some people self-identifying as *Mauri* in Late Antiquity: discussed by Andy Merrills, 'The *Mauri* in Late Antiquity', in *A Companion to North Africa in Antiquity*, ed. by R. Bruce Hitchner (Wiley, 2022), pp. 317–31 (p. 319), doi:10.1002/9781119071754.ch18. Given these considerations, the Anglicised forms 'Moor' and 'Moorish' appear to me to be the best option.

to seize their own territory in Italy created complications that almost lost the region to the resurgent Ostrogoths of Totila. Finally, these two patterns combined in Illyria. There has been a tendency to consider Illyria as part of a Balkan or Danube frontier, but I argue it is best understood as a region of the ‘reconquered west’.⁵ Here, Justinian ended a longstanding and effective relationship with the Gepids because of a dispute over who would take the city of Sirmium. This decision led to a long struggle against the Gepids, only won by subsidising their Lombard rivals and, ultimately, accepting their possession of Sirmium.

5.1. The Moors in Africa

Immensely proud of his conquest of Africa, Justinian claimed the victory titles of *Vandalicus*, *Alanicus* and *Africanus* as early as December 533.⁶ Africa, he declared, was ‘returned to the dominion of Rome and our empire, by our victories gained through the favour of heaven’.⁷ The claim to have vanquished the *Africani* was especially presumptuous. The number of Moorish kings, extent of their territories and nature of their societies are all debated.⁸ There has long been debate about whether the Moors should be characterised as endogenous or exogenous to the collapsing Roman Empire.⁹ Justinian’s armies were to continue fighting

5 Favouring the framing of Frank Wozniak, ‘East Rome, Ravenna and Western Illyricum: 454–536 A.D.’, *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 30.3 (1981), pp. 351–82 (pp. 351–82); cf. Alexander Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars: Campaigning, Diplomacy and Development in Illyricum, Thrace and the Northern World, A.D. 527–65* (Francis Cairns, 2016).

6 Just. *Inst.*, ‘Proemium’, preface.

7 Just. *Inst.*, ‘Proemium’, 1: et bellicos quidem sudores nostros barbaricae gentes sub juga nostra deductae cognoscunt et tam Africa quam aliae innumeros ae provinciae post tanta temporum spatia nostris victoriis a caelesti numine praestitis iterum dicioni Romanae nostroque additae imperio protestantur.

8 See Andy Merrills, ‘Kingdoms of North Africa’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Attila*, ed. by Michael Maas (Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 264–81.

9 For the view of the Moors as breakaway Roman subjects (‘Ce qui la caractérise c’est d’être rattachée à l’Empire du point de vue de la civilisation et d’en être politiquement dissociée’), see Christian Courtois, *Les Vandales et l’Afrique* (Arts et Métiers, 1955), p. 91. For a recent argument in favour of a migration hypothesis: Elizabeth Fentress and Andrew Wilson, ‘The Saharan Berber Diaspora and the Southern Frontiers of Byzantine North Africa’, in *North Africa under Byzantium and Early Islam*, ed. by Susan T. Stevens and Jonathan P. Conant (Harvard University Press, 2016), pp. 41–63. For a synthesis: Andy Merrills, ‘Invisible Men: Mobility and Political Change on the Frontier of Late Roman Africa’, *Early Medieval Europe*, 26.3 (2018), pp. 366–90, doi:10.1111/emed.12280.



FIG. 5.1. Map of Africa after Justinian's Reconquest

different polities of Moors until his final years. How did this come about? As so often, the explanations come down to 'decline' or 'fall'. On the one hand, historians blame internal Roman factors; this position has been put most forcefully by Miranda Williams in a series of works.¹⁰ On the other hand, there are historians who credit the Moors with outmatching the Romans and argue Justinian underestimated their strength; this argument has been advanced by Yves Modéran.¹¹

Preferring Modéran's interpretation, I shall argue that the conflict was driven by conflicting understandings by Moors and Romans of their relationship. While Justinian issued

10 Williams, 'The African Policy of Justinian', pp. 266–72; Miranda Williams, 'The Establishment of Roman Authority in Africa: Romans and Berbers in Procopius' Vandalic War', in *Le monde de Procope / The World of Procopius*, ed. by Sylvain Janniard and Gregory Greatrex (Éditions de Boccard, 2018), pp. (pp. 379–98); Miranda Williams, 'East Roman Client Management During the Reign of Justinian I: A Comparison of Strategies on the Eastern and African Frontiers', in *Mélanges James Howard-Johnston*, ed. by Phil Booth and Mary Whitby (Association des Amis du Centre d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance, 2022), pp. 209–30 (pp. 209–30).

11 Yves Modéran, *Les Maures et l'Afrique romaine (IVe–VIIe siècle)* (Publications de l'École française de Rome, 2013), doi:10.4000/books.efr.1395; cf. the section 'Die Verknennung der machtpolitischen Realitäten in Bezug auf die Mauren' in Konrad Vössing, 'Africa zwischen Vandalen, Mauren und Byzantinern (533–548 n.Chr.)', *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum*, 14.1 (2010), pp. 196–225 (pp. 205–08), doi:10.1515/zac.2010.10.

proclamations with a maximalist vision of reconquering Africa from Moorish ‘invaders’, Moorish leaders believed their status as client kings placed obligations on the Roman emperor, not least to give subsidies. In practice, the successful management of the relationship depended on whether Justinian’s representatives ‘on the ground’ were able to manage the Moorish rulers with tact; they often were not.

How did the Romans envisage the Moors? When they launched the invasion of the Vandal Kingdom Justinian and his advisers had been well-aware of the political and military strength of the Moors. Indeed, the travails of the Vandals against the Moors were part of the context considered when planning the invasion.¹² The invasion force had been prepared to fight the Moors: Procopius, who of course served in the campaign, reports the ‘despair’ of soldiers who had returned from the war with Persia, only to be asked to ‘risk their lives against Vandals and Moors’.¹³ Miranda Williams’s arguments are based on the premise that ‘throughout the *Wars*, Procopius’ treatment of the Berbers is unsophisticated’.¹⁴ This is too harsh on Procopius. In contrast Andy Merrills argues Procopius was ‘well aware’ of distinctions amongst Moorish society, but lacked the motivation that Corippus had as an African to expound the details.¹⁵

We should treat Procopius as giving the most we can expect of an intelligent Roman from outside the province: he combined deeply-ingrained anti-barbarian prejudice with a sharp observational eye and a desire to provide a ‘true account’. There are naturally occasions where his narrative resorts to classical tropes of barbarians, such as when he states that ‘among the Maurosioi there is neither fear of God nor respect for men’.¹⁶ When he offers the

12 Procop., *BV*, III. 8. 1–9.

13 Procop., *BV*, III. 10. 5.

14 Williams, ‘The Establishment of Roman Authority in Africa’, p. 385.

15 Andy Merrills, ‘Contested Identities in Byzantine North Africa’, in *The Routledge Handbook on Identity in Byzantium*, ed. by Michael Stewart, David Parnell, and Conor Whately (Routledge, 2022), pp. 181–97 (pp. 189–90), doi:10.4324/9780429031373-12.

16 Procop., *BV*, IV. 8. 10: ἔστι γὰρ ἐν Μαυρουσίοις οὔτε θεοῦ φόβος οὔτε ἀνθρώπων αἰδώς. μέλει γὰρ αὐτοῖς οὔτε ὄρκων οὔτε ὁμήρων, ἣν καὶ παῖδες ἢ ἀδελφοὶ τῶν ἐν σφίσιν ἡγουμένων τύχῳσιν ὄντες.

view that only ‘fear of the enemies opposing them’ could secure peace with the Moors, these are the bitter words of an old soldier who had risked his life fighting that enemy, not an armchair general consulting Strabo.¹⁷ He could also offer more positive views. He criticised the Vandals as ruined by luxurious living in contrast to the primitive hardiness of the Moors.¹⁸ Taken with other sources, I believe Procopius provides sufficient evidence to assess Justinian’s use of money in Africa.

5.1.1. The Moors during the Vandal War

Justinian’s approach to the Moors shifted as his objectives changed in his war with the Vandal Kingdom. During the invasion, Belisarius had received an embassy from the Moorish leaders who favoured the Roman invaders. The leaders in the coastal provinces declined Gelimer’s request for support and instead pledged themselves to Belisarius.¹⁹ This was helped by Belisarius giving them ‘much money’ and distributing the insignia of office they had traditionally received from Roman emperors and, latterly, Vandal kings.²⁰ Throughout the Vandal period, the Moorish leaders had continued to claim legitimacy in the idiom of Roman power.²¹ Procopius believed they knew themselves to be kingmakers, arguing their real policy was ‘standing to the side of both contestants, they waited to see what the fortune

17 Procop., *BV*, IV. 8. 11: οὐδὲ ἄλλω οὐδενὶ εἰρήνῃ ἐν Μαυρουσίοις, ὅτι μὴ τῶν πολεμίων τῶν κατ’ αὐτῶν δέει κρατύνεται.

18 Discussed by Merrills, ‘Contested Identities in Byzantine North Africa’, p. 190; Procop., *BV*, IV. 6. 10: ἐθνῶν γὰρ ἀπάντων ὧν ἡμεῖς ἴσμεν ἀβρότατον μὲν τὸ τῶν Βανδύλων, ταλαιπωρότατον δὲ τὸ Μαυρουσίων τετὶ χηκεν εἶναι.

19 Procop., *BV*, III. 25. 1–9.

20 Procop., *BV*, III. 25. 3–8: ὅσοι γὰρ ἐν τε Μαυριτανία καὶ Νουμιδία καὶ Βυζακίῳ Μαυρουσίων ἦρχον, πρέσβεις ὡς Βελισάριον πέμπαντες δοῦλοι τε βασιλέως ἔφασκον εἶναι καὶ ξυμμαχήσειν ὑπέσχοντο. εἰσὶ δὲ οἱ καὶ τοὺς παῖδας ἐν ὁμήρων παρείχοντο λόγῳ, τὰ τε ξύμβολα σφίσι παρ’ αὐτοῦ στέλλεσθαι τῆς ἀρχῆς κατὰ δὴ τὸν παλαιὸν νόμον ἐδέοντο. νόμος γὰρ ἦν Μαυρουσίων ἄρχειν μηδένα, κἂν Ῥωμαίοις πολέμιος ᾖ, πρὶν ἂν αὐτῷ τὰ γνωρίσματα τῆς ἀρχῆς ὁ Ῥωμαίων βασιλεὺς δοίῃ. ἅπερ ἤδη πρὸς Βανδύλων λαβόντες [...] Βελισάριος δὲ ταῦτα τε αὐτοῖς ἐπέμψε καὶ χρήμασι πολλοῖς αὐτῶν ἕκαστον ἐδωρήσατο.

21 For the continued use of Roman concepts of power, Jonathan Conant, *Staying Roman: Conquest and Identity in the Mediterranean 439–700* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 252–305, doi:10.1017/CBO9781139048101. For how this developed post-reconquest, see Andy Merrills, ‘The Men Who Would Be King: Moorish Political Hierarchies and Imperial Policy in Byzantine Africa’, *Al-Masāq*, 33.1 (2020), pp. 14–29, doi:10.1080/09503110.2020.1833575.

of war would bring' and backing the winning side.²² In the final part of the campaign over the winter of 533/4, Romans forces did battle with the Moors of Numidia who harboured Gelimer in their mountain fortresses.²³ Yet even before Gelimer had been taken to Constantinople in chains, Justinian had begun to reformulate his African policy. Historians continue to debate the level of ambition behind the invasion of 533 and recent scholarship has favoured a minimalist interpretation.²⁴ Yet it is impossible to disagree with Procopius's judgement that the speed of the expedition's success exceeded all expectations.

Justinian's claims in the wake of the conquest created problems for the relationship with the Moors. When he established governance arrangements for Africa in April 534, Justinian declared the Romans would 'extend the boundaries of the provinces of Africa to that point where the Roman Empire had its limits before the invasion of the Vandals and the Moors, and where the ancient guards were posted'.²⁵ Procopius echoes this with his statement that Justinian had 'overthrown the kingdom of the Vandals and subjugated the Maurousioi'.²⁶ These statements erased the status the Moorish rulers believed they had achieved. When they had agreed treaties with Belisarius in the autumn of 533, they had declared themselves to be 'slaves of the emperor'. In return, they believed the emperor endorsed their status and that they could expect subsidies to continue.²⁷

In the course of Belisarius's invasion, he had received an embassy from Moorish leaders. This was between the Battle of Ad Decimum (13 September 533) and before the Battle of Tricamarum (15 December 533).²⁸ Procopius, who was of course serving Belisarius

22 Procop., *BV*, III. 25. 9.

23 Procop., *BV*, IV. 4. 21–26.

24 Lillington-Martin, 'Procopius, πάρεδρος / quaestor, Codex Justinianus, 1.27 and Belisarius' strategy in the Mediterranean', p. 157; cf. Williams, 'The African Policy of Justinian', p. 116.

25 Just. *Cod. Iust.*, XXVII. 2. 4: usque ad illos fines provincias Africanas extendere, ubi ante invasionem Vandalorum et Maurorum res publica Romana habuerat et ubi custodes antiqui servabant.

26 Procop., *BP*, II. 2. 8: Βανδύλων μὲν οὖν ἤδη καθελὼν τὴν βασιλείαν καὶ Μαυρουσίους καταστρεφάμενος.

27 Procop., *BV*, III. 25. 3–4: ὅσοι γὰρ ἐν τε Μαυριτανίᾳ καὶ Νουμιδίᾳ καὶ Βυζακίᾳ Μαυρουσίῳν ἦρχον, πρέσβεις ὡς Βελισάριον πέμπαντες δοῦλοί τε βασιλέως ἔφασκον εἶναι καὶ ξυμμαχήσειν ὑπέσχοντο.

28 Williams, 'The African Policy of Justinian', p. 180.

as his legal secretary, reports that ‘all those who ruled over the Moors in Mauretania, Numidia and Byzacium sent envoys to Belisarius saying that they were slaves of the emperor and promised to fight with him’. Some ‘surrendered their children as hostages and requested that the insignia of office be sent to them according to the ancient custom’; Belisarius obliged and also gave ‘much money’.²⁹ Elsewhere Procopius confirms these were *spondai*, written treaties sworn with oaths.³⁰

From Procopius’ later narrative, we can reconstruct that the leaders included Cusina, Esdilasas, Iourphouthes, Medisinissas, and Antalas.³¹ These leaders are later identified with the province of Byzacena.³² It has sometimes been argued that Moorish kings in Mauretania also sent an embassy; this is unlikely given Procopius later describes them as not being Roman subjects.³³ Procopius’ complaint that the chieftains offered no meaningful support to Belisarius is beside the point.³⁴ In preparing for that battle, we are told Gelimer also offered the Moors an alliance but was turned down.³⁵ Although we cannot say for sure that the Moors joining Gelimer would have turned the tide of the war, their support was definitely a

- 29 Procop., *BV*, III. 25. 3–8: ὅσοι γὰρ ἐν τε Μαυριτανία καὶ Νουμιδία καὶ Βυζακίῳ Μαυρουσίων ἦρχον, πρέσβεις ὡς Βελισάριον πέμπαντες δοῦλοί τε βασιλέως ἔφασκον εἶναι καὶ ξυμμαχήσειν ὑπέσχοντο. εἰσὶ δὲ οἱ καὶ τοὺς παῖδας ἐν ὁμήρων παρείχοντο λόγῳ, τὰ τε ξύμβολα σφίσι παρ’ αὐτοῦ στέλλεσθαι τῆς ἀρχῆς κατὰ δὴ τὸν παλαιὸν νόμον ἐδέοντο. νόμος γὰρ ἦν Μαυρουσίων ἄρχειν μηδένα, κἂν Ῥωμαίοις πολέμιος ᾗ, πρὶν ἂν αὐτῷ τὰ γνωρίσματα τῆς ἀρχῆς ὁ Ῥωμαίων βασιλεὺς δοίη. ἅπερ ἤδη πρὸς Βανδύλων λαβόντες οὐκ ᾔοντο ἐν βεβαίῳ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἔχειν. ἔστι δὲ τὰ ξύμβολα ταῦτα ράβδος τε ἀργυρᾶ κατακεχρυσωμένη καὶ πῖλος ἀργυροῦς οὐχ ὅλην τὴν κεφαλὴν σκέπων, ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ στεφάνη τελαμῶσιν ἀργυροῖς πανταχόθεν ἀνεχόμενος, καὶ τριβώνιον τι λευκὸν ἐς χρυσοῦν περόνην κατὰ τὸν δεξιὸν ὦμον ἐν χλαμύδος σχήματι Θετταλῆς ξυνίον, χιτῶν τε λευκὸς ποικίλματα ἔχων, καὶ ἀρβύλη ἐπίχρυσος. Βελισάριος δὲ ταῦτά τε αὐτοῖς ἔπεμψε καὶ χρήμασι πολλοῖς αὐτῶν ἕκαστον ἐδωρήσατο.
- 30 Procop., *BV*, IV. 8. 10 and 11. 4.
- 31 PLRE III, ‘Antalas’, pp. 86–87; ‘Cutzinas’, pp. 366–68; ‘Esdilas’, p. 451; ‘Iourphouthes’, p. 717; ‘Medisinissas’, p. 870. Solomon names Antalas as loyal while the others broke the treaties: see Procop., *BV*, IV. 10. 6 and 12. 30:
- 32 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 17. 21: Ἀντάλαν τε καὶ Ἰαύδαν, οἱ Μαυρουσίων τῶν ἐν Βυζακίῳ τε καὶ Νουμιδίᾳ τὸ κράτος εἶχον.
- 33 The identities of these kings are disputed: see PLRE II, ‘Masuna’, pp. 734–35; PLRE III, ‘Mastigas’, p. 851; PLRE III, ‘Massonas’, p. 850; for the argument in favour see Philip Grierson, ‘Mathasuntha or Mastinas: A Reattribution’, *The Numismatic Chronicle*, 19, (1959), pp. 119–30 (p. 127); for a more sceptical analysis see Modéran, *Les Maures et l’Afrique romaine*, pp. 374–83.
- 34 Procop., *BV*, III. 25. 9.
- 35 Procop., *BV*, III. 25. 2.

necessary condition to his success. Therefore it was crucial to the success of Belisarius to have secured at least the neutrality of the Moors.

Recent historiography has challenged the idea that *spondai* were ever agreed. Miranda Williams argued that the direct conflict between Romans and Moors was initiated by the Romans, and the Moors may have been raiding without a political objective.³⁶ She also argues that when Procopius criticised the Moors for breaking sworn obligations, ‘this interpretation reflects a profound misunderstanding, on Procopius’ part, of the Berber embassies to Carthage in 533’. She says it was a ‘temporary gesture of goodwill’: ‘despite Procopius’ depiction of the subsequent Berber raids’, Williams argues ‘there is no indication that the negotiations were ever intended to represent a long term political agreement’.³⁷ This is effectively to say that Procopius was confused by his own account. Elsewhere, Williams does acknowledge that the subsidy that Antalas received would ‘presumably’ have been established in 533.³⁸ I do not therefore find any compelling reason to disbelieve that the Moors established a formal treaty.

Belisarius departed Africa in the early summer of 534, leaving Solomon in command.³⁹ Procopius says that at that time, ‘the Maurousioi who lived in Byzacium and Numidia turned to revolt for no reason, and they decided to break the treaty and rise suddenly against the Romans’.⁴⁰ Procopius is explicit that they rose up ‘when they heard that [Belisarius] was leaving’.⁴¹ Procopius names four chiefs from Byzacena as Cusina, Esdilasas,

36 Williams, ‘The African Policy of Justinian’, pp. 191–92.

37 Williams, ‘The African Policy of Justinian’, p. 189.

38 Williams, ‘The African Policy of Justinian’, p. 246.

39 Procop., *BV*, IV. 8. 9–23 and 10. 1–11; PLRE III, ‘Solomon 1’, pp. 1167–77..

40 Procop., *BV*, IV. 8. 9: Μαυρούσιοι δὲ, ὅσοι ἔν τε Βυζακίῳ καὶ Νουμιδίᾳ ᾤκηοντο, ἐς ἀπόστασιν τε ἐξ αἰτίας οὐδεμιᾶς εἶδον καὶ τὰς σπονδὰς διαλύσαντες χεῖρας ἀνταίρειν ἐξαπιναιῶς Ῥωμαίοις ἔγνωσαν. For a classic narrative account, see Charles Diehl, *L’Afrique Byzantine: Histoire de la domination Byzantine en Afrique (533–709)* (Leroux, 1896), pp. 51–93.

41 Procop., *BV*, IV. 8. 20: αὐτίκα μὲν οὖν ἐς τὴν διάλυσιν τῶν σπονδῶν ὥρμηοντο, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐκ Βελισσαρίου δέος αὐτοὺς διεκώλυεν. οὐ γάρ ποτε πολέμῳ Ῥωμαίων περιέσεσθαι, παρόντος γε αὐτοῦ, ἐν ἐλπίδι εἶχον. ὥς δὲ τὴν ἄφοδον αὐτοῦ σὺν τοῖς ὑπασπισταῖς τοῖς αὐτοῦ καὶ δορυφόροις ποιεῖσθαι ἤκουσαν, ἤδη τε τὰς ναῦς ὑπ’ αὐτῶν τε καὶ Βανδιλίων πληροῦσθαι ἐπύθοντο, τὰ ὅπλα ἐξαπιναιῶς ἀράμενοι ἅπασαν κακοῦ ιδέαν ἐς τοὺς Λίβυας ἐπεδείξαντο.

Iourphouthes and Medisinissas, saying there were others from Numidia.⁴² After explaining the revolt occurred for no reason, Procopius bleakly advised that only ‘fear of enemies’ keeps such barbarians in check.⁴³ Yet later, Procopius presents an exchange of letters between Solomon and the Moorish chiefs which offers a hint at a more reasoned explanation. The Moors’ letter argued that they had become ‘subjects of the emperor Justinian’ because ‘Belisarius deluded us with great promises’.⁴⁴ Later, they argued, ‘the Romans, while giving us no share in any good thing, expected to have us as their friends and allies, although we are pressed with hunger’; this constituted a ‘faithless’ breaking of treaties.⁴⁵ Thus the Moors were obliged to ‘recover their own possessions’.⁴⁶ Procopius’s account therefore presents two clashing narratives: his jaded view of barbarians and a justification in the Moors’ own terms.

What were the ‘great promises’ of Belisarius, the cancellation of which left the Moors ‘pressed with hunger’? What were the possessions which the Moors were rightfully waging war to reclaim? Subsidies explain these concerns. We know positively that the Moors chiefs were given money when they entered a treaty with Belisarius in the autumn of 533. We know from later examples, to be discussed, of later cases of annual subsidies. We also know that Solomon offered different tribes ‘great sums of money’ to fight the rebels.⁴⁷ What may have been the trigger was Justinian’s law of April 534, declaring the Romans would ‘extend the boundaries of the provinces of Africa to that point where the Roman Empire had its limits

42 Procop., *BV*, IV. 8. 9 and IV. 10. 6; discussed by Merrills, *War, Rebellion and Epic in Byzantine North Africa*, pp. 65–66.

43 Procop., *BV*, IV. 8. 10: ἔστι γὰρ ἐν Μαυρουσίοις οὔτε θεοῦ φόβος οὔτε ἀνθρώπων αἰδώς. μέλει γὰρ αὐτοῖς οὔτε ὄρκων οὔτε ὁμήρων, ἦν καὶ παῖδες ἢ ἀδελφοὶ τῶν ἐν σφίσιν ἡγουμένων τύχῳσιν ὄντες.

44 Procop., *BV*, IV. 11. 9: Βελισάριος μὲν ἐπαγγελίαις μεγάλαις ἡμᾶς περιελθὼν ἔπεισε βασιλέως Ἰουστινιανοῦ κατηκόους εἶναι.

45 Procop., *BV*, IV. 11. 9–10: Ῥωμαῖοι δὲ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἡμῖν οὐδενὸς μεταδόντες λιμῷ πιεζομένους ἡξίουσαν φίλους τε ἡμᾶς καὶ ξυμμάχους ἔχειν.

46 Procop., *BV*, IV. 11. 12: καὶ τὸν θεὸν πολέμιον σφίσι ποιοῦνται οὐχ οἱ ἂν τὰ σφέτερα αὐτῶν κομιούμενοι ἐφ’ ἐτέρους χωροῖεν, ἀλλ’ ὅσοι τῶν ἀλλοτρίων ἐπιβατεύοντες ἐς κίνδυνον πολέμου καθίστανται.

47 Procop., *BV*, IV. 13. 30 and 13. 37: Σολόμων δὲ Μαυρουσίων τε τοὺς ξυμμάχους δωρησάμενος χρήμασι μεγάλοις καὶ πολλὰ παρακελευσάμενος παντὶ τῷ στρατῷ; Procop., *BV*, IV. 13. 30 and 13. 37:

before the invasion of the Vandals and the Moors'.⁴⁸ If this had been pursued zealously, it would explain the change in approach towards the Moors.

Alongside the Moors who had reached an agreement with Belisarius were those of Numidia and Mauretania who had not recognised Roman rule. The ruler of the Moors in the highlands of Numidia was Iaudas.⁴⁹ The ruler of Mauretania was Mastigas, who held 'the whole land there subject and tributary to him'.⁵⁰ In summer 535 Solomon led a campaign against the Moors in the Aurès Mountains, but withdrew in the winter. He was unable to return when a mutiny broke out in March 536. Until 539, the government of Roman Africa was immobilised by an effective state of civil war.⁵¹ The most powerful mutineer was a man named Stotzas.⁵² When he was eventually defeated, he took refuge in Mauretania, 'marrying the daughter of one the rulers'.⁵³ Thus the challenges of mutiny merged with the challenge of the independent Moorish kings. Even after Solomon returned to the Aurès in 539 and successfully prosecuted his campaigns, Roman control only extended over Numidia and part of Mauretania Sitifensis.⁵⁴ The more distant regions of Mauretania provided a base from which Stotzas could attempt another revolt in 541, attempting to claim 'the style of king'.⁵⁵

5.1.2. Cycles of Revolt

The final group of Moorish rulers were those who lived beyond the bounds of the historic Roman provinces and practiced nomadism. The principal political group of these Moors in the reign of Justinian was a confederation known in modern scholarship as the Laguatan, but

48 Just. *Cod. Iust.*, XXVII. 2. 4: usque ad illos fines provincias Africanas extendere, ubi ante invasionem Vandalorum et Maurorum res publica Romana fines habuerat et ubi custodes antiqui servabant.

49 Procop., *BV*, IV. 13. 1; PLRE III, 'Iaudas', pp. 610–11.

50 Procop., *BV*, IV. 13. 18 and 20. 30–31.

51 Jord., *Rom.*, 369.

52 PLRE III, 'Stotzas', pp. 1199–200.

53 Procop., *BV*, IV. 17. 35.

54 Procop., *BV*, IV. 20. 30.

55 Vict. Tonn., a. 541: consulato praefato Stuzas apud Africam regnum in heremi partibus cum tyrannide assumit; cf. 'tyrannus' in Marcell. Com. Addit., a. 543–45.

with many and varied names in classical sources.⁵⁶ They have been identified with the *Austuriani* attested by Ammianus Marcellinus in the fifth century.⁵⁷ The Moors of Cabaon, who ousted the Vandal king Thrasamund from Tripolitania, have also been associated with the Laguatan.⁵⁸ In 544 Cyrus and Sergius, Solomon's nephews, were appointed as regional military commanders (*duces*) in the provinces of Libya Pentapolis and Tripolitania respectively.⁵⁹ The Laguatan met Sergius at Leptis Magna to receive 'the customary gifts and insignia of office and so make the peace secure'.⁶⁰ After an argument, Sergius killed the Laguatan nobles.⁶¹

The Laguatan then declared war, marching westwards from Tripolitania to Byzacena in 544. Under the leadership of Carcasan, they formed an alliance with Antalas, who had been a Roman ally.⁶² Antalas is described by Corippus as 'faithful within the borders of Libya' for 'ten full years'.⁶³ However, he wrote to the emperor saying Solomon deprived him of his subsidies and killed his brother.⁶⁴ Williams dismissed the letter as a 'creation of Procopius' and a 'literary invention', but offers no argument.⁶⁵ The authenticity of the letter, even if it was abbreviated, helps make sense of why the revolt broke out.

As the revolt grew, the rebels began articulating political aims. Carcasan's army declared its intent to establish 'a kingdom in name'.⁶⁶ When the Roman soldier Guntharis

56 My usage follows David Cherry, 'Laguatan', in ODLA, 174. See D. J. Mattingly, 'The Laguatan: A Libyan Tribal Confederation in the Late Roman Empire', *Libyan Studies*, 14 (1983), pp. 96–108 (pp. 96–108), doi:10.1017/S0263718900007810; cf. criticism by Williams, 'The African Policy of Justinian', pp. 234–37.

57 Ammianus, xxviii. 6. 1–14; Williams, 'The African Policy of Justinian', pp. 236–37; contra Mattingly, 'The Laguatan', p. 100.

58 PLRE II, 'Thrasamundus 1', pp. 1116–17; PLRE II, 'Cabaon', p. 244; Williams, 'The African Policy of Justinian', pp. 237–38.

59 PLRE III, 'Cyrus 3', p. 374; BATlas, Map 38 B1, 'Pentapolis'; PLRE III, 'Sergius 4', pp. 1124–28; Tripolis (mod. Tripoli, anc. Oea), see BATlas, Map 35 F2, 'Oea'.

60 Procop., *BV*, IV. 21. 2.

61 Procop., *BV*, IV. 21. 16–18.

62 PLRE III, 'Carcasan', p. 270.

63 Coripp. *Ioh.*, II. 29–30: *fidelis [...] ille fuit plenosque decem perfecerat annos.*

64 Procop., *BV*, IV. 21. 7. PLRE III, 'Guarizila', p. 558.

65 Williams, 'The African Policy of Justinian', pp. 85–86 and 246, n. 1275.

66 Coripp. *Ioh.*, VI. 227: *ire docens nomenque sibi promittere regni.*

mutinied in December 545, he formed an alliance with Cusina, Iaudas and Antalas.⁶⁷ He offered Cusina the opportunity to rule Byzacena as king under Guntharis as emperor.⁶⁸ John Troglita arrived in Summer 546.⁶⁹ He offered Antalas peace but was refused.⁷⁰ After two years of war he defeated the Moors at the Battle of the Plains of Cato in 548.

The Battle of the Plains of Cato provided respite, but not a definitive end to conflict with the Moors. Though Cusina had taken part in the revolt, he had eventually fought with John Troglita in the 540s. He appears to have emerged from that war as the principal client ruler, named by Malalas as the exarchos and ‘ruler of the ethnos of the Moors’.⁷¹ As part of this arrangement, Cusina was accustomed to receiving ‘a certain quantity of gold’ from the Roman governor.⁷² This arrangement fell apart in events dated to December 562 by Theophanes.⁷³ Cusina met with John ‘Rogathinus’, who was either the magister militum, the civilian governor, or combined both offices.⁷⁴ For some reason, John refused to pay Cusina and then killed him. We do not know the details because of the laconic writing style of the chronicle genre. The circumstances are reminiscent, however, of Sergius’ ill-fated meeting with the Laguatan narrated by Procopius. In response to this act, the sons of Cusina rose in

67 Procop., *BV*, IV. 25. 1–3; PLRE III, ‘Guntharis 2’, pp. 575–76..

68 Procop., *BV*, IV. 25. 10.

69 PLRE III, ‘Ioannes 36’, pp. 644–49.

70 Coripp. *Ioh.*, II. 342–416.

71 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 145: Καὶ τῷ αὐτῷ μηνὶ παρελήφθη μέρη τινὰ τῆς Ἀφρικῆς ὑπὸ τῶν Μαυριτανῶν· Κουτζίνης γὰρ ὁ ἑξαρχὸς τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἔθνους ἔθος εἶχε λαμβάνειν ἀπὸ Ῥωμαίων διὰ τοῦ κατὰ καιρὸν ἄρχοντος <τῆς Ἀφρικῆς> ποσὸν τι χρυσίον, ἐπειδὴ ἦρχεν τοῦ ἔθνους τῶν Μάυρων. καὶ κατελθόντος Ἰωάννου τοῦ ἐπὶ κλην Ῥογαθινοῦ, καὶ μηδὲν αὐτῷ δεδωκότος κατὰ τὸ πρόφην ἔθος, ἀλλὰ τοῦναντίον καὶ δολοφονήσαντος αὐτόν, ἀνέστησαν τὰ τέκνα τοῦ αὐτοῦ Κουτζίνης, ἐκδικοῦντες τὸ πατρῶον αἷμα. καὶ ἐπαναστάντες τοῖς μέρεσι τῆς Ἀφρικῆς παρέλαβόν τινες τόπους φονεύσαντες καὶ πραιδεύσαντες. ὁ δὲ αὐτὸς βασιλεὺς Ἰουστινιανὸς ἐπεμψε Μαρκιανὸν τὸν ἴδιον αὐτοῦ ἀνεψιὸν καὶ στρατηλάτην, μετὰ ἐξερκέτου πρὸς τὸ εἰρηνεῦσαι τοὺς Μάυρους. καὶ προσερρύησαν αὐτῷ, καὶ εἰρήνευσεν ἡ Ἀφρικὴ.

72 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 145: ἔθος εἶχε λαμβάνειν ἀπὸ Ῥωμαίων διὰ τοῦ κατὰ καιρὸν ἄρχοντος <τῆς Ἀφρικῆς> ποσὸν τι χρυσίον.

73 Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6055: τῷ δ’ αὐτῷ μηνὶ παρελήφθη μέρη τινὰ τῆς Ἀφρικῆς ὑπὸ τῶν Μαυριτάνων, ἐπαναστάντων αὐτῶν τῇ Ἀφρικῇ τρόπῳ τοιοῦτῳ. Κουτζίνας τις ὀνόματι ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἔθνους, ἑξαρχὸς τῶν Μαυριτάνων, εἶχεν ἔθος λαμβάνειν παρὰ τοῦ κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν ἄρχοντος τῆς Ἀφρικῆς ῥητὸν χρυσίον. ἐλθόντος δὲ αὐτοῦ λαβεῖν αὐτό, Ἰωάννης, ὁ ἄρχων Ἀφρικῆς, ἐφόνευσεν αὐτόν. ἀνέστησαν δὲ τὰ τέκνα τοῦ αὐτοῦ Κουτζίνα ἐκδικοῦντες τὸ πατρῶον αἷμα, καὶ ἐπαναστάντες τῇ Ἀφρικῇ παρέλαβον αὐτῆς μέρη τινὰ πραιδεύσαντες. ὁ οὖν βασιλεὺς γνοὺς τοῦτο ἀπέστειλε πρὸς βοήθειαν τῆς Ἀφρικῆς Μαρκιανόν, τὸν ἀνεψιὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ στρατηλάτην, μετὰ ἐξερκέτου πρὸς τὸ εἰρηνεῦσαι τοὺς Μάυρους.

74 PLRE III, ‘Ioannes 75’, p. 670; Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, II, p. 560.

revolt. Justinian sent his nephew Marcian with an army to fight the rebels.⁷⁵ The chronicle's account concludes that the rebels 'returned to' Marcian (*proserryēsan*) and Africa returned to peace.⁷⁶ What, then, was the result of Justinian's use of subsidies in Africa? They emerge from this analysis as the key to the tragedy of misunderstanding. The Moors believed themselves to be Romans, having maintained Roman customs throughout Vandal rule; Justinian saw them as conquered barbarians. The Romans consistently misunderstood the relationship of mutuality.

5.2. The Franks in Italy

In the 530s Justinian formed an alliance with the Merovingian Frankish kings who neighboured the Ostrogothic Kingdom to the west and the north. When Justinian became emperor, the Franks were ruled in three kingdoms by descendants of Clovis I: the kings Clothar I, Childebert I and Theuderic I.⁷⁷ Their territories were loosely defined, but the three ruled from the cities of Paris, Soissons and Reims respectively.⁷⁸

5.2.1. Justinian's Alliance with Theudebert

Having been cowed by Theoderic, the Franks took advantage of his death to launch a series of attacks on Ostrogothic client kingdoms. In the summer of 531 they subjugated the Thuringians.⁷⁹ The following year, Clothar and Childebert attacked the kingdom of the

75 PLRE III, 'Marcianus 7', pp. 821–22.

76 Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6055: ὁ οὖν βασιλεὺς γνούς τοῦτο ἀπέστειλε πρὸς βοήθειαν τῆς Ἀφρικῆς Μαρκιανόν, τὸν ἀνεψιὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ στρατηλάτην, μετὰ ἐξερκέτου πρὸς τὸ εἰρηνεῦσαι τοὺς Μάουρους. καὶ προσερρῶσαν αὐτῷ, καὶ εἰρήνευσεν ἡ Ἀφρικὴ.

77 PLRE II, 'Chlodovecus', pp. 288–90 (Clovis I); PLRE II, 'Chlothacharius', pp. 291–92 (Clothar I); PLRE II, 'Childebertus', pp. 284–85 (Childebert I); PLRE II, 'Theoderic 6', pp. 1076–77 (Theuderic I).

78 Soissons, see BATlas, Map 11 D3, 'Augusta Suessionum'; Paris, see BATlas, Map 11 C4, 'Lutetia'; Reims, see BATlas, Map 11 E3, 'Durocortorum'.

79 Ian Wood, 'The Frontiers of Western Europe: Developments East of the Rhine in the Sixth Century', in *The Sixth Century: Production, Distribution and Demand*, ed. by Richard Hodges and William Bowden (Brill, 1998), pp. 231–53 (pp. 235–37), doi:10.1163/9789004502604_011.



FIG. 5.2. Map of Northern Italy and Merovingian Gaul

Burgundians.⁸⁰ This prompted the Burgundian king, Godomar, to seek an alliance with Amalasuintha.⁸¹ As part of the alliance, Amalasuintha ceded to Godomar former Burgundian territories that her father Theoderic had seized in 523/4.⁸² The Burgundians enjoyed a brief respite during a characteristic period of infighting among the Merovingian kings after the death of Theuderic in 533.

80 Cassiod. *Var.*, XI. 1. 13: Burgundio quin etiam ut sua reciperet, devotus effectus est, reddens se totus, dum accepisset exiguum. elegit quippe integer oboedire quam imminutus obsistere: tutius tunc defendit regnum, quando arma deposuit. recuperavit enim prece quod amisit in acie. beatam te, domina, laude multiplici, cui divino beneficio necessitas tollitur cuncta certaminis, quando adversos rei publicae aut caelesti felicitate vincis aut tuis imperiis spontanea largitate coniungis. See Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths* (University of California Press, 1989), pp. 311–13.

81 PLRE II, 'Godomarus 2', p. 517; PLRE II, 'Amalasuintha', p. 65.

82 Reinhold Kaiser, *Die Burgunder* (Kohlhammer, 2004), pp. 72–73.

Theuderic's son Theudebert I had to fight off his own uncles, Clothar and Childebert, to secure his succession.⁸³ Once this was settled, however, those same three together invaded and destroyed the Burgundian kingdom in 534.⁸⁴ The Ostrogothic alliance proved unable to protect Godomar. The Franks' wars against Ostrogothic allies clearly caught Justinian's attention as he was preparing to directly invade the Ostrogothic kingdom. Justinian sent a letter to 'the leaders of the Franks' requesting them to 'join with us in waging this war'.⁸⁵ This phrase 'leaders' (*hēgemones*) implies that the letter addressed all three triumvirs. On the other hand, we only have positive evidence that Justinian engaged with Theudebert. The letter was accompanied by 'a gift of money', with the promise 'to give them more as soon as they took an active part'.⁸⁶ Procopius noticeably describes a gift of money rather than tax (Gk. *phoros*) and also names the Franks as allies. There is further evidence that this alliance was on a formal basis. Procopius later refers to it as 'oaths sworn in writing'.⁸⁷ Rather than a simple exchange of money for action, we should understand this as a formal alliance. At some point, Frankish rule over Provence was apparently endorsed by Justinian, in an attempt to maintain friendly relations.⁸⁸

The Franks initially honoured the agreement, proving crucial to the first phase of Justinian's invasion of Italy. Procopius has Vitigis, king of the Ostrogoths (536–40), give a speech complaining that the war with the Franks was splitting his forces.⁸⁹ He commented that 'those who are attacked on two sides and do not focus their attention on a single enemy

83 PLRE III, 'Theodebertus 1', pp. 1228–30; Greg. Tur. *HF*, III. 24.

84 Mar. Avent., a. 534: *reges Francorum Childebertus, Chlotarius et Theudebertus Burgundiam obtinuerunt et fugato Godomaro rege regnum ipsius diviserunt.*

85 Procop., *BG*, V. 5. 8: Φράγγων τοὺς ἡγεμόνας.

86 Procop., *BG*, V. 5. 10: χρήμασιν αὐτοὺς δωρησάμενος, πλείονα δώσειν, ἐπειδὴν ἐν τῷ ἔργῳ γένωνται, ὠμολόγησεν. οἱ δὲ αὐτῷ ξὺν προθυμίᾳ πολλῇ ξυμμαχήσιν ὑπέσχοντο.

87 Procop., *BG*, VI. 26. 21: οὐκ εὐπρεπὲς εἶναι. τὸ δὲ καὶ ὅρκους ἀδικοῦντας ἐν γράμμασι κειμένους περιορᾶν τὰ ξυγκείμενα οὐδ' ἂν τοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀτιμοτάτοις ἐπιτηδείως ἔχοι. ἅπερ αὐτὸς ἐν γε τῷ παρόντι ἐξαμαρτάνων οἶσθα, καίτοι ὁμολογήσας ἑναγχος πόλεμον ἡμῖν ἐπὶ Γότθους τόνδε ξυλλήψεσθαι. Note, however, that the insertion of the word 'treaties' in the Kaldellis's revised translation of Dewing is not strictly accurate: Kaldellis (ed.), *The Wars of Justinian / Prokopios*, p. 370.

88 Procop., *BG*, VII. 33. 3–4.

89 PLRE III, 'Vitigis', pp. 1382–86.

are likely to be defeated'.⁹⁰ Although Procopius leaves it unstated, this fighting is likely to have taken place in Provence.⁹¹ This is implied by Theodahad having considered surrendering that province to the Franks in return for their assistance.⁹² Meanwhile we learn from letters of Cassiodorus that 'Burgundians' were raiding Aemilia and Liguria and 'Sueves' raiding Venetia.⁹³ These are dated to 536 by Arnold.⁹⁴ Given the Burgundian kingdom had been annexed by the Franks and the Sueves were possibly under their hegemony too, this should be understood as a Frankish contribution to the war as well.⁹⁵

At some point, however, Justinian sent an embassy to Theudebert to remonstrate about the lack of support. This is evidenced by an extant letter to Theudebert from the emperor, alleging a promised 3000 troops had been delayed.⁹⁶ The date commonly cited is October 538, but I believe this is a year late.⁹⁷ The letter's dating formula refers only to the *kalends* of October. It is possible this was October 538, if we place Theudebert's invasion in the spring of 539.⁹⁸ A better candidate, however, is October 537. In the autumn of 537, the Ostrogoths were besieging the Romans in Milan.⁹⁹ Given the geography, Frankish forces would have been well-placed to relieve a siege at Milan.

90 Procop., *BG*, v. 11. 18–19.

91 Jonathan Arnold, 'The Merovingians and Italy: Ostrogoths and Early Lombards', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Merovingian World*, ed. by Bonnie Effros and Isabel Moreira (Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 441–60 (pp. 441–60), doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190234188.013.1.

92 Procop., *BG*, v. 13. 14

93 Cassiod. *Var.*, XII. 7; Cassiod. *Var.*, XII. 28.

94 Arnold, 'The Merovingians and Italy', pp. 441–60.

95 For friendly relations between the Sueves and Sigibert I (561–71), see Greg. Tur. *HF*, IV. 42 and v. 15; discussed by Wood, 'The Frontiers of Western Europe', p. 237.

96 *Ep. Austras.*, XIX.

97 Dated to 538 by PLRE III, 'Theodebertus 1', pp. 1228–30 (p. 30); Whitby, *The Wars of Justinian*, p. 216. See also Bury, Theodosius to Justinian, II, p. 203, n. 1.

98 Marcell. Com., a. 539: *Ind. II, Appione solo cos [...] Theudibertus Francorum rex cum magno exercitu adveniens*. Marcellinus Comes used a dual system of indictional and consular dates in his chronicle, placing Theudebert breaking his alliance with Justinian in the entry for Indiction II (September 538 to August 539) and Appion's sole consulship (January to December 539). However, we should assume Theudebert's campaign took place in spring or early summer, so will have been 539 under either formula.

99 Milan (anc. Mediolanum), see BATlas, Map 39 E3, 'Mediolan(i)um'. Marcell. com., a. 538: *Ind. I, Joanne solo cos. [...] Oraio Mediolanum longa inedia deterit, Mundilam Paulumque duces ibi positos cum suo milite obsidens*.

Even at that early stage, however, Theudebert had been secretly negotiating to switch sides and join the Ostrogoths. Procopius says that the negotiations had begun in the reign of Theodahad, thus before December 536.¹⁰⁰ Theodahad offered twenty *centenaria* of gold (2000 *librae*) and the concession of Provence if the Franks joined him.¹⁰¹ Another account by Gregory of Tours attests that Theodahad paid 50,000 gold coins (*aurei*) to the Merovingian kings. Gregory, however, explains this as compensation for the murder of Amalasuintha.¹⁰² Given Gregory's accounts of Italian affairs have many demonstrable inaccuracies, this story is often dismissed.¹⁰³ Even so, the quantity of 50,000 is equivalent to about 1500 *librae* in gold. This is of a similar magnitude to Procopius's 2000 *librae* and should therefore be taken as partial corroboration. These negotiations were not concluded before Theodahad's death. Instead, an agreement was concluded by Vitigis after his accession as Ostrogothic king in 536.¹⁰⁴

Vitigis conceded the territory of Provence, taken from Clovis by Theoderic in 504, to Clovis' heirs and paid the money Theodahad had offered.¹⁰⁵ He also conceded rule over the Alemanni, who had been tributary to the Ostrogoths, to Theudebert.¹⁰⁶ Procopius argues this allowed Vitigis to recall some of his strongest troops.¹⁰⁷ Theudebert promised to send military assistance, but so they could deny they had broken the treaty with Justinian, they sent

100 PLRE II, 'Theodahadus', 1067–68.

101 Procop., *BG*, v. 13. 14–15.

102 Greg. Tur. *HF*, III. 31: quod cognuscentes hi regis Childeberthus et Chlothacharius, consubrini eius, necnon et Theudoberthus, quod scilicet tam turpi fuerit interfecta supplicio, ad Theodadum legationem dirigunt, exprobrantes de morte eius atque dicentes 'Si haec quae egisti nobiscum non composueris, regnum tuum auferimus et simile te poena damnabimus'. Tunc ille timens, quinquagina eis milia aureorum transmisit. Childeberthus autem, ut erat semper contra Chlothacharium regem invidus atque versutus, cum Theudoberto, nepote suo, coniunctus, divisum inter se hoc aurum, nihil exinde dare regi Chlothachario voluerunt. At ille super thesauros Chlodomeris adgressus, multum illis amplius, quam hi fraudaverant, abstulit.

103 For doubts in general: S. T. Loseby, 'Gregory of Tours, Italy, and the Empire', in *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*, ed. by Alexander C. Murray (Brill, 2010), pp. 461–97 (pp. 461–97), doi:10.1163/9789004307001_015; for this story, see Arnold, 'The Merovingians and Italy', p. 449.

104 Procop., *BG*, v. 13. 16–29; Procop., *BG*, vi. 28. 19

105 PLRE II, 'Chlodovechus', pp. 288–90; PLRE II, 'Theodericus 7' 1077–84.

106 Agath., *Hist.*, I. 6. 4–6.

107 Procop., *BG*, v. 13. 15–16 and 26

‘auxiliaries’.¹⁰⁸ Thus ‘10,000’ Burgundians joined the Ostrogoths in besieging Milan: the very siege for which Justinian sought Theudebert’s help.¹⁰⁹ The kingdom of the Burgundians had, of course, been an ally of the Ostrogoths until its annexation in 532, so there may well have been Burgundians willing to join the war.

As has been demonstrated, the intervention of the Merovingian king Theudebert in the north-west of the Ostrogothic Kingdom had proved crucial to Justinian’s military success. Yet even before the final capture of Ravenna and Vitigis, Theudebert had broken his agreements with both the Romans and Ostrogoths. Roman sources alleged that Theudebert entertained imperial pretensions. Procopius complains that he presided over horse races at the amphitheatre at Arles and minted gold coins in his image, both imperial prerogatives.¹¹⁰ Indeed, surviving coins from the 540s include the title *Augustus*.¹¹¹ The chronicler Marius of Avenches describes him as *rex magnus*, appropriating an imperial title.¹¹² Agathias says that Theudebert intended to conquer Thrace and Constantinople.¹¹³ Regardless of its accuracy, this shows the imperial capital feared Theudebert’s ambition.

The king’s initial aim was Italian territory. He personally led an expedition into Italy in spring of 539, plundering Liguria and Aemilia and sacking Genoa before his army was struck by disease.¹¹⁴ He defeated the Ostrogothic and Roman armies that lay in his path. Belisarius sent a furious message to Theudebert, alleging him to ‘violate oaths that are set down in writing and to disregard treaties’ and urging him to ‘keep his own possessions in safety and

108 Procop., *BG*, v. 13. 27.

109 Procop., *BG*, vi. 12. 38–39; see also Marius of Avenches, *Chronicle*, AD 538: Mediolanus a Gotis et Burgundionibus effracta est ibique senatores et sacerdotes cum reliquis populis etiam in ipsa sacrosancta loca interfecti sunt, ita ut sanguine eorum ipsa altaria cruentata sint.

110 Procop., *BG*, vii. 33. 5.

111 Martha Jenks, ‘Romanitas and Christianitas in the Coinage of Theodebert I of Metz’, *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum*, 4.2 (2000), pp. 338–68 (pp. 338–68), doi:10.1515/zac-2000-0210.

112 Marco Cristini, ‘Rex Magnus: Theodebert I, Justinian, and the Title of “Great King” in the Sixth Century’, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 220 (2021), pp. 325–28 (pp. 325–28).

113 Agath., *Hist.*, i. 4. 1.

114 Marcell. com., a. 539: Theudibertus Francorum rex cum magno exercitu adveniēns Liguriā totamque deprædat Aemiliā. Genuā oppidum in litus Tyrrheni maris situm evertit ac prædat. exercitu dehinc suo morbo laboranti ut subueniat, paciscens cum Belisario ad Gallias revertitur.

not, by laying claim to the possessions of others, to place his most vital interests in danger'.¹¹⁵ Procopius reports that Theudebert received the letter and decided to withdraw, given his army was afflicted by disease.¹¹⁶ Marcellinus Comes describes the two as having reached a formal agreement.¹¹⁷ The events are given greater weight by Jordanes, who says Belisarius 'also triumphed with almost equal success over the Franks, more than two hundred thousand of whom had arrived with their king Theudebert'.¹¹⁸ He wrote that Belisarius, 'busy with other matters', 'conceded peace at the demand of the Franks and without any loss of his own men he expelled them from the Italian borders'.¹¹⁹ There is a debate about when Theudebert claimed Italian territories, but none of these statements support dating that acquisition to this point.¹²⁰

We are given three accounts by Procopius of Theudebert's acquisition of land in Italy. Firstly, the narrator states that: 'When the Goths and Totila had gained the upper hand in the war, the Franks took control of the largest part of Venetia with no right at all, for the Romans were unable to ward them off any longer just as the Goths were unable to carry on the war against both peoples'.¹²¹ Secondly, in a later volume, the narrator summarises that: 'Theudebert, the ruler of the Franks, had not long before been taken from the world by disease, having without justification made some parts of Liguria, the Cottian Alps and most of Venetia subject to the payment of tribute'.¹²² Finally, the exchange is recounted in a speech attributed to Theudebert's successor Theudebald: 'He [Theudebert] did not acquire these lands by robbing the Romans of them, but he took possession of them as a gift from

115 Procop., *BG*, VI. 25. 20–23

116 Procop., *BG*, VI. 25. 24

117 Marcell. com., a. 539: Theudibertus Francorum rex [...] paciscens cum Belisario ad Gallias revertitur.

118 Jord., *Rom.*, 375: atque unus consul dum contra Getas dimicat, pene pari eventu de Francis, qui cum Theodeperto rege suo plus ducenta milia advenerant, triumphavit.

119 Jord., *Rom.*, 375: sed quia ad alia occupatus alibi noluit implicari, rogantibus Francis pacem concessit et sine suorum dispendio de fines Italos expulit.

120 Sihong Lin, 'Justinian's Frankish War, 552–c.560', *Studies in Late Antiquity*, 5.3 (2021), pp. 403–31 (p. 408), n. 16.

121 Procop., *BG*, VII. 33. 7.

122 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 24. 6.

Totila, who already held them and expressly handed them over to him, and for this the emperor Justinian should congratulate the Franks'.¹²³ Combined with the discussion of Theudebert's withdrawal in 539, the evidence all points to the acquisition of land in the 540s.¹²⁴

In early 540 a Frankish embassy reached Ravenna and offered Vitigis to renew their alliance, 'on the basis that they rule the land jointly with him'.¹²⁵ Vitigis was under siege and suspicious and declined, instead negotiating the treaty described above with the Romans and being taken by Belisarius in May. In the early 550s a Frankish army invaded Italy again. Whether this was officially approved by Theudebald was ambiguous.¹²⁶ Two brothers, Butilinus and Leutharis, who were Alamanni dukes were allowed to raise an army and lead an expedition to Italy following the final embassy of the Ostrogoths.¹²⁷ They arrived in 553 and were defeated in 554.¹²⁸ It is this that is probably meant by a law of Justinian acknowledging the 'recent incursion of Franks'.¹²⁹

5.2.2. After Theudebert

On Theudebert's death in 548, he was succeeded by his son Theudebald.¹³⁰ Agathias says he was 'an ignoble and unwarlike youth and already seriously ill and, physically, in very bad shape' when he came to the throne.¹³¹ He did, however, robustly defend his father and refuse

123 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 24. 27.

124 *Contra* Arnold, 'The Merovingians and Italy', p. 451.

125 Procop., *BG*, VI. 28. 7 γνόντες δὲ οἱ Φράγγων ἄρχοντες τὰ ποιούμενα προσποιεῖσθαι τε τὴν Ἰταλίαν ἐθέλοντες, πρέσβεις παρὰ τὸν Οὐίτιγιν πέμπουσι, ξυμμαχίας ὑπόσχεσιν προτεινόμενοι, ἐφ' ᾧ τῆς χώρας ξὺν αὐτῷ ἄρξουσιν. See also Procop., *BG*, VI. 28. 15: ἡμεῖς μὲν οὖν ξυνάρξομέν τε βουλομένοις ὑμῖν Ἰταλίας ἀπάσης καὶ τὴν χώραν διοικησόμεθα ὅπη ἂν δοκῇ ὡς ἄριστα ἔχειν, *contra* Arnold's assertion there were not 'similar agreements with the Ostrogoths' in Arnold, 'The Merovingians and Italy', p. 451.

126 Modern scholars interpret this as deliberate plausible deniability: Averil M. Cameron, 'Agathias on the Early Merovingians', *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, 2.37 (1968), pp. 95–140 (p. 124); Lin, 'Justinian's Frankish War', p. 409.

127 PLRE III, 'Butilinus 1', pp. 253–54; PLRE III, 'Leutharis', pp. 789–90.

128 Although it is placed later by Marius of Avenches, *Chronicon*, AD 555.

129 Just. *Nov.*, VIII.

130 PLRE III, 'Theodebaldus 1', pp. 1227–28; spelling following Edward James, 'Theudebald', in ODLA, p. 1493.

131 Agath., *Hist.*, I. 6. 1.

to improve relations with Justinian. There is a letter from Theudebald to Justinian in the *Epistolae Austrasicae* collection.¹³² This was in response to the Roman envoys John and Missurius.¹³³ Again, Theudebald rejects criticism of his father, writing that: ‘For this among all things caused great trouble to our minds, that we saw such a prince and a tamer of different nations torn down after his death, who, while alive, maintained unsullied faith to emperors and kings or nations’.¹³⁴

Justinian’s inability to reconcile Theudebald caused severe problems for his war against the Ostrogoths. In early 552, Theudebald’s garrisons in Venetia hindered the general Narses as he marched from Illyria to fight Totila.¹³⁵ When the general Valerian tried to retake Verona from the Ostrogoths in 552, the Franks prevented it.¹³⁶ After Totila’s defeat, the Ostrogoths’ new leader Theia decided to try to form an alliance with the Franks using the money stored at Pavia.¹³⁷ He sent to Theudebald, who declined; Procopius supposes it was because the Franks ‘wanted to acquire Italy for themselves’.¹³⁸ After the defeat of Theia, a further embassy of Ostrogoths went to Theudebald promising ‘vast sums of money’, given ‘as a voluntary payment from us’.¹³⁹ Theudebald declined once again to ally with the Ostrogoths.

Yet Theudebald did not favour the Romans. In c. 551 Justinian sent Leontius to negotiate, offering to endorse Frankish holdings in Italy if the Franks helped fight the

- 132 *Epistolae Austrasicae.*, XVIII; date by Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, II, pp. 816–17; Andrew Gillett, ‘Telling off Justinian: Theudebert I, the *Epistolae Austrasicae*, and communication strategies in sixth-century Merovingian-Byzantine relations’, *Early Medieval Europe*, 27 (2019), pp. 161–94.
- 133 PLRE III, ‘Ioannes 40’, p. 651; PLRE III, ‘Missurius’, p. 893.
- 134 *Epistolae Austrasicae.*, XVIII: illud namque inter omnia valde animis nostris molestiam generavit, quod tantum ac talem principem ac diversarum gentium domitorem post mortem pagina decurrentem videmini lacerari, qui vivens imperatoribus ac regibus.
- 135 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 26. 18–20; PLRE III, ‘Domnicus 3’, pp. 415–16; PLRE III, ‘Maximinus 2’, pp. 865–66.
- 136 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 33. 55; PLRE III, ‘Valerianus 1’, pp. 1355–61..
- 137 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 33. 6–7; PLRE III, ‘Theia’, p. 1224.
- 138 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 34. 17–18.
- 139 Agath., *Hist.*, I. 5.

Ostrogoths.¹⁴⁰ Procopius has Leontius make the speech: ‘For the emperor Justinian did not enter into this war, nor did he let it appear that he was about to fight the Goths, until the Franks, in the name of alliance and friendship, had received from him great sums of money and agreed to assist him in the struggle’.¹⁴¹ But Leontios still offered friendship and alliance, if Theudebald would honour the agreement.¹⁴² Theudebald refused, explaining that he had already reached an agreement with the Ostrogoths.¹⁴³ He did agree to send an envoy Leudardus with Leontius back to Constantinople.¹⁴⁴ According to Marius’ *Chronicle*, there was conflict in 548: he reports ‘Lanthacarius, duke of the Franks, died in the Roman war’.¹⁴⁵ While Theudebald did not want Justinian to control northern Italy, neither did he want to resuscitate the Ostrogothic kingdom.

Justinian’s attempts to deal with the other Merovingian kings showed little more success. The correspondence of Pope Vigilius gives an insight into Justinian’s relations with the Frankish king Childebert.¹⁴⁶ Vigilius, who served from 537 to 555, was close to the Romans and three letters he sent to the bishops of Arles show imperial foreign policy interests.¹⁴⁷ These letters insist that Justinian’s permission was necessary to appoint the papal vicars.¹⁴⁸ The letter of 545 calls on the bishops to encourage Childebert to pray for the

140 PLRE III, ‘Leontius 5’, p. 775.

141 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 24. 13.

142 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 11 and 24.

143 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 9–10 and 25–27.

144 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 24. 11–30; PLRE III, ‘Leudardus’, p. 786.

145 Marius of Avenches, *Chronicon*, AD 548. 2: eo anno Lanthacarius dux Francorum in bello Romano transfossus obiit; PLRE III, ‘Lanthacarius’, p. 765. Discussed by Lin, ‘Justinian’s Frankish War’, pp. 409–10.

146 PLRE II, ‘Vigilius 4’, p. 1166.

147 John Moorhead, ‘Italian Loyalties During Justinian’s Gothic War’, *Byzantion*, 53.1 (1983), pp. 575–96 (p. 89).

148 Lin, ‘Justinian’s Frankish War’, p. 421.

emperor and maintain peace with Justinian.¹⁴⁹ This call was repeated in 546.¹⁵⁰ The peace in question could refer to Justinian's agreement with the Frankish kings in 535, as Sebastian Scholz has argued.¹⁵¹ In April 550, after Totila's capture of Rome, Vigilius wrote again to the Frankish bishop of Arles, Aurelian.¹⁵² He asked him to get Childebert to write to Totila and ask him to protect the church.¹⁵³ It has been argued that this shows Vigilius, at least, to believe Childebert to have influence over Totila.¹⁵⁴ Lin hypothesises that it was Childebert who declined to let Totila marry his daughter in 550.¹⁵⁵ In around 550 Totila asked to marry the daughter of 'the ruler of the Franks' but was scorned.¹⁵⁶

After the Ostrogoths' last king was killed, however, Justinian was able to turn on the Frankish holdings. The death of Theudebald in 555 caused his kingdom to be claimed by his great-uncle, Clothar, but did not end the war.¹⁵⁷ Clothar's forces 'devastated the army of the Roman republic', 'carrying away much wealth'; then, the Roman empire 'recovered its forces and occupied the part of Italy which King Theudebert had acquired'.¹⁵⁸ Sihong Lin argues, however, that the Franks must have retained some of Venetia, given they are attested in the

- 149 *Epistolae Austrasicae.*, XLI: oportet ergo fraternitatem vestram incessantibus supplicationibus Deo nostro preces effundere, ut domnos filios nostros, clementissimos principes Iustinianum atque Theodorum, sua semper protectione custodiat, qui pro his nobis vestrae caritati mandandis, suggerente gloriosissimo et excellentissimo viro, filio nostro, patricio Belisario, quo pro idem vos convenit exorare, pia praebuerunt devotione consensum. hortamur quoque, ut sacerdotali opera inter gloriosissimum virum, Childebertum regem, sed et antedictum clementissimum principem conceptae gratiae documenta paterna adhortatione servetis.
- 150 *Epistolae Austrasicae.*, XLIV: oportet ergo caritatem vestram sacerdotali semper studio inter domnos filios nostros, clementissimos principes, et gloriosissimum virum, id est filium nostrum Childebertum regem, gratiae initae federa custodire.
- 151 Sebastian Scholz, 'The Papacy and the Frankish Bishops in the Sixth Century', in *East and West in the Early Middle Ages: The Merovingian Kingdoms in Mediterranean Perspective*, ed. by Stefan Esders and others (Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 129–37 (p. 131), doi:10.1017/9781316941072.009.
- 152 The recipient is most likely PCBE IV, 'Aurelianus 5', p. 282; it could be PCBE IV, 'Aurelianus 4', p. 281; see Gillett, 'Telling off Justinian', pp. 167–68, n. 22.
- 153 *Epistolae Austrasicae.*, XLV.
- 154 Lin, 'Justinian's Frankish War', p. 421.
- 155 Lin, 'Justinian's Frankish War', p. 423.
- 156 Procop., *BG*, VII. 37. 1–2.
- 157 Agath., *Hist.*, I. 6. 2.
- 158 Marius of Avenches, AD 555: exercitus Francorum rei publicae Romanae exercitum vastavit atque effugatum devastavit cum illis et divitiis multis abductis [...] exercitus rei publicae resumptis viribus partem Italiae, quam Theudebertus rex adquisierat, occupavit.

region around 561 by Menander.¹⁵⁹ He argues that Childebert was friendly to Justinian, as we discussed above, and acted as a check on Clothar, but after his death in 558 Chlothar was free to reinforce his Italian territories. In order to resist the Franks, Narses was forced to make a truce (*ekecheiria*) with the Ostrogoths by 560.¹⁶⁰

After Clothar's death in 561, however, the Romans made a final effort to complete their conquest of northern Italy. In this context the Roman sources report a 'revolt' of the Frank Amingus and Ostrogoth Widin in 562.¹⁶¹ Malalas says that in 562, Narses conquered 'the Gothic city' of Verona.¹⁶² Agnellus says around this time the Franks were expelled from Italy.¹⁶³ The Roman *Liber Pontificalis* narrates that a group of Heruls 'rebelled, appointed themselves a king, Sindual, and oppressed all of Italy'.¹⁶⁴ Narses killed Sindual, stemming the Herul revolt, then fought and killed Amingus and Butilinus.¹⁶⁵ The chaos of these final years of Justinian's reign shows the long-term instability of inviting the Franks to join the war.

To conclude, Justinian's payments to the Franks did not hasten the restoration of imperial rule over Italy. At best it prevented the Franks forming a strong alliance with the Ostrogoths, even if it did not stop the two peoples working together. The attempts by sources to put a brave face on Theudebert's retreat from Italy are unconvincing: it appears he retreated due to an outbreak of disease in his army and returned soon after to claim territories. In short, while the logic of forcing the Ostrogoths to fight on two fronts made sense, Justinian was unable to control his Frankish allies. Justinian's weakness is exemplified by his complaints to

159 Lin, 'Justinian's Frankish War', p. 416.

160 Men. Prot., fr. 3. 1.

161 Men. Prot., fr. 3. 1; Paul Diac., *Hist. Lang.*, II. 2; Arnold, 'The Merovingians and Italy', p. 454. See PLRE III, 'Amingus', p. 55; PLRE III, 'Widin', p. 1403.

162 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 140.

163 Agnellus, *Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis*, 90: in diebus istius expulsi sunt Franci de Italia per Narsem patricium. et post haec apparuit stella comis mense Augusto usque in Kalendas Octubris.

164 PLRE III, 'Sindual', pp. 1154–55..

165 *Liber Pontificalis*, LXIII. 2. PLRE III, 'Butilinus', pp. 253–54 .

Theudebert and Theudebald. Having put a price on their support, he urged them to respect the oaths they swore.

5.3. The Heruls, Gepids and Lombards in Illyria

In this third case study, I consider as part of the ‘reconquest’ of the Ostrogothic kingdom. It had long been ruled by the Ostrogoths, initially as federates. The almost century-long relationship between the Gepids and East Romans was a long-lasting case of subsidies. They provided a buffer against Ostrogothic expansion and ultimately helped oust the Ostrogoths from Illyria. Yet Justinian’s unwillingness to allow the Gepids to occupy the city of Sirmium turned these former allies into difficult enemies, destabilizing the Italian and Danube theatres. Justinian’s solution of promoting the Lombards and later the Avars to establish hegemony backfired enormously after his death, in ways that were foreseeable.

5.3.1. The Heruls

Justinian’s relationship with the Heruls has been characterised as a standard ‘federate’ arrangement.¹⁶⁶ I argue it is more helpful to view their status as a new blend of federate and external ally. Justinian took a group that his predecessor Anastasius had invited to settle on the Middle Danube and sought to use subsidies and political endorsement to create a strong buffer state. This section shall begin by establishing Justinian’s aim of strengthening the Heruls then turn to his policy in practice, before assessing the outcomes of his policy.

166 Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars*, p. 100. See also that the Heruls ‘had been settled within the empire for the past generation’ by Whitby, *The Wars of Justinian*, p. 258.



FIG. 5.3. Map of Northwestern Illyria

Justinian's aim was to make the Heruls a stronger and more compliant ally than they had been since Anastasius. We must begin by establishing that context. The Heruls had been subjects of Attila, but of a decidedly lower rank than the Ostrogoths or Gepids. Their leader was amongst the second-tier *reguli* at Attila's court. When Attila's empire collapsed, an independent Herul kingdom was established in the Morava Valley to the north of the Danube under King Rudolf.¹⁶⁷ Initially they exercised lordship over the Lombards, to whom we shall return later. Rudolf aligned himself with Theoderic's Ostrogoths rather than the Gepids and Romans.¹⁶⁸ In c. 508, however, their erstwhile Lombard subjects rose up and killed Rudolf, forcing the remaining Heruls to flee and take refuge as subjects of the Gepids.¹⁶⁹ It has sometimes been suggested that this revolt had been encouraged by the Romans, but there is no positive evidence for this from the sources.¹⁷⁰ Within a few years these Heruls were

167 River Morava: Lat. *Marus*, see BATlas, Map 13 B4, 'Marus fl.'.

168 Rudolf: Gk. *Ῥοδοῦλφος* in Procop., *BG*, VI. 14. 11; Lat. *Roduulf* in Jord., *Get.*, 24; PLRE II, 'Rodulfus', p. 946; Cassiod. *Var.*, IV. 2

169 Procop., *BG*, VI. 14–15; Paul Diac. *Hist. Lang.*, I. 20; *Origo Gentis Langobardum*, 4.

170 Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, p. 322 ; Roland Steinacher, 'The Herules: Fragments of a History', in *Neglected Barbarians*, ed. by Florin Curta (Brepols, 2010), pp. 319–60 (p. 348), doi:10.1484/m.sem-eb.3.5092.

apparently unhappy under Gepid rule and sought to move south across the Danube. The ensuing events have caused an ongoing debate about how to characterise the relationship between the Heruls and the Romans.

The emperor Anastasius endorsed the Heruls' settlement on the southern bank of the Danube in 512.¹⁷¹ The territory was around the city of Bassiana, bounded by the Danube in the north and east, River Sava in the south, and the city of Sirmium to the west.¹⁷² While the Chronicle of Count Marcellinus states that the emperor Anastasius initiated the move, Procopius emphasises the decision of Heruls decision to move away from the Gepids and suggests their settlement was endorsed after the fact.¹⁷³ The debate begins in earnest about how this relationship should then be characterised. The issue is whether the Heruls had entered the empire and settled as 'federates'.¹⁷⁴ For Sarantis, Heruls differ from other groups because they 'were settled on imperial soil in return for military services whenever required'.¹⁷⁵ If this is so clear cut, the money given to the Heruls would represent a distinct phenomenon to our enquiry into foreign subsidies.

The complication, however, is whether the vicinity of Bassiana can be said to have been 'imperial soil' in a meaningful sense. The emperor Anastasius had in 510 agreed to recognise Theoderic's rule over the territories the Ostrogoths had reclaimed from the Gepids in 504, as Sarantis himself acknowledges.¹⁷⁶ Given this, both in theory and in fact the emperor was inviting the Heruls to occupy a territory he had already conceded to the Ostrogoths. This should be compared to how Zeno had encouraged the Ostrogoths themselves to occupy Italy in the 470s, despite its control by king Odoacer. The repeated

171 Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, II, pp. 305–06.

172 Bassiana or Bassianae, see BAtlas, Map 21 B5, 'Bassiana'; River Sava, see BAtlas, Map 20 D2, 'Savarias fl.'.

173 PLRE II, 'Anastasius 4', pp. 78–80; Marcell. com., *Chron.*, AD 502; Procop., *BG*, VI. 14. 28–32.

174 Steinacher, 'The Herules', p. 352.

175 Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, p. 100. See also that the Heruls 'had been settled within the empire for the past generation' by Whitby, *The Wars of Justinian*, p. 258.

176 Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, p. 45.

pattern encourages a cynical reading of imperial policy: the emperors saw advantage whether the Ostrogoths destroyed the invading Heruls, or the Heruls destroyed the Ostrogoths.

Far from loyal subjects, however, the Heruls continued to behave as an independent kingdom. Their kings still maintained an independent foreign policy, with Cassiodorus' *Variae* recording an embassy from the king of the Heruls to Theoderic.¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, the Heruls had already begun raiding Roman territories before Anastasius' death in 518, provoking a punitive imperial expedition.¹⁷⁸ This does not decide the question of federate versus foreign, because the Gothic federates of the fifth century had often launched raids on their imperial patrons. It does, however, speak to the fragility of the relationship. We hear very little of the Heruls under the emperor Justin, but immediately upon Justinian's accession he took decisive action to formalise the relationship.

Justinian summoned Grepes, king of the Heruls, to Constantinople with his leading nobles.¹⁷⁹ We can place this in January 528 thanks to Malalas, who wrote that Grepes and his leading nobles were baptised and swore an alliance with Justinian.¹⁸⁰ While the exact provenance of the Chronicle attributed to Malalas is uncertain, the common understanding is that he was an imperial civil servant working in Antioch, who compiled his chronicle from imperial notices sent out from Constantinople.¹⁸¹ We can thus infer that Justinian had proudly

177 Cassiodorus, *Variae*, IV. 3: nota sunt enim Erulis Gothorum deo iuvante solacia. nos arma tibi dedimus: gentes autem sibi olim virtutum pignora praestiterunt. The king is unnamed, but the standard procedure of the *Variae* to redact personal names. Discussed by Steinacher, 'The Herules', p. 347.

178 Procop., *BG*, VI. 14. 29–31 χρόνῳ δὲ οὐ πολλῷ ὕστερον προσκεκρούκασιν αὐτῷ οἱ βάρβαροι οὗτοι, ἀνόσια ἔργα ἐργασάμενοι τοὺς ταύτῃ Ῥωμαίους. διὸ δὴ στράτευμα ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ἐπεμψε. νικήσαντες δὲ τῇ μάχῃ Ῥωμαῖοι πλείστους μὲν ἔκτειναν, ἐν ἐξουσίᾳ δὲ πολλῇ ξύμπαντας διαφθεῖραι γεγόνασιν.

179 PLRE III, 'Grepes', p. 555.

180 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 6. 1–9: Ἐν δὲ τῷ αὐτῷ χρόνῳ προσερρῶν Ῥωμαίοις ὁ ῥῆξ τῶν Ἐρουλῶν ὀνόματι Γρέπης· καὶ ἦλθεν ἐν Βυζαντίῳ μετὰ ἰδικῆς βοηθείας, καὶ προσεκύνησεν τὸν βασιλέα Ἰουστινιανὸν καὶ ἤτησεν ἑαυτὸν γενέσθαι χριστιανόν. καὶ βαπτισθεὶς ἐν ἀγίοις θεοφανίοις ἀνάδοχος αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο τοῦ ἀχράντου βαπτίσματος ὁ αὐτὸς βασιλεὺς Ἰουστινιανός· ἐφωτίσθησαν δὲ σὺν αὐτῷ καὶ οἱ συγκλητικοὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ συγγενεῖς αὐτοῦ δώδεκα. καὶ πολλὰ χαρισάμενος αὐτῷ ἀπέλυσεν αὐτόν, καὶ ὤδευσεν ἐπὶ τὴν ἰδίαν χώραν μετὰ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ βοηθείας, εἰπόντος αὐτῷ τοῦ βασιλέως Ῥωμαίων ὅτι· ὅταν βουληθῶ, δηλῶ σοι. The conversion takes place at the Feast of Epiphany, i.e. 6 January 528, as noted by Whitby, *The Wars of Justinian*, p. 258.

181 Elizabeth Jeffreys, 'Malalas' Sources', in *Studies in John Malalas*, ed. by Elizabeth Jeffreys, Brian Croke, and Roger Scott (Australian Association of Byzantine Studies, 1990), pp. 167–216; Alexander

announced the new relationship with the Heruls. Furthermore, we might also infer that the commitment to annual subsidies was not advertised loudly. It is not from Malalas, but Procopius, that we learn that Justinian had formed a formal ‘alliance’ (*symmachikon*) with the Heruls and ‘granted them good lands and other property’.¹⁸² He further tells us that the Heruls regularly travelled to Constantinople to receive ‘contributions’ (*syntaxeis*).¹⁸³ This is, of course, the exact term he used to describe the subsidies to the Gepids, who we know to have been recipients of money. It is also the term used to describe the payments to Gubaz, king of the Laz, earlier in the chapter.

The Heruls did appear in the ranks of the Roman expeditionary forces in both Persia and Africa. The king of the Heruls was therefore allowing the recruitment of federate-style soldiers from his people. Indeed, Procopius described Narses as having gone to the ‘rulers of the Heruls’ to seek soldiers for his forthcoming campaign in Italy in the winter of 545/546.¹⁸⁴ These were recruited to fight under their own leaders, headed by Filimuth.¹⁸⁵ They were garrisoned in Thrace over winter, where they encountered and defeated an army of Sclavenes who had been raiding.¹⁸⁶ The question is whether this should determine our ultimately judgment. Just like under Anastasius, the Heruls began raiding Roman territories, leading to Procopius’s indignant statement that the ‘very men who are plundering Roman subjects’ received money from the emperor.¹⁸⁷

Sarantis, ‘The Justinianic Herules: From Allied Barbarians to Roman Provincials’, in *Neglected Barbarians*, ed. by Florin Curta (Brepols, 2010), pp. 361–402 (p. 371), doi:10.1484/m.sem-eb.3.5093.

182 Procop., *BG*, VII. 14. 33–34 Ἐπεὶ δὲ Ἰουστινιανὸς τὴν βασιλείαν παρέλαβε, χώρα τε ἀγαθὴ καὶ ἄλλοις χρήμασιν αὐτοὺς δωρησάμενος, ἐταιρίζεσθαί τε παντελῶς ἴσχυσε καὶ Χριστιανοὺς γενέσθαι ἅπαντας ἐπεισε. διόπερ τὴν δίαίταν ἐπὶ τὸ ἡμερώτερον μεταβαλόντες τοῖς Χριστιανῶν νόμοις ἐπὶ πλεῖστον προσχωρεῖν ἐγνώσαν, καὶ Ῥωμαίοις κατὰ τὸ ξυμμαχικὸν τὰ πολλὰ ἐπὶ τοὺς πολεμίους ξυντάσσονται.

183 Procop., *BG*, VII. 33. 13–14.

184 Procop., *BG*, VII. 13. 21 τῶν Ἐρούλων τοὺς ἄρχοντας. For the date see Croke, ‘Procopius and Thucydides’, pp. 66–67. PLRE III, ‘Narses 1’, pp. 912–28; see also the book-length biography by Dariusz Brodka, *Narses: Politik, Krieg und Historiographie im 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Peter Lang, 2018), doi:10.3726/b14557.

185 PLRE III, ‘Philemuth’, pp. 1020–21; Procop., *BG*, VI. 39. 10

186 Procop., *BG*, VII. 13. 22–25.

187 Procop., *BG*, VII. 33. 14

The Herul kingdom descended into civil war around 548.¹⁸⁸ At some point Grepes had been succeeded by Ochus.¹⁸⁹ Procopius tells us that Ochus was killed, then the Heruls sent to both Justinian and to distant relatives in Northern Europe to request a new king.¹⁹⁰ Justinian sent Suartuas, ‘who had long been living’ in Constantinople. He was initially accepted, but when Datius, the nominee from the north arrived, it caused the Heruls to split.¹⁹¹ The emperor appointed Suartuas as a *magister militum praesentalis* and thereafter sought to reimpose him as king. In response, those following Datius ‘decided to submit to the Gepids’.¹⁹² It seems that the ‘loyal’ Heruls remained around Bassiana and the ‘rebel’ Heruls crossed into the Gepid territory. In the battles of 549, Procopius numbered 1,500 Heruls who fought for the Romans under Filimuth against 3,000 who fought for Gepids.¹⁹³ It probably makes sense, as Sarantis suggests, to characterise both the overthrow of Ochus and the subsequent civil war as a power struggle between factions in favour and opposed to the Roman alliance.¹⁹⁴

In this section we have examined Justinian’s attempt to use subsidies to strengthen the kingdom of the Heruls as a buffer state on the Danube frontier. This was a change from the approach of Anastasius, who had expected the Heruls to be satisfied with land. One of the benefits of Justinian’s relationship was that the Heruls made a significant contribution of manpower to Justinian’s wars in Persia, Africa and Italy. In their role as a buffer state, the Heruls did play a significant role after the emperor’s alliance with the Gepids soured in the 530s. Yet in the 540s, the Herul kingdom collapsed into warring parties: the majority favouring the Gepids, the minority the Romans. The supply of Roman money was not enough

188 Sarantis, ‘The Justinianic Herules’, p. 393.

189 PLRE III, ‘Ochus’, p. 951.

190 Procop., *BG*, VI. 14. 38–41

191 PLRE III, ‘Suartuas’, p. 1205; PLRE III, ‘Datius’, p. 388.

192 For his appointment, see Procop., *BG*, VIII. 25. 11.

193 Procop., *BG*, VII. 34. 42–43.

194 Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars*, p. 259.

to secure the support of the Heruls, many of whom saw greater profits from raiding imperial territory.

5.3.2. The Gepid Alliance

Our incomplete list of Gepid kings illustrates the problematic nature of the sources.¹⁹⁵ The lack of a self-authored history of the Gepids is regrettable. Though works of Jordanes, Paul the Deacon, or Gregory of Tours may have flaws, those authors were motivated to write continuous narratives of their own peoples that can be scrutinised. On the other hand, a writer like Procopius followed a narrative agenda focused on an elite Roman audience; he dips in and out of barbarian history according to his main purpose. Roman sources often force us to work backwards to reconstruct a narrative of the barbarians. For example, we learn of Elemund, king of the Gepids (*ho Gēpaidōn basileus*), only at his death.¹⁹⁶ Although Procopius' particular concern about subsidies is helpful for our present purpose, we must remain mindful of his agenda.

The first point to establish is the origins and nature of the Roman subsidy to the Gepids. It seems that Justinian inherited a long-standing arrangement, which he continued to honour. Procopius tells us that 'it had been customary from old' for the Gepids to receive 'agreed pay' (*syntaxeis*) from Justinian and his predecessors.¹⁹⁷ The origins of this arrangement are corroborated and clarified by Jordanes. The Gepid king Ardaric had stood

195 With the patchy primary evidence and their political extinction in the later sixth century, the Gepids have not enjoyed the scholarly limelight of their Gothic or Lombard neighbours. The only dedicated monograph remains Constantin C. Diclescu, *Die Gepiden: Forschungen zur Geschichte Daziens im frühen Mittelalter und zur Vorgeschichte des Rumänischen Volkes* (Kröber & Nietschmann, 1922). Archaeological evidence for the Gepids received a useful survey in the recent chapter by Anna Kharalambieva, 'Gepids in the Balkans: A Survey of the Archaeological Evidence', in *Neglected Barbarians*, ed. by Florin Curta (Brepols, 2010), pp. 245–62, doi:10.1484/m.sem-eb.3.5090. The most important recent historiography has been Alexander Sarantis, 'War and Diplomacy in Pannonia and the Northwest Balkans during the Reign of Justinian: The Gepid Threat and Imperial Responses', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 63 (2009), pp. 15–40.

196 PLRE III, 'Elemundus', p. 435.

197 Procop., *BG*, VII. 33. 9: διὸ δὴ βασιλεὺς αὐτοῖς τὰς συντάξεις οὐκέτι ἐδίδου, ἄσπερ εἶθιστο σφᾶς ἀνέκαθεν πρὸς Ῥωμαίων κομίζεσθαι.

foremost amongst the vassal ‘kinglets’ (*reguli*) subject to Attila, king of the Huns.¹⁹⁸ These vassals fought a civil war after Attila’s death, from which Ardaric emerged triumphant.

Jordanes wrote that: ‘claiming the settlements of the Huns for themselves by their strength and having obtained the limits of the whole of Dacia as victors, the Gepids demanded as vigorous men nothing else from the Roman Empire, except peace and yearly *sollemnia* by a friendly agreement. To this the emperor then willingly agreed and until now this very tribe receives the customary gift from the Roman princes’.¹⁹⁹

The emperor Marcian (450–57), having refused to honour the treaty and pay Attila, agreed to begin giving money annually to the Gepids.²⁰⁰ Both Jordanes and Procopius agree and neither had reason to flatter the Gepids. In the case of Jordanes, he based his work on the *Gothic History* Cassiodorus had prepared for the Ostrogothic kings.²⁰¹ He had no reason to credit the Ostrogoths’ enemies with the achievement of subsidies unless it was true. On this basis we can conclude confidently that the Gepids received annual payments from the 450s to the time of Justinian. We can draw less confident conclusions about the size of this subsidy.²⁰² István Bóna quoted a sum of 100 *librae* of gold, which Florin Curta has accepted

198 PLRE II, ‘Ardaricus’, p. 138. Jord., *Get.*, 199: inter quos Ostrogotharum praeminebat exercitus Valamire et Theodemire et Videmere germanis ductantibus, ipso etiam rege, cui tunc serviebant, nobilioribus, quia Amalorum generis eos potentia inlustrabat; eratque et Gepidarum agmini innumerabili rex ille famosissimus Ardaricus, qui ob nimiam suam fidelitatem erga Attila eius consiliis intererat. nam perpendens Attila sagacitate sua, eum et Valamerem, Ostrogotharum regem, super ceteros regulos diligebat.

199 Jord., *Get.*, 264: nam Gepidi Hunnorum sibi sedes viribus vindicantes totius Daciae fines velut victores potiti nihil aliud a Romano imperio, nisi pacem et annua sollemnia, ut strenui viri, amica pactione postulaverunt. quod et libens tunc annuit imperator et usque nunc consuetum donum gens ipsa a Romano suscipit princeps.

200 PLRE II, ‘Marcianus 8’, pp. 714–15.

201 The *Getica* ‘does not hide the fact that the Gepids were largely responsible for the Huns’ defeat’, when it would have been more convenient to celebrate a Gothic success, Peter Heather, *Goths and Romans: 332–489* (Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 246.

202 Todd simply described it as ‘modest’, without offering a figure or explaining his working: Malcolm Todd, *The Early Germans* (Blackwell, 1994), p. 236.

in recent work.²⁰³ Neither cites primary evidence, so we must return to the events of the fifth century to set the parameters.

We should assume that Marcian, having taken a strong stand against Attila over subsidies, must have paid the Gepids less. For that reason, the amounts given to Attila's Huns can be taken as an upper limit. The highest amount Attila received was 2,100 *librae* of gold per annum.²⁰⁴ The amount the Gepids received would likely have been closer to the 500 *librae* of gold demanded by the Persians or 400 *librae* of gold distributed to the subject tribes of Lazica. Indeed, that would be a similar scale to the Huns' initial subsidy of 350 *librae* per year. Furthermore, as Constantine Diculesscu pointed out, Marcian began paying 300 *librae* of gold each year to the Ostrogoths in the same period.²⁰⁵ Given these considerations, it seems credible to estimate the Gepid subsidy at around 350 *librae* of gold; the equivalent of 25,000 *solidi*.

Some have argued a subsidy in this range was insultingly small. On the basis of his figure of 100 *librae*, Bóna judged that 'this was how highly the Byzantines, a people of clear vision and highly sensitive in money matters, rated the "great power" status of Ardaric relative to Attila'.²⁰⁶ This interpretation should be rejected on two grounds. Firstly, Attila's high watermark of 2,100 *librae* per year was truly exceptional. The second and related point is that any higher amount to the Gepids would have been politically unsustainable. Priscus

203 István Bóna, *The Dawn of the Dark Ages: The Gepids and the Lombards in the Carpathian Basin* (Corvina Press, 1976), p. 16; Florin Curta, *The Making of the Slavs: History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, c.500–700* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 191, doi:10.1017/CBO9780511496295.

204 300 *librae*: Priscus, fr. 37, 1–6: Ὅτι τοῦ Βαλάμερος τοῦ Σκύθου παρασπονδήσαντος καὶ πολλὰς πόλεις δηωσαμένου καὶ χώρας Ῥωμαϊκὰς, ἔπεμπον παρ' αὐτὸν οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι πρέσβεις, οἱ αὐτῷ τοῦ νεωτερισμοῦ κατεμέμφοντο, καὶ ὥστε μὴ αὐθις τὴν χώραν καταδραμεῖν, τριακοσίας λίτρας φέρειν αὐτῷ ἐκάστου ἔτους ἔταξαν· σπάνει γὰρ τῶν ἀναγκαίων ἔφραζε πρὸς πόλεμον τὸ οἰκεῖον διαναστῆναι πλῆθος; 1,000 *librae*: Priscus, fr. 9. 4. 17–20: ἀναγκάζεται οὖν Θεοδόσιος πρεσβεύσασθαι πρὸς Ἀττίλαν καὶ ἑξακισχιλίας χρυσίου λίτρας ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀναχωρήσεως παρασχεῖν, χιλίων δὲ χρυσίου λιτρῶν ἐτήσιον φόρον αὐτῷ ἡρεμοῦντι προσομολογήσαι τελεῖν; 2,100 *librae*: Priscus, fr. 9. 3. 5–6: φόρον δὲ ἔτους ἐκάστου δισχιλίας καὶ ἑκατὸν λίτρας χρυσοῦ σφισιν τεταγμένον εἶναι.

205 'Dieselbe hat aber auf jeden Fall nicht weniger als 300 Pfund Goldes betragen können; denn soviel betrugen auch die Jahrgelder, welche vom Kaiser gleichzeitig den Goten in Pannonien bewilligt waren,' in Diculesscu, *Die Gepiden*, p. 122.

206 Bóna, *The Dawn of the Dark Ages*, p. 16.

condemned Theodosius II (402–50) as a man who was ‘unwarlike and lived in cowardice’ because he ‘obtained peace through money’ rather than fighting Attila.²⁰⁷ In contrast Marcian escaped such criticism, even though he established subsidies to the Gepids and Pannonian Goths. There was good reason for both sides to accept a more modest amount that would prove sustainable.

The shadow of Attila remained almost a century later. Justinianic sources showing a strong preoccupation with the king of the Huns. Procopius wrote that Attila had ‘made both empires subservient and bearing tax (*phoros*) to himself, for tribute (*dasmos*) was sent to him every year by the emperors’.²⁰⁸ Likewise, Jordanes wrote of Attila receiving a ‘yearly tax’ (*annuum vectigal*) from the Romans.²⁰⁹ Even if Procopius goes on to criticise the Gepids’ subsidy, he introduced it as ‘stipends’ (*syntaxeis*). It was thus presented through the discourse of pay and service, rather than the discourse of tribute he used consistently with Persia. This does suggest that Marcian had judged the quantity wisely in the fifth century.

Further to this, we can see how Procopius changed his language for rhetorical effect. When Procopius puts a critique of the Gepid alliance in the mouth of a Lombard envoy, he draws on two divergent semantic fields. On the one hand, he writes Gepids as having received ‘many gifts [...] each year’ from the emperor and his predecessors.²¹⁰ Here, the specificity of ‘annual’ clearly indicates that the gifts in question are the payments he had earlier called *syntaxeis*. In the same passage, however, he also has the envoy describe the

207 PLRE II, ‘Theodosius 6’, p. 1100; Priscus, fr. 3. 2. 1–4: Θεοδόσιος, βασιλεὺς Ῥωμαίων, ὁ μικρός. οὗτος διαδεξάμενος παρὰ πατρὸς τὴν ἀρχήν, ἀπόλεμος ὢν καὶ δειλιάς συζῶν καὶ τὴν εἰρήνην χρήμασιν οὐχ ὅπλοις κτησάμενος, πολλὰ προεξένησε κακὰ τῇ Ῥωμαίων πολιτείᾳ.

208 Procop., *BV*, III. 4. 29–30: Αἰτίου γοῦν τελευτήσαντος Ἀττίλας, οὐδενός οἱ ἀντιπάλου ὄντος, Εὐρώπην τε ζύμπασαν πόνω οὐδενὶ ἐληίζετο καὶ βασιλείαν ἑκατέραν ἐπακούουσιν ἐς φόρου ἀπαγωγὴν ἔσχε. δασμοὶ γὰρ αὐτῷ πρὸς τῶν βασιλέων ἐπέμποντο ἀνὰ πᾶν ἔτος.

209 Jord., *Get.*, 257: praecipuus Hunnorum rex Attila, patre genitus Mundzucio, fortissimarum gentium dominus, qui inaudita ante se potentia solus Scythica et Germanica regna possedit nec non utraque Romani urbis imperia captis civitatibus terruit et, ne praedae reliqua subderentur, placatus praecibus annuum vectigal accepit.

210 Procop., *BG*, VII. 34. 10–11: δῶρα πολλὰ [...] ἀνὰ πᾶν ἔτος.

Gepids ‘having often become mercenaries from you and having received the money’.²¹¹ We should interpret Procopius’s envoy as employing different rhetorical techniques to prosecute his argument. In doing so, it is demonstrated how the boundaries between these discursive statements were not rigid. Indeed, the end result is that we can detect a subtle difference between the accounts of Procopius and Jordanes. Procopius presents the Gepids as ‘mercenaries’ working for pay or placed under obligations by gifts. Jordanes explains the subsidy as arising from the Gepids, ‘as vigorous men’, offering peace to the Romans. Given their sources, this difference might be taken to represent ‘imperial’ and ‘barbarian’ outlooks on the same phenomenon.

What, though, did this money buy? We now come to the question of characterising the payments and shall first consider the agreement in a formal sense. Constantin Diculesscu long ago argued that this ought not to be considered a ‘federate’ agreement, pointing to how differently the sources describe it compared to the agreements with the Pannonian and Thracian Goths.²¹² Part of Diculesscu’s reasoning was that Valens (364–78) had ceded the north of the Danube formally to the Visigothic king Athanaric in 369. This, he argued, established the territories as legally beyond the empire.²¹³ This is overly legalistic. In the minds of sixth-century writers like Procopius, the north of the Danube remained ‘Roman’.²¹⁴ On the other hand, the Gepids are conspicuously absent from the federate soldiers who fought Justinian’s wars in Persia, Africa or Italy. The most famous Gepid fighting for the Romans at this time was Mundo.²¹⁵ His relationship to the Gepid Kingdom was complicated, however.

211 Procop., *BG*, VII. 34. 10–11: ἔμισθοι πρὸς ὑμῶν γεγονότες πολλάκις καὶ τὰ χρήματα [...] κεκομισμένοι.

212 Diculesscu, *Die Gepiden*.

213 PLRE I, ‘Athanaricus’, pp. 120–21.

214 Procop., *BG*, VII. 14. 32–33.

215 Mundo, from. Lat. *Mundo* in Marcell. com., *Chron.*, AD 505; cf. Gk. *Moundos* (Μοῦνδος) in Procop., *BG*, V. 5. 2 Martindale distinguished him from PLRE II, ‘Mundo’, pp. 767–68; contra Brian Croke, ‘Mundo the Gepid: From Freebooter to Roman General’, *Chiron*, 12 (1982), pp. 125–35 (pp. 125–35). Croke, however, is now generally accepted: see Fiona Haarer, ‘Mundus (Mundo)’ in ODLA, p. 1046.

He had previously fought for Theoderic against the Gepids.²¹⁶ His service to Justinian thus seems unlikely to have been the result of his alliance with the Gepid kingdom.

Instead, the purpose of the alliance was particular to the Danube frontier. Since the fall of Attila, the Ostrogothic kings of the Amal dynasty had been a powerful enemy of both the Gepids and Romans. Whatever the status of land across the Danube, the Romans unambiguously claimed Pannonia and regarded the Ostrogoths as temporary residents. The Amal kings used a combination of threats and promises to secure a subsidy of 300 *librae* of gold from the Zeno.²¹⁷ The East Romans sought to resolve the status of the Ostrogoths with a ploy. They invited Theoderic to oust the self-declared king of Italy, Odoacer.²¹⁸ Perhaps unexpectedly, Theoderic was wholly successful. His campaign culminated in his own proclamation as king of Italy. While Zeno had managed to shift the Ostrogoths' centre of gravity away from the Eastern Roman Empire, they still remained a threat. The Ostrogoths also retained an interest in Illyria: Theoderic appointed a *comes* named Colosseus to serve in Sirmium.²¹⁹ It is in this context that Sirmium became the most coveted and contested city on the Danube frontier.²²⁰ Given the later importance of the city to Justinian's Gepid subsidies, it is important to establish this clearly.

The first reason was a matter of prestige. The city served as a provincial and prefectural capital for the Romans.²²¹ It was also home to an imperial palace built by

216 PLRE II, 'Theodericus 7', pp. 1077–84.

217 Priscus, fr. 37. 1–6: Ὅτι τοῦ Βαλάμερος τοῦ Σκύθου παρασπονδήσαντος καὶ πολλὰς πόλεις δηωσαμένου καὶ χώρας Ῥωμαϊκᾶς, ἔπεμπον παρ' αὐτὸν οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι πρέσβεις, οἱ αὐτῷ τοῦ νεωτερισμοῦ κατεμέμφοι, καὶ ὥστε μὴ αὖτις τὴν χώραν καταδραμεῖν τ' λίτρας φέρειν αὐτῷ ἐκάστου ἔτους ἔταξαν· σπάνει γὰρ τῶν ἀναγκαίων ἔφραζε πρὸς πόλεμον τὸ οἰκεῖον διαναστῆναι πλῆθος. Discussed by Heather, *Goths and Romans*, p. 247.

218 PLRE II, 'Odoacer', pp. 791–93.

219 PLRE II, 'Colosseus', p. 305; Cassiod. *Var.*, III. 23: Proinde prosperis initiatus auspiciis ad Sirmiensem Pannoniam, quondam sedem Gothorum, proficiscere inlustris cinguli dignitate praecinctus commissamque tibi provinciam armis protege, iure compone, ut antiquos defensores recipere laeta possit, quae se nostris parentibus feliciter paruisse cognoscit.

220 Mod. Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia; BATlas, Map 21 B5, 'Sirmium'.

221 Miroslava Mirković, *Sirmium: Its History from the First Century AD to 582 AD* (Center for Historical Research, University of Novi Sad, 2017), pp. 79–96.

Diocletian, that many Late Antique emperors had used as their residence.²²² For the Ostrogoths it had ideological importance as it was associated with famous victories of both Theoderic and Alaric I (r. 391–410).²²³ Yet the concern was also practical. From Sirmium, the navigable tracts of the Middle Danube could be controlled. To modern historians, the ‘primary importance of Sirmium was that it stood at a key point along the Roman road network that extended from Naissus and Singidunum towards Italy’.²²⁴

In the century prior to Justinian, Sirmium had passed between several rulers. The object of dispute between Western and Eastern Roman emperors, the matter was settled in favour of Constantinople in the early fifth century, only for the city to be seized by Attila in 441.²²⁵ After Attila, Sirmium was seized by the Gothic king Valamer.²²⁶ His possession of the city could have been recognised as part of his federate status. After Theoderic had marched to Italy in 473, however, Sirmium was seized by the Gepids. Their king, Thraustila (c. 488), made it his royal capital.²²⁷ We do not know the East Roman position for certain. However, it is likely the emperors were satisfied the city was out of the hands of the Ostrogoths and controlled by an ally. This did not last. In a celebrated campaign of 504 Theoderic’s army killed Thraustila, retook Sirmium and banished the Gepids beyond the

222 Miroslav Jeremić, ‘The Sirmium Imperial Palace Complex in the Light of the Recent Archaeological Investigations’, in *Diocletian, Tetrarchy and Diocletian’s Palace on the 1700th Anniversary of Existence: Proceedings of the international conference held in Split from September 18th to 22nd 2005*, ed. by Nenad Cambi, Joško Belamarić, and Tomislav Marasović (Književni Krug, 2009), pp. 471–99.

223 PLRE II, ‘Alaricus I’, pp. 43–48; noted by Peter Van Nuffelen and Lieve Van Hoof (eds), *Jordanes: Romana and Getica* (Liverpool, 2020), pp. 358–59.

224 Sarris, *Justinian*, p. 110; for Naissus (mod. Niš) see BATlas, Map 21 D6, ‘Naissus’; for Singidunum (mod. Belgrade) see BATlas, Map 21 C5, ‘Singidunum’.

225 Just. Nov., XI. 1: cum enim in antiquis temporibus Sirmii praefectura fuerat constituta, ibique omne fuerat Illyrici fastigium tam in civilibus quam in episcopalibus causis, postea autem Attilanis temporibus eiusdem locis devastatis Apraemius praefectus praetorio de Sirmiana civitate in Thessalonicam profugus venerat, tunc ipsam praefecturam et sacerdotalis honor secutus est, et Thessalonicensis episcopus non sua auctoritate, sed sub umbra praefecturae meruit aliquam praerogativam. For discussion of the date see Mirković, *Sirmium*, p. 101.

226 PLRE II, ‘Valamer’, pp. 1135–36.

227 For Thraustila, also known as Trapstila: PLRE II, ‘Trapstila’, pp. 1124–25; Ennodius, *Panegyricus Theoderici*, 60–61: Sermiensium civitas olim limes Italiae fuit, in qua seniores domini excubabant, ne coacervata illinc finitimarum vulnera gentium in Romanum corpus excurrerent. haec postea per regentium neglectum in Gepidarum iura concessit, unde cottidiana insultatio et inconposita legationum frequentia mittebatur.

Danube.²²⁸ By Justinian's accession, therefore, this was a city claimed by the Romans under Ostrogothic rule, but had been the Gepid capital within living memory.

What was Justinian's view of Sirmium? An earlier generation of historians, committed to the theory that Justinian pursued *renovatio imperii*, were confident. István Bóna stated that Justinian sought to retake Sirmium and Singidunum from the outset of his reign.²²⁹ There is some primary evidence that suggests Justinian was thinking about Sirmium. In a law of 14 April 535, Justinian named Sirmium as the former regional capital and lamented its loss to Attila.²³⁰ Alexander Sarantis has recently argued that this was a declaration of intent.²³¹ If we think about the date of this law, however, it was issued in the months leading up to Justinian's declaration of war against the Ostrogoths. He may well have had Sirmium in his sights at this point, but it does not clarify his original intent.

One incident might shed light on this, but the primary sources are very fragmentary. By connecting a brief aside in Procopius's *Wars* with a panegyric of Cassiodorus, it appears that Justinian sponsored a Gepid attack on Ostrogothic Sirmium in the first years of his reign.²³² It appears that at some point between 527 and 533 the Gepids mounted a failed attack near Ostrogoth-held Sirmium, provoking the Ostrogoths to retaliate by sacking a Roman fort. In Procopius' version, 'the Goths, in making war on the Gepids by Sirmium, had

228 Jord., *Get.*, 300; Ennodius, *Panegyricus Theoderici*, 62; Cassiodorus, *Chronicle*, a. 504.

229 'Die Bestrebungen von Justinian nach Einheit des römischen Reiches waren von vornherein unvereinbar mit der Tatsache, dass Barbaren fliese wichtigen Städte [i.e., Sirmium and Singidunum] in Händen hielten. Seine Politik, welche die verschiedenen Barbarenvölker einander bekämpfen liess, richtete sich seit seiner Thronbesteigung i. J. 527 auf die Zurückeroberung dieser beiden Städte.' in István Bóna, 'Die Langobarden in Ungarn', *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 7 (1956), pp. 183–244 (p. 235).

230 Just. *Nov.*, XI. 1: cum enim in antiquis temporibus Sirmii praefectura fuerat constituta, ibique omne fuerat Illyrici fastigium tam in civilibus quam in episcopalibus causis, postea autem Attilanis temporibus eiusdem locis devastatis Apraemius praefectus praetorio de Sirmiana civitate in Thessalonicam profugus venerat, tunc ipsam praefecturam et sacerdotalis honor secutus est, et Thessalonicensis episcopus non sua auctoritate, sed sub umbra praefecturae meruit aliquam praerogativam.

231 Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, p. 61.

232 Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, p. 335; Kaldellis (ed.), *The Wars of Justinian / Prokopios*, p. 258; Alexander Sarantis, 'Diplomatic Relations Between the Eastern Roman Empire and the "Barbarian" Successor States, 527–565', *History Compass*, 16.11 (2018), (p. 62), doi:10.1111/hic3.12498.

treated the city of Gratiana, situated at the border of Illyria, as a hostile town'.²³³ In contrast, a panegyric by Cassiodorus to the Ostrogothic queen Amalasuintha insists 'she caused the Danube to be Roman against the will of the eastern *princeps*'.²³⁴ The simplest reading would be that Justinian had encouraged a Gepid attack to probe or harass the Ostrogoths, while maintaining the ability to deny responsibility in public, as Procopius does. The contrary view of Barnish is that the events described by Cassiodorus are otherwise unattested and says they must have taken place during the reign of Justin I; given they took place after the death of Theoderic this would leave a narrow window between the death of Theoderic and the death of Justin (August 526 and August 527).²³⁵ Barnish's theory does not account for the fact that the princeps who willed the invasion still ruled when Cassiodorus wrote in 533.

This does not quite substantiate the idea that the reconquest of Sirmium was a concrete aim of Justinian's early policy. Stein took the view that the Gepids launched their invasion independently of the Romans.²³⁶ Even if Justinian had aimed to take Sirmium, his decision to employ the Gepids seems to have sent a catastrophically mixed message to his allies. For when the Gothic War commenced in earnest later in the decade, the Gepids took the opportunity to claim the city for themselves. We shall return shortly to the profound consequences of this event, but at this point should take stock.

The following points can thus far be concluded about the Gepid and Roman alliance in Justinian's early reign. The first is that it was not a novel arrangement, but the continuation

233 Procop., *BG*, v. 3. 15; Gratiana is identified cautiously with the fort at Saldum (mod. Dobra), see Gordana Jeremić, 'Saldum and connections with Roman Dacia', in *Proceedings of the Regional Conference: Research, Preservation and Presentation of Banat Heritage: Current State and Long Term Strategy*, ed. by Srđan Predić (City Museum of Vršac, 2012), pp. 63–68.

234 Cassiod. *Var.*, xi. 11. 10–11 in ipsis quoque primordiis, quando semper novitas incerta temptatur, contra Orientis principis votum Romanum fecit esse Danuvium. Notum est quae pertulerint invasores: quae ideo praetermittenda diiudico, ne genius socialis principis verecundiam sustineat perditoris. quid enim de nostris partibus senserit, hinc datur intellegi, quando pacem contulit laesus, quam aliis concedere noluit exoratus. additur quod tantis nos legationibus tam raro requisitus ornavit et singularis illa potentia, ut Italicos dominos erigeret, reverentiam Eoi culminis inclinavit; cf. Procop., *BG*, v. 3. 31; PLRE II, 'Amalasuintha', p. 65.

235 S. J. B. Barnish, *Cassiodorus: Variae* (Liverpool University Press, 1992), p. 147, n. 4

236 Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, II, p. 307 and p. 393.

of a decades-long subsidy that had been established in the wake of Attila's death. From the debate over subsidies owed to the Persians' Arab allies discussed in Chapter Two, we know the Romans maintained subsidies were agreed between a given emperor and a given king. If this principle was followed consistently, we might guess that Justinian had to formally re-establish the relationship upon his accession in 527: indeed Curta phrases it that 'Justinian renewed the alliance with the Gepids, as well as the payment of stipends, in order to put pressure on the Gothic hold of Sirmium'.²³⁷ The second point is that this is clearly described in our sources as an agreement between sovereign rulers, rather than conceived as the establishment of federates on Roman soil. The third point is that, although we lack detailed sources, the Gepids appear to have fought as allies in c. 530 and again in 535 when Justinian launched attacks on the Gothic territories in Illyria.

So far, we have established that Justinian had initially continued subsidies to the Gepids and enjoyed their cooperation in challenging Gothic rule in Illyria. When Justinian began his war against the Ostrogoths in earnest, we can see a strategic role for the Gepids in bolstering the Romans' Illyrian front, freeing up Belisarius to attack Sicily. The progress by Belisarius over 535 and 536 eventually forced the Ostrogoths to consolidate the defence of Italy by abandoning their positions in Illyria and Provence. In their wake, the Gepids seized the opportunity to retake their former royal city of Sirmium.

This event has inspired diverse interpretations in modern historiography. Procopius' laconic narration is partly to blame. When narrating the war year of 535/6, roughly March 535 to March 536, he wrote that 'the Gepids, having seized the city of Sirmium and most of Dacia, held them as soon as the Emperor Justinian had taken them from the Goths'.²³⁸ In a later statement attributed to a Lombard ambassador, he makes the point clearer: 'as soon as

237 Florin Curta, *The Long Sixth Century in Eastern Europe* (Brill, 2021), p. 94, doi:10.1163/9789004456983.

238 Procop., *BG*, VII. 33. 8: Γήπαιδες δὲ πόλιν τε Σίρμιον καὶ Δακίας ἐκ τοῦ ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ἀπάσας καταλαβόντες ἔσχον, ἐπειδὴ τάχιστα βασιλεὺς αὐτὰς Ἰουστινιανὸς ἀφείλετο Γότθους.

the Gepids saw that the Goths had been driven out of all Dacia, and that you were occupied with the war against your enemies, these most foul men have dared to set foot everywhere upon your land'.²³⁹ These statements are reasonably clear, if not expansive.

Modern scholars have, however, debated their meaning. In Ernst Stein's account the Romans reoccupied Sirmium in the first years of the war, only to lose it to the Gepids.²⁴⁰ In a recent work Florin Curta went as far as placing the Gepid conquest of Sirmium in 527, but still having Justinian break subsidies in 538.²⁴¹ Following Diculesscu, Sarantis suggests the retreating Ostrogoths had 'handed over Pannonia Sirmiensis to the Gepids in a bid to deny the Romans complete control'.²⁴² These interpretations all reject the basic parameters set by Procopius. If we add the further context of the failed attack on Sirmium in between 527 and 532, elaborated by Cassiodorus, the narrative makes more sense. We can see a consistent policy of Justinian employing his Gepid allies to attack the Ostrogoths in Pannonia, while Roman forces advanced into Dalmatia.²⁴³

If prior events had led Elemund to believe his claim to the city was strong, he was clearly at odds with Justinian. In a later dialogue in the *Wars*, one of the principal crimes attributed to the Gepids is 'holding Sirmium and enslaving Romans'.²⁴⁴ Procopius tells us

239 Procop., *BG*, VII. 34. 15: ἰδοὺ γὰρ, ἐπειδὴ τάχιστα Γήπαιδες εἶδον Γότθους μὲν ἐκ Δακίας ἀπεληλαμένους ἀπάσης, ὑμᾶς δὲ ἀσχολία τῇ πρὸς τοὺς πολεμίους ἐχομένους, πανταχόθι τῆς γῆς ἐπιβατεῦσαι τῆς ὑμετέρας οἱ μιαιώτατοι τετολμήκασιν.

240 'Ils se tinrent donc tranquilles quand les impériaux occupèrent Sirmium au commencement de la grande guerre ostrogothique; mais après qu'en 536 Mundus eut péri en Dalmatie (plus bas p. 344), l'armée de l'Illyricum, occupée ailleurs, ne pouvait défendre cette ville, et les Gépides s'en emparèrent à leur tour. Non contents d'avoir emmené chez eux en esclavage bon nombre de Romains, ils se mirent à ravager le diocèse dacique, et l'empereur cessa de payer leurs subsides de fédérés,' in Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, II, p. 309.

241 'Sirmium (now Sremska Mitrovica, in Serbia), a city that the Gepids first took in 527. Because the Gepids refused to leave Sirmium, Justinian stopped the payment of stipends and attacked them in 538, without much success' in Curta, *The Long Sixth Century in Eastern Europe*, p. 95.

242 Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, p. 93; cf. Diculesscu, *Die Gepiden*, pp. 124–25.

243 Capturing the city of Salona in February/March 536. Mod. Solin, see BAtlas, Map 20 D6, 'Salona'; Procop., *BG*, V. 7. 36–37: Γρίπας δὲ καὶ ὁ τῶν Γότθων στρατὸς, ἐπειδὴ Ῥωμαῖοι Σάλωνα ἐσχον, ἐβδόμη ἡμέρᾳ ἐνθένδε ἀναστάντες ἐπὶ Ραβέννης ἀπεκομίσθησαν, οὕτω τε Κωνσταντιανὸς Δαλματίαν τε καὶ Λιβουρνίαν ζύμπασαν ἔσχε, Γότθους προσαγαγόμενος ἅπαντας, οἱ ταύτη ἴδρυντο. For the date see Brian Croke, 'Procopius and Thucydides: Defining the Gothic War Year', *Classica Cracoviensia*, 26 (2023), pp. 7–127 (pp. 28–38), doi:10.12797/CC.26.2023.26.01.

244 Procop., *BG*, VII. 34. 17: Γήπαιδες, ὧ βασιλεῦ, Σίρμιον ἔχουσι καὶ Ῥωμαίους ἀνδραποδίζουσιν, ὅλην τε προσποιεῖσθαι Δακίαν ἀνχοῦσι.

that Justinian acted to suspend the Gepids' annual subsidies as a direct punitive measure for taking Sirmium.²⁴⁵ This was followed by a Roman military expedition led by Calluc in 538/9.²⁴⁶ The time gap might suggest that Justinian suspended the subsidy in 537 and gave the Gepids time to respond before attacking them. Calluc's campaign failed utterly, with the general killed in battle and his army retreating.²⁴⁷ The seizure of Sirmium in 536 therefore split Justinian and his Gepid allies after nearly a decade of apparent good relations, in which the Gepids had helped oust the Ostrogoths from Illyria.

Justinian thus inherited the subsidy arrangement with Gepids and his use of these allies to check the Ostrogoths was fairly conventional, if escalated by his Gothic War. Yet from the very start of his reign the emperor was also willing to offer new subsidies to groups who had never received money from the empire. This section assesses the relationships established with the Heruls, Antes and Lombards. Taking each group in turn, we shall consider the three questions posited at the beginning of the chapter: how can these arrangements be characterised? Were Justinian's decisions a true break or a natural evolution of his predecessors' policies? Can these actions be understood as a coherent policy or reactive responses to circumstance?

Thus began nearly a decade in which the Gepid kings Elemund and Thurisind, became the principal opponent of the Romans on the Danube frontier.²⁴⁸ The strategic significance of Sirmium allowed the Gepids to begin 'plundering and doing violence to the

245 Procop., *BG*, VII. 33. 8–10: Γήπαιδες δὲ πόλιν τε Σίρμιον καὶ Δακίας ἐκ τοῦ ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ἀπάσας καταλαβόντες ἔσχον, ἐπειδὴ τάχιστα βασιλεὺς αὐτὰς Ἰουστινιανὸς ἀφείλετο Γότθους· ἐξηνδραπόδισάν τε τοὺς ταύτη Ῥωμαίους, ἔτι μέντοι ἐπίπροσθεν αἰεὶ ὁδῶ ἰόντες ἐληΐζοντο βιαζόμενοι τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχήν. διὸ δὴ βασιλεὺς αὐτοῖς τὰς συντάξεις οὐκέτι ἐδίδου, ὥσπερ εἴθιστο σφᾶς ἀνέκαθεν πρὸς Ῥωμαίων κομίζεσθαι.

246 PLRE III, 'Calluc', p. 266.

247 *Marcell. Com. Addit.*, a. 538/9. 6: Calluc magister militum cum Gepidas primum feliciter dimicans secundo infeliciter ruit; cf. Jord., *Rom.*, 387: nec par, ut ferunt, audita est in nostris temporibus pugna a diebus Attilae in illis locis, praeter illa quae ante hanc contigerat sub Calluce mag. mil. idem cum Gepidas aut certe Mundonis cum Gothis, in quibus ambobus auctores belli pariter conruerunt.

248 PLRE III, 'Turisindus', pp. 1345–46.

Roman territory'.²⁴⁹ After the Herul civil war in the late 540s, those Heruls opposed to the Romans took refuge as subjects of the Gepids.²⁵⁰ In around 551, the Gepids formed an alliance with the Kutrigurs and allowed a large army to cross through their territory.²⁵¹ In around 552, the Gepids similarly allowed an army of Sclavenes to cross their territory to raid the Romans, at a price of one gold *stater* for each man who crossed.²⁵² According to Procopius, the raid of the Sclavenes in 552 was a final blow that made Justinian start to consider how he might come to terms with the Gepids.²⁵³ On a grander scale, however, Agathias later wrote that the Frankish king Theudebert I (533–48) sought to recruit the Gepids into an anti-Roman alliance. In Agathias's view, this was intended to pave the way for the conquest of Constantinople itself.²⁵⁴ The Gepid kingdom therefore became the focal point for anti-Roman forces in the region.

The Gepids' status as Justinian's main rival on the Danube frontier has not always been fully recognised by modern historians. Even Sarantis, who has argued powerfully for Thurisind's kingdom having 'posed the most significant threat to the Balkan provinces', equivocates on Justinian's suspension of subsidies.²⁵⁵ He accepts Diculesscu's argument that the subsidy must have been reinstated by the middle of the 540s.²⁵⁶ This is on the basis of a

249 Procop., *BG*, VII. 33. 8.

250 Procop., *BG*, VI. 16. 36; date inferred from Procop., *BG*, VII. 34. 43.

251 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 18. 13–17.

252 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 25. 1–5.

253 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 25. 6.

254 PLRE III, 'Theodebertus I', pp. 1228–30; Agath., *Hist.*, I. 4. 1–2: ἡνίκα γοῦν τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις ὁ πρὸς Τωτίλαν τὸν ἡγεμόνα τῶν Γότθων ὠδίνετο πόλεμος, τούτῳ δὴ τότε τῷ Θεουδιβέρτῳ ἐβεβούλευτό οἱ καὶ διεσπούδαστο, ἕως ἐν Ἰταλίᾳ Ναρσῆς τε καὶ τὰ στρατεύματα ἐμόχθει καὶ ἐνησχόλητο, αὐτὸς πλήθῃ ἀγείρας ἄλκιμά τε καὶ μαχιμώτατα ἐς τὰ ἐπὶ Θράκης ἀφικέσθαι χωρία ἅπαντά τε τὰ τῆδε καταστρεφάμενος ἀμφὶ τὸ Βυζάντιον τὴν πόλιν τὴν βασιλίδαν τὸν πόλεμον μεταστῆσαι. οὕτω δὲ ἐνεργὸν τὸ βούλευμα ἐποιεῖτο καὶ τὴν παρασκευὴν ἐμβριθεστάτην, ὥς καὶ πρεσβεῦεσθαι πρὸς τε Γήπαιδας καὶ Λαγγοβάρδους καὶ ἄλλα ἅττα πρόσοικα ἔθνη, ἐφ' ᾧ καὶ οἶδε ξυλλάβοιντο τοῦ πολέμου; cf. Sarantis's conclusion that Theudebert's influence was short-lived and the Franks thus 'negligible' in Justinian's calculations: see Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, p. 268.

255 Sarantis, 'War and Diplomacy in Pannonia and the Northwest Balkans', p. 63; Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, p. 95.

256 'Andererseits berufen sich 547 die gepidischen Gesandten in Konstantinopel, wie wir bald sehen werden, auf das Bündnis mit dem Reiche und verlangen demgemäß Hilfe gegen die Langobarden, was darauf hindeutet, daß damals das Bündnis der Gepiden mit den Oströmern wieder in Kraft getreten war; auch bekamen jetzt die Gepiden die herkömmlichen Jahrgelder wieder,' in Diculesscu, *Die Gepiden*, p. 126.

speech Procopius attributes to a Lombard ambassador, complaining about the Gepids in c. 548 which complained ‘the Gepids hold Sirmium and are enslaving Romans’, ‘despite having often been in your pay and having received their money, as has been said, for a length of time we can no longer even measure’.²⁵⁷ For Diculesscu and Sarantis, if such a speech were made in 548, the subsidies must have been reinstated. Sarantis argues Procopius ‘had no reason to lie about a point of fact’ like this.²⁵⁸ It is not a question of lying, however: as Diculesscu and Sarantis both argue elsewhere in their works, Procopius is flexible with chronology when he wants to make a literary point, especially in speeches. In this context, the claim can be read perfectly naturally as a reference to the earlier receipt of subsidies without any requirement for an otherwise-unattested reinstatement.

Moreover, in other chapters we have seen that withholding subsidies does not seem to have equated to cancelling subsidies in the minds of the Romans or the recipients. In Chapter One, for example, we saw Justinian award ‘back payments’ to the Persians to compensate for payments he had suspended during the Persian invasion. This evidence shows it is not necessary even after a decade of direct and indirect conflict for the Romans and Gepids to regard their alliance and custom of subsidies as having been formally ended.

Taken together, the foregoing discussion shows Justinian to have overseen the dramatic and bitter collapse of an alliance that had lasted for eighty years. The question thus arises of responsibility and agency. The Gepid kingdom does appear to have changed its political positions in response to sudden shifts in the strategic landscape. Since the fall of Attila, the Gepids and Ostrogoths had faced each other as rivals across the Danube. When the Ostrogoths withdrew to reinforce Italy in the winter of 536/537, Roman troops were heavily

257 Procop., *BG*, VII. 34. 18: Γήπαιδες, ὃ βασιλεῦ, Σίρμιον ἔχουσι καὶ Ῥωμαίους ἀνδραποδίζουσιν, ὅλην τε προσποιεῖσθαι Δακίαν ἀνχοῦσι. τίνα πόλεμον ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ποτε ἢ ξὺν ὑμῖν ἢ πρὸς ὑμᾶς αὐτοὺς νενικηκότες; ἢ τίνος ἀγωνίας ἄθλα τὴν χώραν ταύτην πεποιημένοι; καὶ ταῦτα ἔμμισθοι πρὸς ὑμῶν γεγονότες πολλάκις καὶ τὰ χρήματα, ὥσπερ εἴρηται, κεκομισμένοι χρόνον οὐκ ἴσμεν ὅπόσον ἄνω.

258 Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, p. 95.

committed in Dalmatia and the Gepids had a free hand in Pannonia. It is telling that Justinian's sanction of suspending subsidies proved ineffective: the Gepids must have decided the profits from conducting and facilitating raids against the Romans outweighed the subsidy. Yet it also gave Justinian money he could use to buy new friends, as we shall now consider.

5.3.3. The Lombard Alliance

We can now turn to the Lombards. The Lombards had been subjects of the Heruls in the Morava Valley before overthrowing Rudolf and establishing an independent kingdom in c. 505. They remained in that region until the collapse of Ostrogothic Illyria: then, like the Gepids, they took the opportunity to cross the Danube. While the Gepids, longstanding Roman allies, were punished for their expansion with the suspension of their subsidy, the Lombards were instead rewarded with money and the establishment of a new annual subsidy. To most historians, the explanation has been clear. Curta put it that 'annoyed by Gepid depredations and by the impossibility of dislodging the Gepid king from Sirmium, Justinian agreed to give the Lombards the annual subsidies until then paid to the Gepids'.²⁵⁹ Sarantis agrees that Justinian was 'resigning himself to controlling Pannonia indirectly' following Calluc's failure to oust the Gepids from Sirmium.²⁶⁰ Let us examine this interpretation in light of the primary sources.

Our main source is Procopius but, as discussed previously in this chapter, his decision to narrate events on the Danube in digressions within his account of the Gothic War means we often have to work backwards. How Justinian allied with the Lombards is thus narrated as a preamble to Procopius' account of the war between the Lombards and Gepids in 548, leaving some uncertainty about chronology. His account is that 'meanwhile, the Gepids held

259 Curta, *The Long Sixth Century in Eastern Europe*, p. 9.

260 Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, p. 95.

the city of Sirmium and almost all the cities of Dacia, having taken possession of them as soon as the emperor Justinian removed them from the Goths'. Then Justinian 'ceded' to the Lombard king 'a city of Noricum and the strongholds of Pannonia, as well as many other towns and a great amount of money (*chrēmasi megalois*)'.²⁶¹ While Procopius's city of Noricum and strongholds of Pannonia' are not exact geographical references, Procopius probably means the Lombards occupied a swathe of the former Roman provinces of Noricum and Pannonia to the north and west of the Gepids.²⁶²

It seems clear that Procopius associated the movement of the Lombards with Ostrogothic withdrawal from Illyria (winter 536/37). Yet historians have given wide-ranging dates from the sensible, if conservative, 537–39, to the much later 545–47, with more proposals in between.²⁶³ The preference for later dating is undermined by a separate event narrated by Procopius that can be definitively dated to the winter of 538/539. The Ostrogothic king Vitigis, struggling in Italy, sent to the Lombard king Wacho.²⁶⁴ In the account of Procopius, Vitigis 'sent envoys to Wacho, the ruler of the Lombards, offering great sums of money (*chrēmata te megala proteinomenoi*) and inviting him to a military alliance (*homaichian*)'. This failed once 'these envoys realised that Wacho was a friend and ally of the emperor and so returned unsuccessful'.²⁶⁵ It is on the basis of this passage that Pohl

261 Procop., *BG*, VII. 33. 10–12: Λαγγοβάρδας δὲ βασιλεὺς Ἰουστινιανὸς ἐδωρήσατο Νορικῶν τε πόλει καὶ τοῖς ἐπὶ Παννονίας ὀχυρώμασι τε καὶ ἄλλοις χωρίοις πολλοῖς καὶ χρήμασι μεγάλοις ἄγαν. διὰ τοι τοῦτο ἐξ ἡθῶν τῶν πατρίων Λαγγοβάρδαι ἐξαναστάντες ἐνθὲνδε ποταμοῦ Ἰστρου ἰδρύσαντο, Γηπαίδων οὐ πολλῷ ἄποθεν.

262 Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, pp. 96–98.

263 '545–7' in Kaldellis (ed.), *The Wars of Justinian / Prokopios*, p. 445, n. 711; 'c. 543' in Walter Pohl, 'The Empire and the Lombards: Treaties and Negotiations in the Sixth Century', in *Kingdoms of the Empire*, ed. by Walter Pohl (Brill, 1997), pp. 75–133 (p. 88), doi:10.1163/9789004620186_007; 'c. 537–9' in Sarantis, 'War and Diplomacy in Pannonia and the Northwest Balkans', p. 27; 'c. 540s' in R. C. Blockley, *The History of Menander the Guardsman: Introductory essay, text, translation and historiographical notes* (Francis Cairns, 1985), p. 267, n. 152.

264 Lat. *Wacho* following Paul Diac. *Hist. Lang.*, I. 21, *passim*, and *Origo Gentis Langobardum*, 4; cf. Gk. *Ouakēs* (Οὐάκης) in Procop., *BG*, VI. 22 and VII. 35; see PLRE III, 'Vaces', p. 1350.

265 Procop., *BG*, VI. 22. 11–13: Οὐίττιγίς δὲ καὶ οἱ ξὺν αὐτῷ Γότθοι Βελισάριον ἅμα ἤρι ἀρχομένῳ ἐπὶ σφᾶς τε καὶ Ῥάβενναν ἤξιν ἀκούοντες ἐν δείματι μεγάλῳ καθίσταντο καὶ τὰ παρόντα σφίσιν ἐν βουλῇ ἐποιοῦντο. καὶ αὐτοῖς πολλὰ βουλευσαμένοις (οὐ γὰρ ἀξιόμαχοι τοῖς πολεμίοις κατὰ μόνας ῥοντο εἶναι) ἔδοξεν ἄλλων τινῶν βαρβάρων ἐπικουρίαν ἐπάγεσθαι. Γερμανῶν μὲν οὖν τοῦ τε δολεροῦ καὶ

suggests the Lombards began receiving money from the Romans, because Justinian had to make it ‘rewarding enough for Wacho to make him refuse the Gothic offer’.²⁶⁶ Such an argument is only necessary because Pohl dates the earlier reference by Procopius to land and money to the 540s: if we place the latter in the 530s, as we have argued for, there is no such problem.²⁶⁷ The simplest way to reconcile the two passages is therefore to date Justinian’s alliance with the Lombards to the late 530s, after his break with the Gepids.²⁶⁸

Why, though, was Justinian content to surrender these tracts of Noricum and Pannonia, when he had been so aggrieved at the Gepid seizure of Sirmium? The explanation seems practical and ideological. Sirmium was the prestigious former prefectural capital and site of an imperial palace, which lay on the important highway to Italy and was within striking distance of existing Roman territories. Lying beyond the Gepid kingdom, the provinces taken by the Lombards were not directly accessible from imperial territory. They also lacked any prize as prestigious as Sirmium.²⁶⁹

The strategic considerations are also fairly clear. By endorsing the establishment of a Lombard kingdom in northern Pannonia and Noricum, Justinian was creating a buffer against the return of the Ostrogoths or the further expansion of Gepid power. The multipolarity of politics in the Illyria of the 530s meant, however, that a subsidy was essential. As we saw with the prior quote from Procopius, the Ostrogoths were quite willing to use their own financial power to accrue allies. Had Wacho not been in Justinian’s pay, it seems likely he would have accepted the Ostrogoth offer: we saw how the Heruls under Anastasius continued their raiding even after a grant of territory, only to be pacified by Justinian’s offer of a

ἀπίστου ἤδη ἐν πείρᾳ γεγενημένοι ἀπέσχοντο, ἀγαπῶντες, ἣν μὴ καὶ αὐτοὶ ζῶν Βελισαρίῳ ἐπὶ σφᾶς ἴωσιν, ἀλλ’ ἀμφοτέροις ἐκποδὼν στήσωνται. ἐς δὲ Λαγγοβαρδῶν τὸν ἄρχοντα Οὐάκην πρέσβεις ἔπεμψαν, χρήματά τε μεγάλα προτεινόμενοι καὶ ἐς τὴν ὁμαιχμίαν παρακαλοῦντες. οἱ δὲ, ἐπεὶ βασιλεῖ φίλον τε καὶ ξύμμαχον τὸν Οὐάκην ἔγνωσαν εἶναι, ἄπρακτοι ἀνεχώρησαν.

266 Pohl, ‘The Empire and the Lombards’, p. 88.

267 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 33. 10–12.

268 Pohl, ‘The Empire and the Lombards’, p. 85; Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars*, p. 96.

269 Pohl, ‘The Empire and the Lombards’, p. 88.

subsidy. Thus Justinian's acceptance of the Lombards crossing the Danube gave him a new ally against his two principal foes. Though Procopius might describe the Ostrogothic offer as 'a great amount of money', it is unlikely to have far exceeded the Roman offer. Like the Heruls and the Antes, the Lombards also gave Justinian a supply of soldiers for his wars. This seems to have been particularly important in the later 540s and early 550s, potentially because the collapse of the Herul kingdom created a shortfall.

In the year 548/49 a new king, Audoin, had risen amongst the Lombards.²⁷⁰ Audoin first acted as regent for Wacho's son, Waltari.²⁷¹ Although later Lombard sources credit Audoin with having led his people into Pannonia, we should prefer dating this to the 530s under Wacho as has been argued.²⁷² Procopius describes how 'Audoin, the ruler of the Lombards, was won over by the emperor Justinian and by much money'. Furthermore, 'in accordance with the treaty of alliance', he sent 2500 soldiers to fight with the Romans.²⁷³ This introduces the supply of soldiers in return for the subsidy.

The dating of this alliance is complicated. Pohl argues that because Procopius has Audoin complain that the Romans did not help against the Gepids, despite the Lombards having helped in Italy, the Battle of Asfeld (552) must postdate the statement by Procopius about Audoin's alliance.²⁷⁴ His argument overlooks Procopius' earlier statement that Audoin had pledged troops to participate in Germanus' campaign of 550.²⁷⁵ Elsewhere, we are told that Narses had been given 'an extremely large amount of money' to recruit from the Lombards as he travelled to Italy.²⁷⁶ In a later speech attributed to Totila, Procopius has the Ostrogothic king rally his troops by asking whether 'Huns and Lombards and Heruls, hired

270 PLRE III, 'Audoin', pp. 152–53.

271 PLRE III, 'Waltari', p. 1399. See Procop., *BG*, VII. 34. 4; Procop., *BG*, VII. 35. 12–18.

272 *Origo Gentis Langobardum*, 5; Paul Diac. *Hist. Lang.*, I. 22.

273 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 26. 12.

274 Pohl, 'The Empire and the Lombards', pp. 90–91.

275 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 39. 20.

276 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 26. 5.

by them with I know not how much money, will ever endanger themselves for them to the point of death'.²⁷⁷ All of this points to payments continuing, both as pay to Lombard soldiers and a subsidy to Audoin to maintain his alliance.

With regards to the Danube frontier, the alliance bore fruit in the late 540s and early 550s as the rivalry between Audoin and Thurisind escalated. Threatening each other with war, both appealed to Justinian for support. This culminated in the rival embassies of 549 which, as dramatized by Procopius, give us much of the valuable information about the emperor's relations with these kings that we have been using. With Justinian backing the Lombards, the Gepids twice came to terms with Audoin to avoid war.²⁷⁸ By 552, the Gepids and Justinian were willing to come to terms: the emperor hoped to stop the waves of raiders the Gepids were allowing into his empire, while Thurisind aimed to avoid fighting the Lombards and Romans on two fronts.²⁷⁹ Yet soon after, the Lombards agitated for war and, according to Procopius, Justinian ruled that further Slavene raids through Gepid territory rendered their treaty void.²⁸⁰ The Gepids and Lombards fought the ferocious Battle of Asfeld, which Jordanes describes as one of the largest since the days of Attila.²⁸¹ The Gepids were defeated and forced to make peace.

The subsidy to the Lombard kings Wacho and Audoin thus bought Justinian several benefits. It secured the territories of northern Pannonia and Noricum against the Ostrogoths and Gepids. The Lombard presence presumably checked Gepid expansion throughout the 540s and culminated with the Battle of Asfeld, in a military defeat of the Gepids that the Romans had proven unable to achieve in the 530s. It also guaranteed against attacks or

277 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 30. 18 PLRE III, 'Totila', pp. 1328–32.

278 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 18. 1–11.

279 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 25. 7–8.

280 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 25. 10.

281 Jord., *Rom.*, 386–87; Procop., *BG*, VIII. 25. 14–15; for the date see Nuffelen and Hoof (eds), *Jordanes: Romana and Getica*, pp. 11–13; Brian Croke, 'Jordanes and the Immediate Past', *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 54 (2005), pp. 473–94 (pp. 477–89); Sarantis, 'War and Diplomacy in Pannonia and the Northwest Balkans', p. 36; Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, pp. 315–17.

further expansion by the Lombards themselves. Finally, it had provided a source of manpower for the war in Italy at a critical point in the campaign against Totila.

The rupture between Justinian and the Gepids was a significant turning point for two polities which had enjoyed relatively warm and cooperative relationship for nearly eighty years. As an enemy, their main danger seems not to have been direct expansion, but their willingness to marshal Justinian's enemies and facilitate raids across the Danube and deep into the empire's Balkan provinces. As discussed in the previous section, the disintegration of the Heruls into pro-Roman and pro-Gepid factions robbed Justinian of one of his clients, but the Lombards' occupation of Pannonia offered a new opportunity. This culminated in a new balance of power after the Lombards' defeat of the Gepids at Asfeld.

The first point about the new political landscape is the treaty Justinian struck with the Gepids in around 552. The evidence we can piece together about the treaty suggests it was designed with the intention of definitively settling the causes of conflict. The defeated Thurisind pledged 'eternal friendship' with both the Lombards and Romans.²⁸² More concretely, both kings then killed the claimants to each other's thrones whom they had harboured with the approval of Justinian.²⁸³ While further details of this treaty are not specified, Menander offers an important clue. He reports that when Justin II (565–78) met an Avar embassy, he declared that 'our predecessor as Emperor took in the Gepids when they came to him and gave them land around Sirmium' and then refers to 'the Gepids belonging to us'.²⁸⁴ Blockley rejects these claims as either a mistake of Menander or a rhetorical flourish of Justin, but that is neither necessary nor helpful.²⁸⁵ Instead, Justin's words should be read as

282 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 27. 21.

283 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 27. 21.

284 Men. Prot., fr. 12. 6. 58–62: κράτος Γήπαιδας ἐπήλυδας ὄντας εἰσεποιήσατο καὶ χώραν αὐτοῖς ἀπένειμε τὴν περὶ τὸ Σίρμιον [...] τοὺς ἡμῖν ἀνήκοντας Γήπαιδας; note while the translation by Blockley as 'the Gepids who are our subjects' conveys the essential meaning, but Menander does not use that technical term: Blockley, *The History of Menander the Guardsman*, p. 141. See PLRE III, 'Iustinus 5', pp. 754–56.

285 Blockley, *The History of Menander the Guardsman*, p. 268, n. 163.

a positive statement of at least the outcome, and perhaps the terms, of Justinian's treaty of 552. The Gepids had submitted to the emperor's authority in return for the formal recognition of their presence in Sirmium. The description elsewhere by Menander of the Gepids as Roman allies (*symmachoi*) further reinforces the idea that 552 represented a formal renewal of the alliance.²⁸⁶

On the other hand, the narrative of Menander suggests that the subsidies frozen in 537 were not reinstated by the treaty. When the Avars embassy to Justin II demanded recognition of their conquest of the Gepids, it did not demand subsidies on that basis. At the same time, the ambassadors sought subsidies due to the Kutrigurs and Utrigurs. This was an aggrandizement: as demonstrated in Chapter Six, Justinian had ended the Kutrigurs subsidies as penalty for their raiding. Given this, there is no reason for the Avars to fail to assert their right to the subsidy owed to the Gepids even if such a claim was dubious. We should therefore treat as genuine the silence of our sources about a reinstatement of Gepid subsidies.

The reset with the Gepids did not come at the expense of their rivals the Lombards. We learn from Menander that the Lombard alliance was still in place at the start of Justin's reign. Indeed Alboin, who succeeded Audoin in 563, was to receive Justin's support in waging war on the Gepids in 567.²⁸⁷ Knowing this, we can treat Paul the Deacon's account of the final years of Justinian's relations with the Lombards as largely credible, even if his work is often disparaged for having been written two centuries later.²⁸⁸ He wrote that 'all the time which the Lombards possessed Pannonia, they were supporters against the enemies of the Roman state'.²⁸⁹ He also attests that Alboin sent military support to assist the Romans in Italy. Given Alboin's accession in 563 and Justinian's death in November 565, this can be

286 Men. Prot., fr. 12. 1. 5–8: Ῥωμαίων [...] συμμαχοῦντων τοῖς Γήπαισιν.

287 Men. Prot., fr. 12. 1–3; PLRE III, 'Alboin', pp. 38–40.

288 Pohl, 'The Empire and the Lombards', p. 96.

289 Paul Diac., *Hist. Lang.*, II. 1: Omnique tempore quo Langobardi Pannoniam possiderunt Romanae rei publicae adversum aemulos adiutores fuereunt.

dated to the narrow window of Narses's final campaigns against the Ostrogoths.²⁹⁰ Those warriors 'returned to their own lands as victors, having been honoured with many gifts'.²⁹¹ This could naturally have consisted of any spoils of war, but we should recall the mission of Narses to recruit Lombards with money in the 550s. There is greater likelihood that Lombards continued to receive annual subsidies to the end of Justinian's reign than the Gepids. That the Lombards never came under Avar domination, having first allied with their new neighbours and then decamped to Italy before they could be conquered, means the Lombards' omission from the list of subsidies claimed by the Avars does not hold the significance that the Gepids' does.

5.4. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Justinian's use of subsidies to bring third parties into his Vandal and Gothic Wars might have helped in the short term but proved fateful for the longer-term management of newly-acquired territories. In Africa, Italy and Illyria the Romans struggled for decades against the Moors, Franks and Gepids who had helped oust the Ostrogoths. The presence of these powers also encouraged and enabled internal unrest and revolts in Africa and Italy, while the Gepids helped raiders from the steppe access the Balkan provinces.

In the first case, it was the Moors who consistently employed moral rhetoric to assert their claims against Justinian. The emperor took an absolutist position about his rule over Africa. Yet in practice, more subsidies were required to win wars in the 530s and 540s. The attempts to cancel subsidies in the 530s, 540s and 560s all resulted in conflicts. This contrasts to the second case, where it was Justinian and his representatives who employed a discourse of moral obligation. They urged the kings Theudebert and Theudebald to honour the alliance

290 Paul Diac., *Hist. Lang.*, II. 1: Alboin electam e suis manum direxit, qui Romanis adversum Getas suffragium ferrent.

291 Paul Diac., *Hist. Lang.*, II. 1: *honorati multis muneribus victores ad propria remearunt.*

on the basis of the money they had received. This had little effect and Justinian's armies had to fight a grinding war of attrition until the 560s to oust the Franks from Italy; even then, Provence was recognised as irredeemably lost.

The case of Illyria combined these dynamics. Justinian ended longstanding subsidies rather than recognise the Gepids ruling Sirmium. For their part, the Gepids had ruled Sirmium in the fifth century with at least tacit imperial endorsement. After the subsidy was cancelled, the Gepids began raiding imperial territories and enabling other groups to raid. Justinian's response was to promote the Lombard kings, offering money and endorsing their settlement in north-western Pannonia. The Lombards contributed soldiers to the Roman war effort in Italy and eventually overcame the Gepids, but Sirmium was not yielded. Indeed, although the evidence is not explicit, it does seem Justinian formally recognised their rule of Sirmium in the end.

These cases show, once again, how subsidies were used to pursue Justinian's objectives, but also caused the 'reconquered West' to become a military quagmire. Furthermore, far from following a standard template, Justinian presented subsidies through different political discourses: from absolute discretion in Africa to a binding obligation in Italy and Illyria. If this had helped achieve his objectives, it would deservedly be called 'flexible'. To the erstwhile allies who had enabled his western reconquests, it must have seemed infuriatingly incoherent.

Chapter Six: ‘Bringing all the barbarians into collision’¹ The Pontic Steppe and the Defence of the Lower Danube

‘They are not ploughmen, but nomads.’² These simple words of Herodotus have posed an intricate hermeneutic challenge to the historian ever since. The profound absence of texts written by nomads themselves forces us to rely on literature produced within cultures where the life of the steppe nomad was believed to be the antithesis of civilized life.³ We might thus fear that in conducting analyses based on those sources, ‘modern historians have often repeated the ancient *topoi* under a thin scholarly veneer’.⁴ This concern shall be shown to be particularly acute regarding the analysis of subsidies.

This chapter considers the Eurasian steppe and the Lower Danube region. The first case examines the equestrian nomads of the Pontic Steppe, called ‘Huns’ in general terms. I argue that Justinian’s approach changed over time. Initially, he attempted to establish a hegemonic ruler through Gordas of the ‘Bosporan Huns’. When this failed, he was forced into dealing with the Kutrigurs and Utigurs, as well as other groups. The policy changed in the opposite direction with the ‘Slavic’ or ‘Proto-Slavic’ tribes of the Lower Danube. Initially

1 Procop., *Anecd.*, XI. 5: πάντας βαρβάρους πρὸς τε ἀλλήλους ξυνέκρουε.

2 Herodotus, *Histories*, IV. 3. 1: οὐ γὰρ ἀρόται εἰσὶ ἀλλὰ νομάδες.

3 Walter Pohl, ‘Ethnicity and Empire in the Western Eurasian Steppes’, in *Empires and Exchanges in Eurasian Late Antiquity: Rome, China, Iran, and the Steppe, ca. 250–750*, ed. by Nicola di Cosmo and Michael Maas (Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 189–205 (p. 202); Brent Shaw, “‘Eaters of Flesh, Drinkers of Milk’: The Ancient Mediterranean Ideology of the Pastoral Nomad”, *Ancient Society*, 13–14 (1982), pp. 5–31; Mark Whittow, ‘Byzantium’s Eurasian Policy in the Age of the Türk Empire’, in *Empires and Exchanges in Eurasian Late Antiquity: Rome, China, Iran, and the Steppe, ca. 250–750*, ed. by Nicola di Cosmo and Michael Maas (Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 271–86 (pp. 281–82).

4 Pohl, ‘Ethnicity and Empire in the Western Eurasian Steppes’, p. 189.

Justinian launched military expeditions to keep these groups in check, before adopting a policy of promoting the Antes as a buffer against the steppe nomads and as a check on the neighbouring Sclavenes. The third case then considers a major shift related to both these cases: the decision to promote the Avars as a hegemonic steppe empire over the Huns and the Slavic tribes. Recent revisionist scholarship has sought to disprove that Justinian paid subsidies to the Avars, but I will argue that we can be sure that he did.

The overarching issue that we must begin by addressing is whether the steppe peoples had a particular dynamic of subsidies related to their way of life. It has often been argued that the limited surplus generated by a pastoral economy made the wealth of neighbouring agrarian empires attractive, and the expert ridership learned on the steppe enabled forms of warfare that have been aptly compared to Blitzkrieg.⁵ I argue, however, that the use of subsidies in this region bears strong resemblance to the cases in preceding chapters.

Imperial subsidies are fundamental to the most influential model of relations between the ancient polities of the Eurasian steppe and neighbouring empires, developed by Thomas Barfield.⁶ For Barfield, the pastoral economy placed fundamental limits on the ability of steppe empires to generate revenue through tax, thus necessitating ‘extracting resources from outside the steppe to fund the state’ in the form of ‘loot from raids, trading rights, and subsidies’.⁷ In this model the nomads were not interested in acquiring territory per se, because they lacked the institutional infrastructure to extract taxes: instead, they could

5 ‘Blitzkrieg, in that their goal was to concentrate overwhelming force at high speed and constant motion in order to keep the enemy off-balance and to make it difficult for the Romans to organize an adequate response at any given point,’ Florin Curta, ‘Avar Blitzkrieg, Slavic and Bulgar Raiders, and Roman Special Ops: Mobile Warriors in the 6th-Century Balkans’, in *Medieval Europe From Another Angle: The People*, ed. by Florin Curta (Routledge, 2025), pp. 69–89 (p. 72).

6 Thomas J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China* (Blackwell, 1989), p. 9.

7 Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China*, p. 9; cf. Thomas J. Barfield, ‘The Hsiung-nu Imperial Confederacy: Organization and Foreign Policy’, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 41.1 (1981), pp. 45–61 (p. 52), doi:10.2307/2055601.

employ existing empires as intermediaries.⁸ To menace an agrarian empire into making concessions required a high level of military and political sophistication, and thus created a ratcheting dynamic for the development of nomadic empires until they became unsustainable. Because of this, Barfield has described steppe polities as ‘secondary state formation’, or ‘shadow empires’.⁹ Barfield’s model has proven extraordinarily influential, even to those who are sceptical.¹⁰ Indeed, the growing interest in accounting for climate change in historiography has led many to further refine the basic idea of Barfield: the fragility of surplus on the steppe meaning any climatic change acted as a further impulse to acquire resources from neighbouring empires.¹¹

Such models offer an account of how steppe polities came to demand subsidies that has a compelling internal coherence. It also intriguingly corresponds to the account of Procopius given in this chapter’s epigram, which has otherwise been dismissed as

- 8 ‘Barfield’s model of Han–Xiongnu relations, however, can be useful in interpreting the policies of the Huns vis-à-vis the Roman Empire and Hunnic military campaigns into Roman territory, which were, at least initially, mainly aimed at bringing about economically advantageous treaties for the Huns and not territorial gains,’ Hyun Jin Kim, *The Huns, Rome and the Birth of Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 193–94, doi:10.1017/cbo9780511920493, n. 12.
- 9 Thomas J. Barfield, *Shadow Empires: An Alternative Imperial History* (Princeton University Press, 2023), p. 3, doi:10.1353/book.114765. A comparable formulation is ‘Central Eurasian tribes can be understood as “secondary phenomena” arising in response to outside catalysts, especially the external states with which they continually interacted’, adopted by Peter B. Golden, ‘The Stateless Nomads of Central Eurasia’, in *Empires and Exchanges in Eurasian Late Antiquity: Rome, China, Iran, and the Steppe, ca. 250–750*, ed. by Nicola di Cosmo and Michael Maas (Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 317–32 (p. 320), doi:10.1017/9781316146040.024.
- 10 For example Matthew Canepa has argued that payments to steppe nomads should be considered in terms of ‘symbolic as well as economic capital’. Yet it is not clear how the process of acquiring ‘symbolic capital’ in Canepa’s conceptualisation differs logically from Barfield’s economic capital. See Matthew P. Canepa, ‘Sasanian Iran and the Projection of Power in Late Antique Eurasia: Competing Cosmologies and Topographies of Power’, in *Empires and Exchanges in Eurasian Late Antiquity: Rome, China, Iran, and the Steppe, ca. 250–750*, ed. by Nicola di Cosmo and Michael Maas (Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 54–69 (p. 54), doi:10.1017/9781316146040.006.
- 11 ‘Political and military conditions on the steppe were themselves highly sensitive to the climate change. Any abnormal variation in temperature risked having a dramatic impact on the availability and quality of grassland on which the nomad powers and tribal confederations of the region depended for their military might [...] The 530s [...] was a period of major climactic instability [...] This in turn opened the way to a major reconfiguration of power relations on the steppe, resulting in a renewed period of political and military insecurity for both Persia and, ultimately, Byzantium,’ Peter Sarris, *Empires of Faith: The Fall of Rome to the Rise of Islam, 500–700* (Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 170, doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199261260.001.0001.

hyperbolic.¹² Indeed, a recent chapter by Marion Kruse argued precisely that when Procopius describes a ‘vicious cycle’ of payments to the Huns, he shows a rationalist economic logic.¹³ This creates a conundrum, however, given the other chapters of this thesis show Justinian providing payments to societies of an unquestionably sedentary and agrarian character. This raises the question of whether the steppe nomads’ uniqueness has been overstated, if demand for subsidies was a general characteristic shared by neighbours of the Romans.

Any attempt at building models must, however, face the challenges raised about our basic data by new literary approaches to Late Antique sources. With direct reference to Procopius and his contemporaries, Anthony Kaldellis argues that the purpose of ethnographic digressions was as ‘foils to discuss their own societies indirectly’.¹⁴ He does, however, concede that this recognition must be made ‘without discounting the abundant information these texts provide on foreign peoples’.¹⁵ A good example of this is given by Walter Pohl, who argues that although Procopius often employs a general concept of ‘Hunnish peoples’, his use of precise nomenclature for individual groups shows he was capable of making the distinction.¹⁶ Indeed, this very point was made by Procopius’s successor Agathias, who explained that ‘all these peoples were referred to by the general name of Scythians or Huns, whereas individual tribes had their own particular names, rooted in ancestral tradition’.¹⁷

12 ‘His criticisms are the criticisms of prejudice. [...] Subsidies essential to diplomacy in themselves, but still more so to keep things quiet on one front while war was being waged on another, are seen as an unworthy betrayal of Byzantine might,’ in Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (University of California Press, 1985), p. 264.

13 Marion Kruse, ‘Economic Thought and Ideology in Procopius of Caesarea’, in *Le Monde de Procope*, ed. by Geoffrey Greatrex and Sylvain Janniard (Éditions de Boccard, 2018), pp. 39–54 (pp. 41–44).

14 Anthony Kaldellis, *Ethnography After Antiquity: Foreign Lands and Peoples in Byzantine Literature* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 23.

15 Kaldellis, *Ethnography After Antiquity*, p. 23.

16 ‘Procopius, in the mid-sixth century, had a rather coherent concept of Hunnic peoples, *Ounnika ethnē*, comprising Akatzirs, Ultizurs, Onogurs, Utigurs, Cutrigurs, and others whom he saw derived from Attila’s Huns. Procopius also included Central Asian Huns, specifically, the Hephthalites, “who are of the stock of the Huns in fact as well as in name”. This phrase implies that Procopius was well aware of the difference between precise ethnic denominators and generic terms,’ in Pohl, ‘Ethnicity and Empire in the Western Eurasian Steppes’, p. 193.

17 Agath., *Hist.*, v. 11. 2: οὗτοι δὲ ἅπαντες κοινῇ μὲν Σκύθαι καὶ Οὐννοὶ ἐπωνομάζοντο· ἰδίᾳ δὲ κατὰ γένη τὸ μὲν τι αὐτῶν Κοτρίγουροι, τὸ δὲ Οὐτίγουροι, ἄλλοι δὲ Οὐλτίζουροι καὶ ἄλλοι Βουρούγουνδοι, καὶ ἄλλοι ὥς ἂν αὐτοῖς πάτριόν τε ἦν καὶ εἰθισμένον.

Justinianic authors were clearly making decisions about the balance between literary form and empirical substance.

Any approach must therefore begin with a recognition that our textual sources for sixth-century nomads were written by Roman authors for Roman audiences, who shared strong preconceptions about the subject. The more literary-minded writers sought consciously to evoke Herodotus, who wrote that the Scythians ‘are not ploughmen, but nomads’.¹⁸ Yet classicising historiography was also intended to give the impression at least of verisimilitude through empirical knowledge. By carefully distinguishing empirical information and literary tropes, we can hope to reconstruct accounts from these sources.

6.1. The Pontic Steppe: Bosphoran Huns, Kutrigurs and Utigurs

In order to understand Justinian’s payments on the Pontic steppe, we must first understand the politics of that region. Because of the difficulties in interpreting the ethnic terms used in our primary texts, however, the political landscape of the sixth-century Pontic steppe remains highly disputed in academic scholarship. This case study shall begin by reviewing the recent debates and establishing parameters, before then considering how payments were used.

18 Herodotus, *Histories*, IV. 3. 1: οὐ γὰρ ἀρόται εἰσὶ ἀλλὰ νομάδες; see discussion by Shaw, “Eaters of Flesh, Drinkers of Milk”, pp. 8–9.

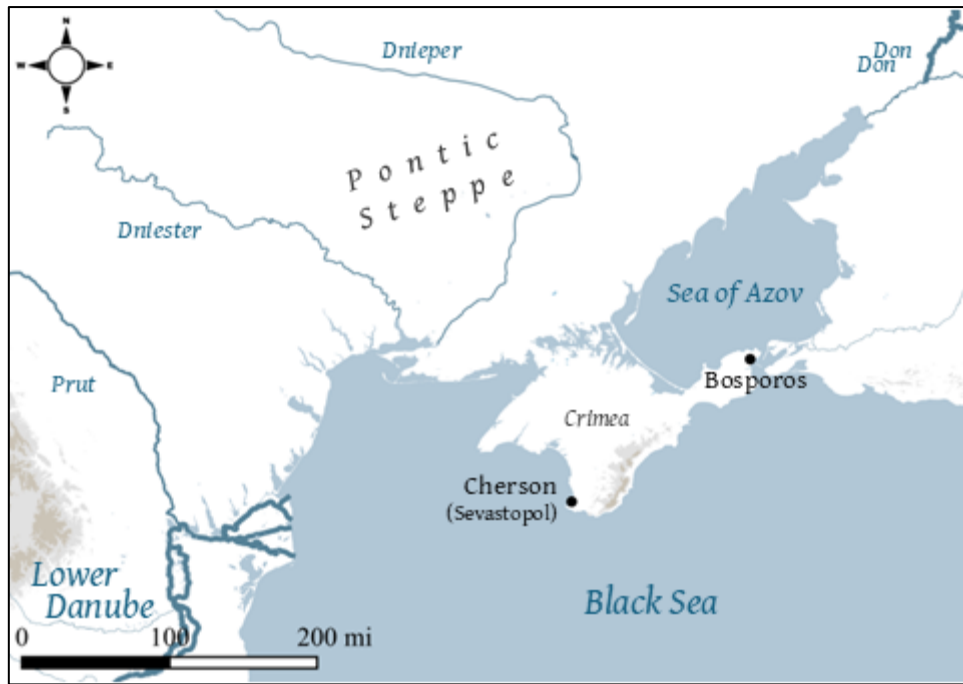


FIG. 6.1. Map of the Pontic Steppe and Crimea

The dispute has largely turned on whether the *Ounnoi* of Procopius and Agathias can be identified with the Bulgar of Jordanes; characteristically, Malalas employs both *Ounnoi* and Bulgar.¹⁹ Florin Curta recently argued that ‘instead of pigeonholing ethnic names from one author onto the (mental) map of another, it may be wiser to regard separately the ethnic names each one of them employed’.²⁰ Kim argues that ‘the various Oghurs (Utigurs and Kutrigurs) and the Bulgars [...] are likely to have been either the same people or at least members of the same, related political entity’.²¹ Sarantis argues against treating the terms Hun and Bulgar as interchangeable, arguing ‘Bulgar referred to a specific political grouping of Hun tribes’.²² He disputes Kim’s argument for a continuity of a concept of Hunnic empire

19 Florin Curta, ‘Ethnicity in the Steppe Lands of the Northern Black Sea Region During the Early Byzantine Times’, *Archaeologia Bulgarica*, 23.1 (2019), pp. 33–70 (p. 36).

20 Curta, ‘Ethnicity in the Steppe Lands’, p. 46.

21 Kim, *The Huns, Rome and the Birth of Europe*, p. 137.

22 Alexander Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars: Campaigning, Diplomacy and Development in Illyricum, Thrace and the Northern World, A.D. 527–65* (Francis Cairns, 2016), pp. 57–58.

after the fall of Attila.²³ Pohl, drawing on Golden and contra Kim, argues the ‘-gur’ tribes shared a cultural identity but never formed a cohesive political entity or empire.²⁴

6.1.1. The ‘Bosporan Huns’

In 528 Justinian allied with King Gordas, the leader of a group often referred to in modern scholarship as the ‘Bosporan Huns’.²⁵ While not usually considered a case of subsidisation because no cash payment is explicitly attested, this discussion shall demonstrate the strong likelihood of an exchange of money given the contextual evidence. To begin, however, the context of the Cimmerian Bosphorus and the ‘Bosporan Huns’ must be addressed. The Cimmerian Bosphorus was the ancient name for the Kerch Strait, which connects the Black Sea with the Sea of Azov (anc. Maeotic Lake).²⁶ This area was the centre of a network of Greek colonies as early as the fourth century BC.²⁷ Like Colchis in Chapter Three, it was thus deeply embedded in the Graeco-Roman imagination as a distant, albeit known land.

The city of Panticapaeum (mod. Kerch), ‘the metropolis of those [cities] along the Bosphorus [strait]’, was commonly known as Bosphorus.²⁸ Together with Cherson (mod. Sevastopol) on the west of the Crimea, ‘twenty days’ journey’ as Procopius has it, the cities

23 Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars*, p. 38, n. 95.

24 Pohl, ‘Ethnicity and Empire in the Western Eurasian Steppes’, p. 31.

25 Gordas, from Gk. *Gordas* [Γορδάς] in Theoph., *Chron.*, (cf. Gk. *Grōd* [Γρῶδ] in Joh. Mal., XVIII. 14); see PLRE III, ‘Grod’, pp. 557–58. Joh. Mal., XVIII. 14. 1–11: εἰς τὸ φυλάττειν τὰ Ῥωμαϊκὰ καὶ τὴν Βόσπορον.

26 BAtlas, Map 84 B2, ‘Maeotis’.

27 For the cities’ origins, see John Hind, ‘The Bosporan Kingdom’, in *CAH* 6, ed. by D. M. Lewis and others (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 476–511; for the Roman relationship, see Doug Lee, ‘Naval Intelligence in Late Antiquity’, *Publications de l’École Française de Rome*, 297 (2002), pp. 93–112 (pp. 94–99).

28 Stephanus of Byzantium, *Ethnica*, vi. 26. 1–6: Παντικάπαιον· πόλις μεγίστη, τῶν κατὰ Βόσπορον μητρόπολις. ᾠκίσθη δὲ παρὰ Αἰήτου παιδός, λαβόντος τὸν τόπον παρὰ Ἀγαήτου τοῦ Σκυθῶν βασιλέως καὶ καλέσαντος τὴν πόλιν ἀπὸ τοῦ παραρρέοντος ποταμοῦ Παντικάπου. ὁ πολίτης Παντικαπαιεύς. λέγεται καὶ Παντικαπαιάτης. ἔστι δὲ <καὶ> Παντικαπεύς, ὡς ἀπὸ τοῦ Παντικάπη, ὡς τοῦ Σινώπη τὸ Σινωπεύς. τὸ δὲ Παντικάπη κεῖται παρὰ Εὐστοχίῳ. The city probably became known as Bosphorus simply because of its location on the Cimmerian Bosphorus as implied by Stepanus. A more colourful suggestion is that the name originated as *Boōn phoros*, because the city paid tribute to Rome in the form of cattle; see Joh. Mal., XVIII. 14. 7; Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6020

formed the so-called ‘Bosporan Kingdom’.²⁹ This kingdom had been allied with the Romans for centuries but had struggled against invaders from the steppe in the fourth and fifth centuries. Procopius says the *Bosporitai* became Roman subjects under Justin I (518–27); this should be read as a demonym for the wider Bosporan polity, rather than the city.³⁰ This would seem the likely time that the city received a Roman garrison ‘on account of the Huns’.³¹ At the accession of Justinian the area was thus not simply a far-flung Roman outpost, but his empire’s northernmost territory.

If the Bosporans were city-dwelling Roman subjects, then who were the ‘Bosporan Huns’? Like ‘Caucasian Huns’, this epithet is employed in modern historiography because our sources do not give any more specific ethnic or tribal name. In Theophanes and Malalas, Gordas is described as ‘a king of the *Hounnoi* in the vicinity of Bosporus’.³² Procopius says the entire land journey between Bosporus and Cherson was controlled by Huns.³³ It is, however, important to recognise that neither statement necessarily locates the Huns as living directly on the Bosporus Strait or the Crimea. Indeed, Curta has argued based on archaeological evidence that the settlements of these Huns were on the northern limit of the steppe and the forest zone.³⁴ As Theophanes wrote, ‘there were many dealings between

29 Procop., *BP*, I. 12. 6–9: ἔστι δὲ πόλις ἐπιθαλασσία ἢ Βόσπορος, ἐν ἀριστερᾷ μὲν ἐσπλέοντι τὸν Εὐξεινον καλούμενον πόντον, Χερσῶνος δὲ πόλεως, ἥ γῆς τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἐσχάτη ἐστίν, ὁδῷ διέχουσα ἡμερῶν εἴκοσιν; cf. Procop., *Aed.*, III. 7. 10: καὶ μὴν καὶ Βοσπόρου καὶ Χερσῶνος πόλεων, αἵπερ κατὰ τὴν ἐκείνη ἀκτὴν ἐπιθαλασσίδια μετὰ λίμνην τε τὴν Μαιώτιδα καὶ τοὺς Ταύρους καὶ Ταυροσκύθας ἐν ἐσχάτῳ οἰκοῦνται τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς, πεπονηκότα παντάπασιν τὰ τεῖχη εὐρὼν ἐς μέγα τι κάλλους τε καὶ ἀσφαλείας κατεστήσατο χρῆμα. ἐνθα δὲ καὶ φρούρια πεποιήται τό τε Ἀλούστου καλούμενον καὶ τὸ ἐν Γορζουβίταις.

30 Procop., *BP*, I. 12. 8–9: οἱ δὲ Βοσπορίται αὐτόνομοι μὲν τὸ παλαιὸν ὄκουν, Ἰουστίνῳ δὲ βασιλεῖ ἐναγχος προσχωρεῖν ἔγνωσαν.

31 PLRE III, ‘Dalmatius’, p. 384; Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6020: ἐκάθισε δ’ ἐκεῖ καὶ ἀριθμὸν στρατιωτῶν Ῥωμαίων καὶ τριβοῦνον φυλάττειν τὴν πόλιν διὰ τοὺς Οὐννους; cf. the omission of the name in Joh. Mal., XVIII. 14.

32 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 14: ὁ πλησίον Βοσπόρου ῥῆξ τῶν Οὐννων; Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6020: ὁ πλησίον Βοσπόρου ῥῆξ τῶν Οὐννων.

33 Procop., *BP*, I. 12. 6–9: ὧν δὲ τὰ ἐν μέσῳ ἅπαντα Οὐννοι ἔχουσιν.

34 Florin Curta, ‘The North-Western Region of the Black Sea during the 6th and Early 7th Century AD’, *Ancient West & East*, 7 (2008), pp. 151–87 (pp. 163–76), doi:10.2143/AWE.7.0.2033257.

Chapter One that Malalas wrote of ‘gifts’ as part of the ‘Eternal Peace’ when other sources attest to money. Furthermore, we know that Probus sought to recruit Huns in the area using money not long before. The desire of Gordas’s followers for Roman coin is perhaps evidenced by an anecdote told by Malalas, although, as we shall see, it has doubtful veracity.

Both Malalas and Theophanes describe how upon Gordas’s return, his people melted down their religious idols.⁴⁵ Our Malalas text goes on to relate that their purpose was to acquire precious metals, which they exchanged with the Romans for *miliarensia*, a particular denomination of silver coin.⁴⁶ This claim is often accepted at face value.⁴⁷ If so, it would represent our only case of Justinian paying in silver coin rather than gold. However, the denomination raises suspicions. The *miliarensis* was introduced at the value of fourteen to the *solidus* in the monetary reforms of Constantine I (r. 306–37), but by the sixth century it had fallen out of use.⁴⁸ As Andrei Gandila puts it, silver coinage ‘served a purely ceremonial function until the introduction of the hexagram, although it was loosely struck on the weight standard of the *siliqua* or the *miliarensis*’.⁴⁹ In Gandila’s view, however, the non-monetary value of Justinian’s *miliarensis*-style coins means their presence in coin hoards beyond the Roman frontier, particularly in Transcaucasia, must represent subsidy payments.⁵⁰

Even if that were so, we are faced with a problem of textual transmission. Theophanes omits the crucial statement that the money was exchanged for *miliarensia*. While Theophanes was writing in the ninth-century, he is generally regarded to have faithfully incorporated Malalas’s *Chronicle* into his work. This is proven by Theophanes’s retention of text even

45 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 14; Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6020.

46 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 14: ἦσαν γὰρ ἀργυρᾶ καὶ ἡλεκτρινα· καὶ κατήλλαξαν αὐτὰ ἐν Βοσπόρῳ, λαβόντες αὐτῶν μυριάσια.

47 Interpreted as ‘melting down their idols and exchanging them for silver coin’ by Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars*, p. 34.

48 Philip Grierson, *Byzantine Coinage* (Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1999), p. 10.

49 ‘As for silver coinage, it served a purely ceremonial function until the introduction of the hexagram, although it was loosely struck on the weight standard of the *siliqua* or the *miliarensis*,’ Andrei Gandila, *Cultural Encounters on Byzantium’s Northern Frontier, c. AD 500–700: Coins, Artifacts and History* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 243.

50 Gandila, *Cultural Encounters on Byzantium’s Northern Frontier*, pp. 191–206.

when it caused computational errors with his own work. Theophanes's *Chronicle* survives from two ninth-century manuscripts.⁵¹ In contrast, our only Greek text of Malalas survives in the *Codex Baroccianus* which was compiled in the eleventh century.⁵² Besides historians' general preference for the fidelity of Theophanes over the *Codex Baroccianus*, the context of the latter raises further suspicion in this instance. Having been reintroduced as a standard denomination by Leo III (717–41), the *miliarense* continued to be issued until the late eleventh century.⁵³ This further adds to the suspicion that the discrepancy results from a scribal emendation.

Yet when Gordas returned, he faced a revolt and was overthrown by his brother Mougeris.⁵⁴ Although we are told the revolt was sparked by the melting of religious idols, it should be noted that our sources often relate stories like this to explain anti-Roman revolts within client kingdoms, as we saw with the Heruls in Chapter Five.⁵⁵ Mougeris then sacked the city of Bosphorus, destroying the garrison and killing the tribune Dalmatius.⁵⁶ In response, Justinian dispatched an army to forcibly reestablish control. The story of that expedition is not given in detail by Malalas.

It is curious that even though Procopius does not narrate it in the *Wars*, he does know the episode. In the dialogue between the Armenian ambassador and Khosrow about breaking the Eternal Peace, Procopius has the Armenian ask: 'Has he [Justinian] not sent generals to

51 Elizabeth Jeffreys, Michael Jeffreys, and Roger Scott, *The Chronicle of John Malalas* (Brill, 1986), p. xxxi, doi:10.1163/9789004344600.

52 Cyril Mango, Roger Scott, and Geoffrey Greatrex, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284–813* (Clarendon Press, 1997), p. xcvi.

53 Grierson, *Byzantine Coinage*, pp. 13–15.

54 Mougeris, from Gk. *Mouageris* [Μουάγερις] in Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6020 (cf. Gk. *Mougel* [Μοῦγελ] in Joh. Mal., XVIII. 14); see PLRE III, 'Mougel', p. 896.

55 Joh. Mal., XVIII. 14: 'Ο δὲ αὐτὸς ῥῆξ ὁ γενόμενος χριστιανὸς ἀπελθὼν ἐπὶ τὴν ἰδίαν χώραν πλησίον Βοσπόρου εὔρε τὸν ἴδιον ἀδελφόν· καὶ ἑάσας αὐτὸν μετὰ βοηθείας Οὐννικῆς ἀνεχώρησεν. ἔσεβον δὲ οἱ αὐτοὶ Οὐννοὶ ἀγάλματα· καὶ λαβόντες αὐτὰ ἐχώνευσαν· ἦσαν γὰρ ἀργυρᾶ καὶ ἡλέκτρινα· καὶ κατήλλαξαν αὐτὰ ἐν Βοσπόρῳ, λαβόντες αὐτὰ αὐτῶν μυριάσια. καὶ μανέντες οἱ ἱερεῖς τῶν αὐτῶν Οὐννων ἔσφαξαν τὸν ῥῆγα καὶ ἐποίησαν αὐτὸ αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀδελφὸν Μοῦγελ. καὶ πτοηθέντες Ῥωμαίους ἦλθον ἐν Βοσπόρῳ καὶ ἐφόνευσαν τοὺς φυλάττοντας τὴν πόλιν.

56 Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6020; see PLRE III, 'Dalmatius', p. 384; the name is omitted in our text of Malalas, see Joh. Mal., XVIII. 14.

the men of Bosporos, the subjects of the *Ounnoi*, taking over a city that in no way belongs to him?'.⁵⁷ This is part of the literary tradition of expressing critique through foreign ambassadors but, by the same token, cannot be taken as an exact statement of fact.⁵⁸ What it does suggest, however, is a literary purpose to Procopius's omission of the Gordas story: the story would have undermined this statement and thus, his wider argument about Justinian's culpability.

Indeed, a literary purpose seems more likely given that in Procopius's later works, he refers more plainly to Justinian's activities on the Bosporus. In the eighth volume of the *Wars*, he briefly relates that Bosporus had been sacked but then retaken and placed under direct Roman authority.⁵⁹ When he describes how Justinian fortified Cherson and Bosporus, Procopius makes special note that this was a city which Justinian 'himself brought back into the Roman power, as it had long been barbarized and lay under the Huns'.⁶⁰ This investment appears to have been well-made: the cities remained Roman to the reign of Tiberius II (578–82), when they were lost to the Western Türks.⁶¹ If we reflect on Justinian's experience with the Bosporan Huns, it is an example in which Justinian failed to secure clients through conversion, friendship and probably money. Moreover, that failure required the deployment of the regular Roman army, direct administration of the region and investment in city fortifications: all expenditure the use of subsidies is supposed to avoid on the rational model.

57 Procop., *BP*, II. 3. 40: οὐ Βοσπορίταις μὲν τοῖς Οὐννων κατηκόοις στρατηγοὺς ἐπεμψε καὶ τὴν πόλιν προσεποιήσατο οὐδὲν αὐτῷ προσήκον.

58 Marion Kruse, 'The Speech of the Armenians in Procopius: Justinian's Foreign Policy and the Transition Between Books 1 and 2 of the "Wars"', *The Classical Quarterly*, 63.2 (2013), pp. 866–81 (pp. 870–71).

59 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 5. 26: μετὰ δὲ τὰ ἔθνη ταῦτα πόλις θαλασσία οἰκεῖται, Βόσπορος ὄνομα, Ῥωμαίων κατήκοος γενομένη (27) οὐ πολλῷ πρότερον. ἐκ δὲ Βοσπόρου πόλεως ἐς πόλιν Χερσῶνα ἰόντι, ἡ κεῖται μὲν ἐν τῇ παραλίᾳ, Ῥωμαίων δὲ καὶ αὐτὴ κατήκοος ἐκ παλαιοῦ ἐστι, βάρβαροι, (28) Οὐννικὰ ἔθνη, τὰ μεταξὺ ἅπαντα ἔχουσι.

60 Procop., *Aed.*, III. 7. 12: διαφερόντως δὲ τὴν Βόσπορον τῷ ἐρύματι ἐκρατύνατο, ἥνπερ ἐκ παλαιοῦ βεβαρβαρωμένην καὶ ὑπὸ τοῖς Οὐννοις κειμένην ἐς τὸ Ῥωμαίων αὐτὸς μετήνεγκε κράτος.

61 Men. Prot., fr. 19. 1–2; see Blockley, *The History of Menander the Guardsman*, pp. 277–78.

6.1.2. The Kutrigur and Utigur Huns

The early history of Justinian's relations with the so-called Bosphoran Huns is thus established. In the middle of his reign, however, our sources switch from generic terms for Hun and begin specifying two named tribes: the Kutrigurs and the Utigurs. Procopius introduces the Kutrigur and Utigurs as named groups of Huns in his eighth volume of the *Wars*, providing a digression about their history which places the Kutrigurs on the Pontic Steppe to the west of the Sea of Azov and the Utigurs on the Kuban steppe to its east.⁶² How are we to match the earlier 'Huns' and 'Bulgars' with these later groups? One clue might be the figure of Sinnion, a Hun who had participated in the Vandal War as a Roman ally. In his *Vandal War* Procopius describes Sinnion as 'of the nation of the *Massagetai*', whom he explains 'are now called Huns'.⁶³ By the 550s he had returned to the steppe and was 'among the several leaders' of the Kutrigurs.⁶⁴ While it is possible that Sinnion served in the Vandal War under a treaty of that time, his later break from the Kutrigurs to seek refuge within the Roman Empire could suggest he had operated independently in the earlier period too.

At different points, both groups are attested as receiving subsidies. Procopius first described the Kutrigurs as receiving subsidies. He complained that 'although they receive many gifts from the emperor every year, they still continually cross the Ister [Danube] river and overrun the emperor's land, being both at peace and at war with the Romans'.⁶⁵ He later wrote that Justinian sent to the Utigurs, 'reminding them of all the gifts they had previously received from him on many occasions' and describing them as 'friends of us since ancient

62 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 5. 1–15.

63 Procop., *BV*, III. 11. 9–11: Αἰγὰν δὲ ἦν Μασσαγέτης γένος, οὗς νῦν Οὐννοὺς καλοῦσιν. οἱ δὲ λοιποὶ σχεδὸν τι ἅπαντες τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς Θράκης χωρία ᾤκουν. εἶποντο δὲ αὐτοῖς Ἑρουλοὶ τετρακόσιοι, ὧν Φάρας ἦρχε, καὶ ξύμμαχοι βάρβαροι ἐξακόσιοι μάλιστα ἐκ τοῦ Μασσαγετῶν ἔθνους, ἱπποτοξόται πάντες· ὧν δὴ ἡγοῦντο Σιννίων τε καὶ Βάλας, ἀνδρίας τε καὶ καρτερίας ἐς ἄκρον ἦκοντε. ναῦς δὲ ἡ σύμπασα στρατιὰ πεντακοσίας ἦγε, καὶ αὐτῶν οὐδεμία πλέον ἢ κατὰ μυριάδας.

64 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 19. 7: ἡγοῦντο δὲ αὐτῶν ἄλλοι τε καὶ Σιννίων, ὅσπερ ξὺν Βελισαρίῳ πολλῶ πρότερον ἐπὶ τε Γελίμερα καὶ Βανδύλους ἐστράτευσε.

65 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 5. 16–17: καὶ δῶρα μὲν πολλὰ πρὸς βασιλέως ἀνὰ πᾶν ἔτος κομίζονται, καὶ ὥς δὲ διαβαίνοντες ποταμὸν Ἰστρον καταθέουσιν ἐσαεὶ τὴν βασιλέως χώραν, ἐνσπονδοὶ τε καὶ πολέμιοι Ῥωμαίοις ὄντες.

times'.⁶⁶ This is confirmed by Menander, who described both groups receiving 'customary money (*ta sunēthē chrēmata*)' from Justinian.⁶⁷

In 550/1 a major raid was launched into Illyricum by a group of Kutrigurs led by Chinialon.⁶⁸ Procopius says the Kutrigurs had recently forged an alliance with the Gepids, who allowed them to cross the Danube in their territory. Procopius says the Kutrigurs 'plundered practically the whole country there' before Justinian initiated several responses. He sent to the king of the Utigurs, Sandilch, to ask him to attack the Kutrigurs on the steppe.⁶⁹ The Roman envoy made 'a gift of money', whilst 'also reminding them of all the gifts they had previously received from him on many occasions'.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, he sent the general Aratius to negotiate with the Kutrigur raiders.⁷¹ Procopius says that 'by offering them money' he persuaded them to depart; he characterises it as 'a large sum of money'.⁷²

Alongside these negotiations, a group of Kutrigurs led by the aforementioned Sinnion sought refuge and land within the Roman Empire. Justinian allowed this, thereby splitting the Kutrigurs.⁷³ This apparently prompted a formal protest from Sandilch, who sent an envoy to

66 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 18. 20–23: τούτων δὲ αὐτοὶ οὐδὲν τὸ μέρος κερδαίνοντες, οὐδὲ τῆς λείας Κουτρίγούροις διαλαγχάνοντες, οὐ προσποιῶνται κακουμένους Ῥωμαίους, καίπερ αὐτοῖς (21) φίλοι ἐκ παλαιοῦ ἐς τὰ μάλιστα ὄντες. ταῦτα σημήνας τοῖς Οὐτιγούροις Ἰουστινιανὸς βασιλεὺς καὶ χρήμασι μὲν αὐτοὺς δωρησάμενος, ὑπομνήσας δὲ ὅσων δώρων καὶ πρότερον πολλάκις πρὸς αὐτοῦ ἔτυχον, ἀναπεῖθει σφᾶς ἐφοδὸν αὐτίκα ἐς τῶν Κουτρίγούρων τοὺς ὑπολελειμμένους (22) ποιήσασθαι. οἱ δὲ Γότθων τῶν σφίσι προσοίκων, οἱ δὲ Τετραξίται καλοῦνται, δισχιλίους ἐς ζυμμαχίαν ἐπαγόμενοι διέβησαν πανδημεὶ ποταμὸν Τάναϊν; cf. 'The Utigurs held the land alone, making no trouble at all for the Romans', Procop., *BG*, VIII. 5. 22: οὕτω μὲν οὖν οἶδε οἱ Γότθοι τῇδε ἰδρύσαντο καὶ τῶν Κουτρίγούρων, ὥσπερ μοι εἴρηται, ἀπολελειμμένων ἐν γῇ τῇ ἐπὶ θάτερα τῆς Λίμνης οὔση μόνοι Οὐτίγουροι τὴν χώραν ἔσχον, πράγματα Ῥωμαίοις ὥς ἤκιστα παρεχόμενοι, ἐπεὶ οὐδὲ αὐτῶν ἄγχιστα ῥῆκνται, ἀλλ' ἔθνεσι πολλοῖς διειργόμενοι μεταξὺ οὓσιν ἀκουσίῳ ἀπραγμοσύνη ἐς αὐτοὺς ἔχονται.

67 Men. Prot., fr. 12. 6: τὰ συνήθη χρήματα.

68 Chinialon, from Gk. *Chinialon* [Χινιαλὼν] in Procop., *BG*, VIII; see PLRE III, 'Chinialon', p. 296.

69 Sandilch, from Gk. *Sandilchos* [Σάνδιλχος] in Agath., *Hist.*, and Men. Prot., fr. 12 (cf. Gk. *Sandil* [Σανδίλ] in Procop., *BG*, VIII); see PLRE III, 'Sandilchus', pp. 1111–12.

70 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 18. 21.

71 PLRE III, 'Aratius', pp. 103–04.

72 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 19. 4: βασιλεὺς δὲ Ἰουστινιανὸς Ἀράτιον στρατηγὸν στείλας παρὰ τε Χινιαλὼν καὶ Οὐννων τοὺς ἄλλους, ἀγγεῖλαι μὲν ἐκέλευε τὰ σφίσιν ἐν γῇ τῇ σφετέρᾳ αὐτῶν ζυνενεχθέντα, χρήματα δὲ αὐτοῖς προῖέμενον πείσαι ἀπαλλάσσεσθαι ὅτι τάχιστα ἐκ Ῥωμαίων τῆς γῆς. οἱ δὲ τῶν Οὐτιγούρων τὴν ἐφοδὸν γνόντες καὶ χρήματα μεγάλα πρὸς τοῦ Ἀρατίου κεκομισμένοι ζυνέβησαν μήτε φόνον ἐτι ἐργάσεσθαι μήτε ἀνδραποδεῖν Ῥωμαίων μηδὲνα μήτε τι ἄλλο ἄχαρι δράσειν, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἀναχώρησιν ἄτε διὰ φίλων ποιήσεσθαι τῶν τῇδε ἀνθρώπων.

73 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 19. 6–7.

complain that the Kutrigurs he had attacked were now living lavishly within the Roman Empire while his people remained on the steppe.⁷⁴ Justinian's response was to mollify Sandilch with 'many words and [...] a quantity of gifts'.⁷⁵ This is how Procopius leaves his account, with some ambiguity about the status of the remainder of the Kutrigur polity.

The story was continued by Agathias. He introduces the Utigurs of Sandilch as 'exceedingly well-disposed and an ally (*enspondos*) to the Romans' and the emperor 'frequently favoured him with gifts'.⁷⁶ The Kutrigurs resented that they did not receive 'equal treatment', which confirms their subsidy had been cut off after the events of 550/51 narrated by Procopius.⁷⁷ In an effort to prove themselves, a Kutrigur leader named Zabergan undertook a raid across the Danube.⁷⁸ This can be dated to March 559.⁷⁹ Roman forces, led by the aged Belisarius, brought one force of Kutrigurs to battle on the outskirts of Constantinople while another pillaged Greece. Despite the Roman victory, Zabergan insisted he received 'a vast sum of money' like that given to the Utigurs. Justinian assented, sending a 'large enough quantity of gold to ransom the captives and secure the peaceful withdrawal of the Kutrigurs'.⁸⁰ Agathias reports that the populace of Constantinople knew about the payment to the Kutrigurs and were aggrieved about it, giving us one of our few examples

74 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 19. 8–21.

75 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 19. 22.

76 Agath., *Hist.*, v. 12. 6: Σάνδιλχος γάρ τις ὄνομα Οὔννος ἀνὴρ ἡγεῖτο μὲν ἐκείνου τοῦ γένους, εὖνους δὲ ἐς τὰ μάλιστα καὶ ἔνσπονδος ὑπῆρχε Ῥωμαίοις. τοιγάρτοι βασιλεὺς ἔστεργε τε αὐτὸν καὶ ἐγέραιρε καὶ δώροις θαμὰ ἐφιλοφρονεῖτο.

77 Agath., *Hist.*, v. 12. 7: οἱ δὲ Κοτρίγουροι ἄτε δὴ οὐ τῶν ὁμοίων μετέχοντες, ἀλλὰ παντάπασι περιπεφρονημένοι καὶ περιφανῶς προπηλακίζόμενοι, τήνδε ποιεῖσθαι τὴν ἐκστρατεῖαν ὥθησαν χρῆναι, ὥς ἂν καὶ αὐτοὶ δῆθεν φοβεροὶ τε καὶ λόγου ἄξιοι ἀποδειχθεῖεν καὶ οἷοι μὴ ἐφίεναι τῷ ἀτιμάζοντι.

78 Zabergan, from Gk. *Zabergan* [Ζαβεργάν] in Agath., *Hist.*, v. 11–25 and Men. Prot., fr. 2; see PLRE III, 'Zabergan 2', p. 1410.

79 Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6051.

80 Agath., *Hist.*, v. 23. 7–8.

where popular sentiment about subsidies is discussed.⁸¹ Koehn contrasts the reported anger of the populace with the later approval of the policy by Agathias and Menander.⁸²

Rather than reinstating the Kutrigurs' previous subsidy, Justinian was reprising his tactic of 550/51. He sent to the Utigurs to demand they arrest the raiders: he said that the Kutrigurs had taken the gold destined for the Utigurs, which the latter must reclaim, and if they failed to do so he would permanently transfer their alliance and subsidies to their rivals.⁸³ Sandilch led an army and defeated the Kutrigurs, seizing the gold they had received.⁸⁴ Agathias says that this led to an outbreak of war 'for a very long time' between the Kutrigurs and Utigurs, weakening both to the extent they could be conquered by 'other peoples'.⁸⁵ This presumably is a reference to their defeat by the Avars, which Agathias did not narrate but would have known about.

As ever, we then have a further account from Menander's fragmentary history which somewhat complicates the picture. There is no secure date for this fragment and some debate about whether it is a garbled restatement of Agathias's narrative. Menander wrote that 'the Huns led by Zabergan had been driven far from the Roman Empire', but Justinian remained

81 Agath., *Hist.*, v. 24. 1.

82 'Am Ende stimmen Agathias und sein historiographischer Nachfolger Menander in der Beurteilung der neuen kaiserlichen Politik völlig überein: Stand bei dem wesentlich positiver gestimmten Menander der Option πόλεμος die εὐβουλία des Kaisers gegenüber, so sind es bei Agathias die ὅπλα, denen nun ebenfalls die εὐβουλία gegenüber gestellt wird. Am Ende erweist sich zumindest in der Sicht der späten Historiographen Justinians Vermeidung des Militäreinsatzes als die bessere Option', in Clemens Koehn, *Justinian und die Armee des frühen Byzanz* (De Gruyter, 2018), p. 265.

83 Agath., *Hist.*, v. 24. 5–7: καὶ τοίνυν οὐκ ἀνῆκαν ἀνὰ τὴν Θράκην ἀλώμενοι, πρὶν τὸ χρυσίον ἅπαν, ὅποσον σοι ἂν' ἔτος ἕκαστον μισθοῦ χάριν δωρεῖσθαι εἰώθαμεν, αὐτοὶ ἐκομίσαντο. καίτοι ῥάδιον ἦν ἡμῖν ἢ ἄρδην ἅπαντας ἀποκτεῖναι ἢ, τὸ γοῦν ἔλαττον, ἀπράκτους σφᾶς ἀποπέμψασθαι· ἀφήκαμεν δὲ ὁμῶς ἐκάτερα τῆς σῆς πειρώμενοι δόξης. 6 εἰ μὲν γὰρ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἀνδρειότερος εἶ καὶ φρενήρης καὶ οἷος μὴ ἐπιτρέπειν τοῖς τὰ σὰ σφετεριζομένοις, οὐδὲ νῦν ἔλαττον ἔξεις. πάρεστι γάρ σοι ἐν καιρῷ τὸ δυσμενὲς ἀμύνασθαι καὶ τῇ μάχῃ κεκρατηκότι τοὺς οἰκείους μισθοὺς ἀπολαβεῖν, ὥσπερ δι' αὐτῶν σοι ἀπεσταλμένους. εἰ δὲ καὶ τοιαῦτα πρὸς αὐτῶν ὑβρισμένος ἡσυχίαν ἄγειν ἐθέλεις, δεδιώς, οἴμαι, καὶ τὴν αἰσχίστην ἐλόμενος ἀπραγμοσύνην, σὺ μὲν, ὦ γενναῖε, ἀπόμισθος ἔσῃ, ἐκείνοις δὲ τὰ παρ' ἡμῶν δεδωρήσθω.

84 Agath., *Hist.*, v. 25. 2: ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ τοῖς ἐκ Θράκης ἐπανερχομένοις ἄρτι τὸν Ἰστρον ποταμὸν διαπεραιωθεῖσιν ὑπαντιάξει ἐξαπιναιῶς· καὶ πολλοὺς ὅσους ἀποκτείνας τὰ τε χρήματα αὐτοῦς τὰ παρὰ βασιλέως καὶ ἅπασαν τὴν λείαν ἀφαιρεῖται.

85 Agath., *Hist.*, v. 25. 3: κατὰ ταῦτό τοις ἄλλοις γενόμενοι ἐς πόλεμον τοῖς ἐναντίοις καθίσταντο· οὕτω τε ἐξ ἐκείνου ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ἐκάτεροι διετέλουν κατ' ἀλλήλων τρεπόμενοι καὶ τὴν δυσμένειαν ἐμπεδοῦντες.

concerned. He therefore was ‘applying pressure to Sandilch, the leader of the Utigurs’ through ‘a stream of embassies and trying various means to provoke him’.⁸⁶ Blockley maintains that this must be a sequel to Agathias, given it states Zabergan’s Huns had been ‘driven far’.⁸⁷ An alternative, I would suggest, might be to interpolate this account within Agathias’s summary. That is to say, that Sandilch destroyed the Kutrigur raiders as promised, but had to be encouraged to attack the remaining Kutrigurs. This would fit with how Menander describes Sandilch as reluctant to exterminate ‘kin’, but eventually agreeable to seizing their horses to prevent them from raiding the Romans.

A complicating element is that Justinian promised Sandilch that ‘if he destroyed the Kutrigurs, the Emperor would transfer to him all the yearly tribute-monies that were paid by the Roman Empire to Zabergan’.⁸⁸ This would suggest that Justinian still provided annual subsidies to the Kutrigurs even after Zabergan’s raid of 559. Unlike Procopius’s account of 550/1 or Agathias’s of 559, we might note an interesting inversion by which Justinian was offering more money to the Utigurs, rather than threatening to cut their subsidy.⁸⁹ Koehn argues this was a novel approach by Justinian, developing his earlier policy now that he had completed his wars with the Ostrogoths and Persians.⁹⁰ We have demonstrated, however, that this had long been Justinian’s approach.

86 Men. Prot., fr. 2, 14–21: Ἐπεὶ οὖν ταῦτα τῇδε ἐχώρει, καὶ οἱ γε ἀμφὶ τὸν Ζαβέργαν Οὕννοι πόρρω που τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἐπικρατείας ἀπεληλαμένοι ἐτύγχανον, τῆνικαῦτα Ἰουστινιανός (ἐν νῶ γὰρ εἶχεν ὡς ἐλεύσονται καὶ αὖθις οἱ Κοτριάγῃροι δηώσοντες τὰ ἐπὶ Θράκης) ἐγκείμενός τε ἦν τῷ Σανδύλῳ τῷ τῶν Οὐτιγούρων ἡγεμόνι, ἀνίει τε οὐδαμῶς παραινῶν πρεσβείας τε συχνὰς ἐκπέμπων καὶ ἄλλοτε ἄλλῳ τρόπῳ ἀνερεθίζων, ὥς ἂν ἀμωσγέπως ἐκπολεμώσῃ γε αὐτὸν ὡς τὸν Ζαβέργαν.

87 R. C. Blockley (ed. and trans.), *The History of Menander the Guardsman* (Francis Cairns, 1985), p. 251.

88 Men. Prot., fr. 2. 1. 21–23: εἴ γε καταγωνίσοιτο τοὺς Κοτρήγους, καὶ τὰ ὅσα ἐτήσια χρήματα ἐκ τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἐπικρατείας ἀπονεμηθέντα ἦσαν τῷ Ζαβέργῃ μεταθήσειν ὡς αὐτόν.

89 Contra Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars*, p. 347.

90 Koehn, *Justinian und die Armee des frühen Byzanz*, p. 266.



FIG. 6.2. Map of the Lower Danube

6.2. The Lower Danube: Sclavenes and Antes

While Justinian attempted to play the Kutrigurs and Utigurs against each other, he also faced raids by the Sclavenes and the Antes over the Lower Danube. These groups offered a solution to the raids of the Huns, if they could be made allies. Between the Danube and the Carpathian Mountains were forested river valleys home to tribal groups known as Sclavenes and Antes in Roman sources. The Romans considered them to share a common culture and language, and modern historians tend to refer to them collectively as Slavic or Proto-Slavic.⁹¹ It has caused much consternation to modern scholars that these Slavic peoples appeared suddenly in our sixth century sources: does this represent a sudden migration or the ethnogenesis of a new group?⁹²

91 Translating 'Sclavene' as Slav brings broader modern connotations.

92 See Peter Heather, *Empires and Barbarians: The Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe* (Macmillan, 2010), pp. 392–406.

For the purpose of explaining Justinian's policy, a resolution of such a debate is not strictly necessary: just as the questions of the supposed Scandinavian origin of the Heruls does not have a meaningful bearing on why Justinian offered them subsidies. It is important to acknowledge that our position on Justinian's policy has consequences for the historiographical debate on Slavic ethnogenesis. The most influential work in recent times has been Florin Curta's *Making of the Slavs*, which comes down decisively in favour of a political explanation: 'This was therefore an identity formed in the shadow of Justinian's forts, not in the Pripet marshes'.⁹³

Let us begin then by reviewing the evidence from Procopius and Jordanes. We are told by Procopius that the Antes had crossed the Danube in the reign of Justin, only to be decisively defeated.⁹⁴ He also described the raids as annual.⁹⁵ In his later eighth volume of the *Wars*, Procopius stated that during the first four years of Justinian's reign the Sclavenes and Antes 'had already made the crossing many times and done irreparable harm to the Romans'.⁹⁶ There is clearly some truth to this, as Justinian appointed a man called Chilbudius to be *magister militum* for Thrace and tasked him with making aggressive incursions across the Danube.⁹⁷ As Curta notes, these are the first Transdanubian expeditions recorded since the 360s.⁹⁸ The campaigns of Chilbudius can be associated with Justinian's adoption of the title 'vanquisher of the Antes' (*Anticus*), first recorded on 21 November 533.⁹⁹ At some point in

93 Curta, *The Making of the Slavs*, p. 350.

94 Procop., *BG*, JOHII. 40. 5–6; the lack of a definite date has, of course, inspired contradictory interpretations, such as the late 510s in Curta, *The Making of the Slavs*, p. 75 or the 520s in Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, p. 84.

95 Procop., *Anecd.*, XVIII. 20: Ἰλλυριοὺς δὲ καὶ Θράκην ὅλην, εἴη δ' ἂν ἐκ κόλπου τοῦ Ἰονίου μέχρι ἐς τὰ Βυζαντίων προάστεια, ἐν τοῖς Ἑλλάς τε καὶ Χερρονησιωτῶν ἡ χώρα ἐστίν, Οὐννοὶ τε καὶ Σκλαβηνοὶ καὶ Ἄνται σχεδὸν τι ἀνὰ πᾶν καταθέοντες ἔτος, ἐξ οὗ Ἰουστινιανὸς παρέλαβε τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν, ἀνήκεστα ἔργα εἰργάσαντο τοὺς ταύτη ἀνθρώπους.

96 Procop., *BG*, VII. 14. 2: ἐπεὶ αὐτοῦ τὴν διάβασιν πολλάκις ἤδη Οὐννοὶ τε καὶ Ἄνται καὶ Σκλαβηνοὶ πεποιημένοι ἀνήκεστα Ῥωμαίους ἔργα εἰργάσαντο.

97 PLRE III, 'Chilbudius 1', pp. 286–87; Procop., *BG*, VII. 14. 2–3.

98 Curta, *The Making of the Slavs*, p. 76.

99 Just. *Inst.*, 'Proemium'; discussed in Georgios Kardaras, 'The Title Anticus to the Successors of Justinian I: a pattern of imitation?', *Byzantion Nea Hellas*, 37 (2018), p. 273.

534, however, Chilbudius was ambushed and killed on one such raid; this seems to have curbed enthusiasm for further expeditions.¹⁰⁰

The early policy of Justinian towards the Slavic tribes therefore differed from his later approach and from the concurrent policy on the Middle Danube. Rather than seek alliances with the Slavic leaders, Justinian sought to control them using military force. A possible explanation is that the Romans believed the Slavs to be without clear leadership. Procopius wrote that the Sclavenes and the Antes ‘have lived of old under a democracy, and consequently everything that involves their welfare, whether for good or for ill, is a matter of common concern’.¹⁰¹ Unlike the king of the Gepids or the Heruls, the Romans did not believe there to be an authority with which they could treat. Whether or not this was true is beside the point: the ethnography is a useful insight into how the Romans thought about foreign people. As Curta puts it, ‘to be one of Justinian’s ἔθνη, one needed first to have a “king”’.¹⁰²

Justinian’s approach then changed in the 540s, after two developments amongst the Slavs. It seems the Sclavenes had fought and defeated the Antes.¹⁰³ Like the suspicion discussed earlier that the Romans had encouraged the Lombard revolt against the Heruls, it has been suggested that this conflict was stoked by the Romans.¹⁰⁴ In the case of the Slavs, however, there is greater cause for suspicion.

We possess a later sixth-century text, the *Strategikon*, which advised that ‘since there are many kings among them always at odds with one another, it is not difficult to win over some of them by persuasion or by gifts’.¹⁰⁵ The aim was to ensure they did not unite under

100 Procop., *BG*, VII. 14. 4–5.

101 Procop., *BG*, VII. 14. 22–23: τὰ γὰρ ἔθνη ταῦτα, Σκλαβηνοὶ τε καὶ Ἄνται, οὐκ ἄρχονται πρὸς ἀνδρὸς ἐνὸς, ἀλλ’ ἐν δημοκρατίᾳ ἐκ παλαιοῦ βιοτεύουσιν, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο αὐτοῖς τῶν πραγμάτων αἰεὶ τὰ τε ξύμφορα καὶ τὰ δύσκολα ἐς κοινὸν ἄγεται. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ὡς εἰπεῖν ἅπαντα ἐκατέρους ἐστὶ τε καὶ νενόμισται τοῦτοις ἀνωθεν τοῖς βαρβάροις.

102 Curta, *The Making of the Slavs*, p. 349.

103 Procop., *BG*, VII. 14. 7; Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars*, p. 249.

104 Curta, *The Making of the Slavs*, p. 79.

105 Maur., *Strat.*, XI. 4. 128–31: πολλῶν δὲ ὄντων ῥηγῶν καὶ ἀσυμφώνως ἐχόντων πρὸς ἀλλήλους, οὐκ ἄτοπόν τινας αὐτῶν μεταχειρίζεσθαι ἢ λόγῳ ἢ δόροις καὶ μάλιστα τοὺς ἐγγυτέρῳ τῶν μεθούρων καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἐπέρχεσθαι.

one ruler.¹⁰⁶ The uncertain dating of the *Strategikon* makes it impossible to directly evaluate its claims, but the passage is at least positive proof that Romans, at some point in the sixth century, considered the Slavic tribes to be prime targets for ‘divide and rule’.

Even if the *Strategikon* cannot be firmly associated with Justinian, he began to pursue a policy in line with its recommendations. After an Antes raided Thrace in the early 540s, Justinian sought to form an alliance with this group.¹⁰⁷ In 545 Justinian offered a treaty to the Antes whereby he would ‘give’ them the city of Turrus. Like granting territory in Moesia to the Heruls, it is doubtful that Turrus was in Roman hands, and most historians read this as an endorsement of territory the Antes already held. Furthermore, Justinian promised ‘to grant (*proiesthai*) them great sums of money on condition that they remain at peace with him thereafter and constantly block the Huns, when the latter wished to overrun the Roman domain’.¹⁰⁸ This passage is interesting in that it emphasises the role of the Antes in blocking a potential channel for steppe nomads. Yet modern interpreters emphasise the task of counterbalancing Slavenes and ending the raids of the Antes over this.¹⁰⁹

One complicated element is the story given by Procopius about an imposter pretending to be the general Chilbudius.¹¹⁰ As part of the alliance, it was agreed that the man was to be invested at Constantinople as a general to rule over the Antes. When he met the general Narses on his way to Constantinople, however, he was exposed as a fake. This did not apparently stop the treaty coming into force.¹¹¹ As Curta notes, the interest of the Chilbudius story is in how it illustrates Roman concerns about a lack of leadership amongst the Slavic tribes. Procopius wrote of the Antes as a leaderless people who made decisions

106 Maur., *Strat.*, XI. 4. 128–31: ἵνα μὴ ἡ πρὸς πάντας ἔχθρα ἔνωσιν ἢ μοναρχίαν ποιῇ.

107 Procop., *BG*, VII. 14. 11: ὑπὸ δὲ τὸν χρόνον τοῦτον Ἄνται ἐπισκήψαντες εἰς τὰ ἐπὶ Θράκης χωρία πολλοὺς ἐληΐσαντο καὶ ἡνδραπόδισαν τῶν ἐκείνη Ῥωμαίων. οὐσπερ ἐπαγόμενοι ἀπεκομίσθησαν εἰς τὰ πατρία ἦθη.

108 Procop., *BG*, VII. 14. 33 χρήματα δὲ μεγάλα σφίσι προΐεσθαι, ἐφ’ ᾧ οἱ ἔνσπονδοι τὸ λοιπὸν ὄντες Οὐννοὺς ἐμπόδιοι ἐς αἰὲ γένωνται, καταθεῖν βουλομένοις τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχήν.

109 Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars*, p. 252.

110 PLRE III, ‘Chilbudius 2’, p. 287.

111 Procop., *BG*, VII. 14. 32–34; Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars*, pp. 247–53.

through a ‘democratic’ assembly.¹¹² If the *Strategikon* was indeed written a few decades later, the writer’s description of ‘many kings’ (*polloi rēges*) may either represent a genuine social change or simply a change in Roman understandings of their social structure. If there was a change, this would be in line with Curta’s theory that Justinian’s policies stimulated the political development of the Slavs.

How successful was the subsidy to the Antes on its own terms? It has been said that the remaining years of Justinian’s reign saw relative peace in the lower Danube.¹¹³ If Jordanes was writing in the early 550s, however, his works offer evidence to the contrary.¹¹⁴ In the *Romana* he writes of ‘the daily pressures of the Bulgars, Antae, and Sclavenes’, while in the *Getica* he laments that ‘today, on account of our sins, [the Antae and Sclavenes] wage war everywhere’.¹¹⁵ On the other hand, Procopius’ account reports both Antes and Sclavenes fighting in Italy in 536 and the Antes fighting there again in the 540s.¹¹⁶ Agathias writes of an Antian, Dabragezas, fighting for the Romans in Transcaucasia in the 550s.¹¹⁷ Again, the presence of federate troops does not necessarily require a political relationship: compare how Mundo ‘the Gepid’ fought first for Theoderic and later for the Romans, irrespective of the status of the King of the Gepids, from whom he was probably estranged.

Like with the Heruls, we can conclude that Justinian’s use of subsidies to win over the Antes worked as intended. Compared with expeditions of Chilbudius in the 530s, which not only bore their own costs in lives and money, but did not permanently block raiding, the subsidy appears to have been rather effective at stemming raids by the Antes in the 540s and 550s. The strange episode of the fake Chilbudius and the changing political language about

112 Procop., *BG*, VII. 14. 21–31.

113 Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars*, p. 253.

114 Dated to 551 by Nuffelen and Hoof (eds), *Jordanes: Romana and Getica*, pp. 9–13.

115 Jord., *Rom.*, 388: instantia cottidiana Bulgarum, Antium et Sclavinorum; Jordanes, *Getica* 119: nam hi, ut in initio expositionis vel catalogo gentium dicere coepimus, ab una stirpe exorti, tria nunc nomina ediderunt, id est Venethi, Antes, Sclaveni; qui quamvis nunc, ita facientibus peccatis nostris, ubique deseuiunt, tamen tunc omnes Hermanarici imperiis servierunt.

116 Procop., *BG*, V. 27. 1; VI. 26. 18–25; VII. 22. 3–5 and VI. 21.

117 PLRE III, ‘Dabragezas’, pp. 378–79. Agath., *Hist.*, III. 6. 9; III. 7. 2; III. 21. 6.

the Slavs would suggest that Justinian's decision to engage and pay subsidies helped to develop interlocutors with whom he could deal, rather than the formless 'democratic' mass the Roman authors reviled. This makes for an interesting comparison with the pattern Peter Heather identifies on the Rhine frontier in the fourth century that 'the point of subsidies' was 'to reinforce the power of a reasonably compliant frontier king, so that he would have a real stake in maintain peace on the frontier. Subsidies tended to strengthen existing monarchies'.¹¹⁸ To the Roman sources at least, Justinian was creating new monarchs among the Slavs, rather than strengthening existing ones. Yet this policy was abandoned in Justinian's final decade.

6.3. The Avar *Qağanate*

In the 550s Justinian found a new partner in the *qağanate*, or empire, of the Avars.¹¹⁹ The Avars were a nomadic group from Central Asia, who arrived in the North Caucasus. Given their late arrival they were not recorded by Procopius or Agathias, and we must therefore rely on the fragments of Menander and the chroniclers. In around 557 representatives of the Avars met with Saroes, the Alan king who controlled the north-western passes through the Caucasus Mountains as a Roman ally.¹²⁰ He conveyed their message to the Roman general in Lazica, Justin son of Germanus, a favoured nephew of Justinian.¹²¹ He sent to the emperor, who invited an Avar embassy; an ambassador named Kandikh was sent.¹²² He is estimated to have arrived in Constantinople in January 558.¹²³ The Avar message was that 'the emperor should

118 Heather, *Empires and Barbarians*, pp. 86–87.

119 *Qağanate*, 'empire', and Qağan, 'emperor of steppe peoples', from Old Turkic title *qağan* (cf. Gk. *chaganos* [χαγάνος] or *chagan* [χαγάν]); for discussion see Peter B. Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples: Ethnogenesis and State Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East* (Harrassowitz, 1992), pp. 71–72.

120 PLRE III, 'Saroes', p. 1115.

121 PLRE III, 'Iustinus 4', pp. 750–54.

122 PLRE III, 'Candich', p. 269.

123 Theoph., *Chron.*, AM 6050 (AD 557/8); identified by Bury, *Theodosius to Justinian*, II, p. 315; Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, II, p. 542; recently reaffirmed by Walter Pohl, *The Avars: A Steppe Empire in*

make an alliance with them and enjoy their efficient protection'.¹²⁴ This could only be done 'in exchange for the most valuable gifts, yearly payments and very fertile land to inhabit'.¹²⁵

Menander says Justinian agreed to an alliance.¹²⁶ He sent a bodyguard, the spatharius Valentinus, to the Avars to confirm the alliance and direct the Avars against Roman enemies.¹²⁷ Under Valentinus's direction, the Avars defeated the Onogurs, Zali and Sabirs.¹²⁸ At some point between 557 and 562, the Avars conquered the Kutrigurs and began raiding the Antes.¹²⁹ While the Kutrigurs had been Roman enemies, the Antes appear to have still been allies, so it is not clear whether these campaigns were under imperial direction.

The Avars also fought a war with the Merovingian king Sigibert at some point between 562 and 565.¹³⁰ The war ended with agreed 'terms of friendship', although it would break out again in 566.¹³¹ Pohl warns against explaining this war as solely a consequence of imperial policy.¹³² However, given the circumstances it does seem likely that the Romans encouraged such a campaign to direct the Avars away from their own frontier.

In 562, an Avar embassy came to view the lands Justinian offered for settlement – the former territory occupied by the Heruls. The negotiation was delegated to Justinian's nephew

Central Europe, 567–822, 3rd edn (Cornell University Press, 2018), p. 414; contra AD 559/60 given by Blockley, *The History of Menander the Guardsman*, p. 253.

124 Men. Prot., fr. 5. 2. 35–36: ὁμαιχμίαν ἐσάγειν Ῥωμαίοις καὶ κατὰ τῶν ἀντιπάλων ὀπλίζεσθαι.

125 Men. Prot., fr. 5. 2.

126 Men. Prot., fr. 5. 2. 38–40: τοῦ δὲ Βαλεντίνου ἐκεῖσε ἀφικομένου καὶ τὰ δῶρα παρασχομένου καὶ ὅσα ἐσήμηνεν ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐξειπόντος, πρῶτον μὲν ἐξεπολεμώθησαν Οὐνιγούροις, εἴτα Ζάλοις, Οὐννικῶ φύλῳ· καὶ Σαβήρους δὲ καθεῖλον.

127 PLRE II, 'Valentinus 3', p. 1353.

128 Men. Prot., fr. 5. 2. 38–40: τοῦ δὲ Βαλεντίνου ἐκεῖσε ἀφικομένου καὶ τὰ δῶρα παρασχομένου καὶ ὅσα ἐσήμηνεν ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐξειπόντος, πρῶτον μὲν ἐξεπολεμώθησαν Οὐνιγούροις, εἴτα Ζάλοις, Οὐννικῶ φύλῳ· καὶ Σαβήρους δὲ καθεῖλον.

129 Men. Prot., fr. 5. 3. 44–46: Ὅτι ἐπεὶ οἱ ἄρχοντες Ἀντῶν ἀθλίως διετέθησαν καὶ παρὰ τὴν σφῶν αὐτῶν ἐλπίδα ἐπεπτώκεσαν, αὐτίκα οἱ Ἄβαροι ἔκειρον τε τὴν γῆν καὶ ἐληίζοντο τὴν χώραν.

130 Pohl, *The Avars*, p. 55. See PLRE III, 'Sigibert 1', pp. 1146–48.

131 Greg. Tur., *HF*, IV. 23: nam post mortem Chlothari regis Chuni Gallias appetunt, contra quos Sigyberthus exercitum dirigit, et gestum contra eos bellum, vicit atque fugavit. sed postea rex eorum amicitias cum eodem per legatus meruit. dum autem cum eis esset turbatus Sigyberthus, Chilpericus, frater eius, Remus pervadit [...] rediens autem Sigyberthus victur a Chunis, Sessionas civitatem occupat [...].

132 Pohl, *The Avars*, p. 55; contra Wolfgang Hermann Fritze, 'Zur Bedeutung der Awaren für die slawische Ausdehnungsbewegung im frühen Mittelalter', *Zeitschrift für Ostforschung*, 28 (1979), pp. 498–545 (p. 527).

Justin, the son of Germanus, who had first met the Avars in Lazica. He advised the emperor to delay negotiations, as he had been told the Avars planned to cross the Danube and invade the Roman Balkans. The Avar embassy reached Constantinople and, having ‘received their accustomed gifts’, bought clothes and weapons.¹³³ When the embassy reached the Danube frontier, Justin confiscated the weaponry. Menander says that this incident caused ‘the hostility between the Romans and the Avars, which had already been smouldering, broke out’, but it is unclear how. In 565, the Avars still sent a regular embassy to the Emperor Justin, expecting to receive ‘usual gifts which the previous Emperor, Justinian, had given to their tribe’.¹³⁴

The key question about Justinian’s Avar policy is therefore whether he ever commenced annual payments of money. That this happened is straightforwardly accepted by Pohl in his monograph on the Avars.¹³⁵ For Pohl such subsidies were ‘in no way exceptional’, as ‘almost all barbarian peoples were associated with the Roman Empire in similar fashion’.¹³⁶ His position has subsequently been disputed by Kardaras, whose arguments are endorsed by Sarantis.¹³⁷ Kardaras argues that Justinian ‘refused [...] yearly payments, offering them only gifts’ because Menander only states that Justinian ‘sent the gifts: cords worked with gold, couches, silk garments and a great many other objects’, and does not explicitly report the payment of cash.¹³⁸

133 Men. Prot., fr. 5. 4. 90–97: οἱ δὲ πρέσβεις τῶν Ἀβάρων, ἐπεὶ οὐδέν τι ὤνησαν ὥνπερ αἰτοῦντες πρὸς βασιλέα ἀφίκοντο, δῶρα ὥσπερ σύνηθες ἦν αὐτοῖς παρ’ αὐτοῦ εἰληφότες, καὶ μὲν οὖν ὤνησάμενοι τὰ ὅσα χρεών, τοῦτο μὲν ἐσθῆτος, τοῦτο δὲ καὶ ὅπλων, ἀφέθησαν μὲν, ὅμως δ’ οὖν Ἰουστίνῳ λάθρᾳ ἐνεκελεύσατο ὁ βασιλεὺς τρόπῳ τῷ τὰ ὅπλα ἀφελέσθαι παρὰ σφῶν. καὶ οὖν ὁ στρατηγός, ἐπεὶ ἐδέξατό γε αὐθις ἐπανιόντας τοὺς πρέσβεις, κατὰ ταῦτα ἐποίησε.

134 Men. Prot., fr. 8. 2–4: Ὅτι ἐπὶ Ἰουστίνου τοῦ νέου οἱ τῶν Ἀβάρων πρέσβεις παρεγένοντο ἐν Βυζαντίῳ τὰ συνήθη δῶρα ληψόμενοι, ἅπερ τῷ κατ’ αὐτοὺς ἔθνεϊ Ἰουστινιανὸς ὁ πρὸ τοῦ βασιλεὺς ἐδίδου.

135 Pohl, *The Avars*, pp. 22–25 and 75.

136 Pohl, *The Avars*, p. 23.

137 Georgios Kardaras, ‘The Avars: Foederati of Byzantium?’, in *Byzantska kultura a Slovensko: Zbornik studii*, ed. by Juraj Bartík (Slovenské Národné múzeum, 2007), pp. 131–38 (pp. 132–33); Georgios Kardaras, *Byzantium and the Avars, 6th–9th Century AD: Political, Diplomatic and Cultural Relations* (Brill, 2019).

138 Kardaras, ‘The Avars: Foederati of Byzantium?’, p. 132.

There are two reasons why Pohl's interpretation is to be preferred. It is true that Menander's vagueness about a Justinianic subsidy might raise suspicions. In contrast, when relating a later subsidy arrangement between the Avars and the emperor Tiberius (578–84), he enumerates a figure of 80,000 *nomismata* each year.¹³⁹ Why does he not give a figure for Justinian, if he is telling us that Justinian paid a subsidy? Given the fragmentary nature of the extant Menander text, however, it would be unwise to read too much into any gaps. Moreover, throughout the foregoing chapters we have seen many examples in Procopius of him being unambiguous that cash subsidies were paid, but reluctant to enumerate a quantity, even though in his *Persian Wars* he did so with relish. That Menander wrote probably two decades after Justinian, but possible in the reign of Tiberius, might also explain a difference in precision of information.

Besides this point, I would argue that the position outlined by Kardaras overreads the sources with a preconceived distinction between cash subsidies and gifts. As Sarantis so acutely phrases the matter in explaining his preference for Kardaras's position over Pohl's: 'it seems more likely that these were simply regular gifts rather than official subsidies'.¹⁴⁰ The argument thus rests on a semantic point as to whether 'official subsidies' could conceivably be encompassed within Menander's reference to *dōra*. Let us look carefully at Menander's usage of these terms.

Firstly, when Menander relates the demands of the Avar embassy of 558, he specifies 'yearly money' (*chrēmasin etēsiois*) alongside gifts and lands.¹⁴¹ Justinian never honoured the offer of land and the matter became subject of a diplomatic argument.¹⁴² It is unlikely that the lack of land became the subject of dispute, but a failure to convey subsidies was left

139 Men. Prot., fr. 27. 3.

140 Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, p. 334, n. 52.

141 Men. Prot., fr. 5. 1: ἡ δώροις ἐς τὰ μάλιστα τιμιωτάτοις καὶ χρήμασιν ἐτησίοις καὶ γῆς εὐφορωτάτης οὐκίσει.

142 Men. Prot., fr. 5. 4.

unspoken. Secondly, there is a very clear equation between the ‘gifts’ and ‘tribute’ used to describe the same phenomenon. When the Avar ambassador addresses Justin II, he spoke of ‘the usual gifts’ (*ta sunēthē dōra*) they had received from Justinian.¹⁴³ In an authorial comment, Menander then wrote that ‘they thought by this means [...] the Romans would be forced to become tributary to the Avars’.¹⁴⁴ In his ferocious rebuttal, the emperor Justin said the Avars were lucky to be spared their lives, let alone receive ‘Roman money’ (*tōn Rhōmaikōn chrēmatōn*).¹⁴⁵ Although Blockley translates this as ‘Roman gold’, that is slightly loose: Menander is quite precisely referring to money.¹⁴⁶ In a later fragment about Tiberius’ subsidy to the Avars, Menander directly employs *chrēmata* as a synonym for *nomismata*.¹⁴⁷ Later in the text, Menander wrote that Justinian had a formal treaty (*tas spondas*) with the Avars; Justin abrogated, thereby depriving them of ‘the customary things’ (*tōn eiōthotōn*).¹⁴⁸ Altogether, this points towards the provision of annual subsidies.

This reading of Menander is strengthened by other sources. The panegyric *In Praise of Justin the Younger* by Corippus celebrated the accession of Justin II. It therefore describes events in the style of a very different genre, the praise poem. Corippus has the Avars requesting the ‘due gifts’ (*debita munera*).¹⁴⁹ He has Justin reply: ‘Was it by terror, do you think, that our father gave gifts to the needy and exiled out of pity?’¹⁵⁰ The language of ‘pity’ is a form of the discourse of gift which elevates the giver.

143 Men. Prot., fr. 8.

144 Men. Prot., fr. 8.

145 Men. Prot., fr. 8. 53–55: ἄπιτε τοιγαροῦν πλείστου πριάμενοι παρ’ ἡμῶν κἄν γοῦν ἐν ζῶσι τελεῖν καὶ ἀντὶ τῶν Ῥωμαϊκῶν χρημάτων τὸν καθ’ ἡμᾶς φόβον εἰς σωτηρίαν εἰληφότες. οὔτε γὰρ δεηθεῖν ποτὲ τῆς καθ’ ὑμᾶς συμμαχίας, οὔτε τι λήψεσθε παρ’ ἡμῶν ἢ καθ’ ὅσον ἡμῖν δοκεῖ, ὥσπερ δουλείας ἔπανον, καὶ οὐχ, ὡς οἴεσθε, φορολογίαν τινά.

146 Blockley, *The History of Menander the Guardsman*, p. 95.

147 Men. Prot., fr. 25. 1.

148 Men. Prot., fr. 12. 1: ὃς παρωσάμενος τὰς Ἰουστινιανοῦ τοῦ μητραδέλφου σπονδὰς πρὸς Ἀβάρους ἐκ πολλοῦ γεγενημένας τῶν εἰωθότων ἐστέρησεν.

149 Coripp., *Iust.*, III. 305: debita quaerenti transmittes munera regi.

150 Coripp., *Iust.*, III. 347–49: terrore putatis id nostrum fecisse patrem, miseratus egenis et profugis quod dona dedit?

Altogether, these points show that we risk greater over-interpretation with the claim that Justinian did not give subsidies to the Avars than the conclusion that he did. The best estimate would be that these were paid as expected for the six years from 558 to 564. The Avar embassy which arrived so soon after Justin's accession in November 565 should be interpreted, following John of Ephesus, as arriving to collect the subsidy. Although it is as ever impossible to estimate a value for subsidies when it is not stated in the text, we might want to conclude that the payments were of a similar or lower value to the 80,000 *nomismata* later paid by Tiberius to the Avars. When Menander enumerates that payment, he offers no comment suggesting it is significantly higher or lower than they had previously received.

Having established the likelihood that Justinian paid an annual subsidy to the Avars, we can now turn to consider why he might have done so. As we have noted in the cases of the Sabirs, Kutrigurs and Utigurs, an alliance with the Avars marked a significant change in policy. The various tribes of Sabirs and the Kutrigur-Utigur duopoly meant that Justinian could play groups of steppe nomads against each other. In the case of the Sabirs, no annual subsidy was ever paid. With the Kutrigurs, he could switch the subsidy to their neighbours when they demanded more. By encouraging the Avars to establish a monopoly over both the Caspian Steppe and the Pontic Steppe, Justinian was removing his ability to 'stir up' his barbarian neighbours.

The final chapter of Justinian's relations with the Sabirs relies on the fragmentary history of Menander and is thus tantalisingly brief. Menander tells us that after Justinian formed an alliance with the Avars, he sent a general to direct their campaigns against other steppe nomads. These directions apparently included 'destroying' (*katheilon*) the Sabirs.¹⁵¹ Clearly, though, he had decided that the 'fickle' Sabirs were better replaced with a reliable

151 Men. Prot., fr. 5. 2. 38–42: τοῦ δὲ Βαλεντίνου ἐκεῖσε ἀφικομένου καὶ τὰ δῶρα παρασχομένου καὶ ὅσα ἐσήμηνεν ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐξειπόντος, πρῶτον μὲν ἐξεπολεμώθησαν Οὐνιγούροις, εἶτα Ζάλοις, Οὐννικῶ φύλῳ· καὶ Σαβήρους δὲ καθεῖλον.

partner, even if the Avars, unlike the Sabirs, were to receive an annual subsidy. Yet the destruction of the Sabirs cannot have been complete. Menander later states that Tiberius II met representatives of the Sabirs and offered to pay double the amount of money (*chrēmata*) they were receiving from the Persians to win them over.¹⁵² This did not work, and the Sabirs later fought for the Persians in Syria.¹⁵³ This appears to be their final mention in Roman sources.¹⁵⁴ Therefore if it had been Justinian's intent to quieten the Sabirs with the Avars he had failed: his successors were still forced into the bidding war.

It would appear that there was no further trouble from the Kutrigurs and Utigurs in the last years of Justinian. However, like the Sabirs, both groups were defeated and incorporated into other polities in the 560s: the Kutrigurs were later found within the Avar confederation; the Utigurs within that of the Western Türks.¹⁵⁵ Here again, we can see that Justinian had been able to play groups off against each other for decades, before apparently opting for a single partner in the last decade.

The ambiguity of the sources unfortunately limits our ability to interpret his motive and judge whether this was the intended outcome, but we might profit from a comparison to the development of Justinian's policy towards the Sasanians. Having provoked all-out war with Kavādh by his refusal to pay subsidies in the 520s, Justinian gradually acceded to Khosrow's requests for money. This process culminated in the full treaty of 561 committing the Romans to 30 years of subsidies to the Sasanians (see above, Chapter One). If Justinian had reached the conclusion that a stable relationship with Persia was most important, he might also have decided the same with the steppe. Although playing steppe polities against

152 Men. Prot., fr. 18. 5.

153 Men. Prot., fr. 23. 1.

154 See Henry H. Howorth, 'The Sabiri and the Saroguri', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, (1892), pp. 613–36 (p. 621), doi:10.1017/s0035869x00021973. Even if they can be securely identified with the Suwār who appear as subjects of the Khazars and Bulgarians in later Arabic source, those sources do not shed any light on their sixth-century history: Peter Golden, 'The Peoples of the South Russian Steppes', in *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, ed. by Denis Sinor (Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 256–84 (p. 259), doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521243049.011.

155 See Men. Prot., fr. 12. 5 and fr. 19. 1.

each other was praised by historians like Agathias and Menander as clever, we know from Agathias that the populace of Constantinople had been aghast that the Huns had reached the city's outer walls and then been paid to leave. The alliance with the Avars may have seemed to promise greater stability and control of his northern frontier.

It is inevitable that Justinian's policy towards the Avars is judged by the runaway success of the latter in the remainder of the sixth century. Nevertheless, many historians are willing to plead for Justinian's defence. In the words of Sarantis, 'no-one could have known when they first sent envoys to Constantinople in 557/58 that the Avars were destined to become the first superpower to dominate the northern world since the Hun empire of Attila'.¹⁵⁶ This reasoning lets Justinian off too lightly. We have seen throughout this chapter and previous chapters how sixth-century authors clearly conceived of subsidies as a means to play rival groups of barbarians off against each other. Even Procopius's scathing criticism in the *Anecdota* accepts this dynamic, only to invert its logic into a vicious circle.

By subsidising the Avars and directing their military campaigns, Justinian was clearly breaking with that logic in favour of a monopolistic power on the steppe, just as his treaty with Persia sought to stabilise power in the East. The example of the Gepids discussed in the preceding chapter might have served as a salutary example of how such a monopolistic power could act independently of Justinian's wishes. Moreover Attila, remembered by contemporary sources including Procopius and Jordanes as having made the Romans 'tributary', came to power in exactly the same way that the Avars would, by uniting the Romans' rivals. When we have such clear-eyed analysis from our sixth-century sources explaining how Justinian's subsidy policy protected the empire by keeping barbarians in competition, we should not excuse the emperor himself for lacking foresight.

156 Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, p. 396.

We have seen also how Justinian had formed an alliance with the Slavic tribe of the Antes, both as a buffer against the incursions of the steppe nomads and a counterweight against their neighbours, the Sclavenes. This system proved far less effective than its counterpart in Illyria. When the Kutrigurs moved across the Middle Danube to attack the Romans in 551, they depended on the cooperation of the Gepids. By 559, Justinian had successfully reset his relationship with the Gepids and thereby closed off the Middle Danube. When the Kutrigurs tried crossing the Lower Danube instead in early 559, they found a territory supposedly protected by the Antes was found to be ‘deserted’ and advanced ‘unopposed’.¹⁵⁷ With their defeat of the Kutrigurs sometime between 559 and 562, the Avars had expanded their territory to the borders of the Antes and Romans in the Lower Danube.¹⁵⁸ Menander describes how the Avars ‘ravaged and plundered’ the territory of the Antes. In response, they sent an envoy, Mezamer, only for him to be slain by the Avars.¹⁵⁹ The dating of this episode is difficult, as our only parameters are the conquest of the Kutrigurs around 559 and the later Avar embassy to Justin around 562. We are also left unclear as to whether Justinian had intended this attack on his Antes allies.

On the other hand, it seems more likely that the war fought by the Avars against the Merovingian king Sigibert around 562 had imperial backing.¹⁶⁰ The war ended with agreed

157 Men. Prot., fr. 5. 2.

158 Men. Prot., fr. 5. 2.

159 PLRE III, ‘Mezamerus’, p. 887; Men. Prot., fr. 5. 3: ‘Ὅτι ἐπεὶ οἱ ἄρχοντες Ἀντῶν ἀθλίως διετέθησαν καὶ παρὰ τὴν σφῶν αὐτῶν ἐλπίδα ἐπεπτώκεσαν, αὐτίκα οἱ Ἀβαροὶ ἔκειρόν τε τὴν γῆν καὶ ἐληίζοντο τὴν χώραν. πιεζόμενοι δ’ οὖν ταῖς τῶν πολεμίων ἐπιδρομαῖς οἱ Ἄνται ἐπρεσβεύσαντο ὡς αὐτούς, Μεζάμηρον τὸν Ἰδαριζίου Κελαγᾶστου ἀδελφὸν ἐπὶ τὴν πρεσβείαν χειροτονήσαντες, ἐδέοντό τε πρίασθαι τῶν τινας τοῦ οἰκείου φύλου δοριαλώτων. καὶ τοῖνυν Μεζάμηρος ὁ πρεσβευτῆς, στωμύλος τε ὢν καὶ ὑπαγόρας, ὡς Ἀβάροις ἀφικόμενος ἀπέρριψε ῥήματα ὑπερήφανά τε καὶ θρασύτερά πως. ταῦτα τοι ὁ Κοτράγηρος ἐκεῖνος, ὁ τοῖς Ἀβάροις ἐπιτήδειος, ὁ κατὰ Ἀντῶν τὰ ἐχθιστα βουλευσάμενος, ἐπεὶ ὁ Μεζάμηρος ὑψηλότερον ἢ κατὰ πρεσβευτὴν διελέγετο, εἶπεν ὡς τὸν Χαγάνον· οὗτος ὁ ἀνὴρ μεγίστην ἐσὸτι περιβέβληται δύναμιν ἐν Ἄνταις οἷός τε πέφυκε κατὰ τῶν ὁπωσοῦν αὐτῷ πολεμίων ἀντιτάττεσθαι. δεῖ τοιγαροῦν ἀποκτανθῆναι τοῦτον καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν ἀδεῶς ἐπιδραμεῖσθαι τὴν ἀλλοτρίαν. τοῦτω πεισθέντες οἱ Ἀβαροὶ, παρωσάμενοι τὴν τῶν πρέσβων αἰδῶ ἐν οὐδενί τε λόγῳ θέμενοι τὴν δίκην ἀναιροῦσι τὸν Μεζάμηρον. ἐξ ἐκείνου πλέον ἢ πρότερον ἔτεμνον τὴν γῆν τῶν Ἀντῶν καὶ οὐκ ἀνίσταν ἀνδραποδιζόμενοι ἄγοντές τε καὶ φέροντες.

160 PLRE III, ‘Sigibertus I’, pp. 1146–48; Fritze, ‘Zur Bedeutung der Awaren’, p. 527; Pohl, *The Avars*, p. 55.

‘terms of friendship’, although it would break out again in 566.¹⁶¹ The war has been explained as imperial policy, although Pohl is sceptical, arguing the Avars may well have wanted to test Frankish resistance for themselves.¹⁶² It does, however, seem likely that the Romans encouraged such a campaign. It served both to direct the Avars away from the Danube frontier and to arrest the Franks’ eastwards expansion.

Meanwhile, the Romans and Avars deliberated over where the tribe could settle on the Danube frontier. Justinian was guided by the advice of Justin, the son of his cousin Germanus, who was by this time an experienced general from campaigns in Transcaucasia.¹⁶³ Justin met the Avar envoys on the frontier, probably in the year 562.¹⁶⁴ He offered the Avars the former territory of the Heruls; whether the Heruls were still resident or the Avars were expected to oust them is left unclear. The Avars refused, insisting on remaining in ‘Scythia’.¹⁶⁵ Rather than a wider concept of the steppe, Blockley interprets this as meaning the province of Scythia Minor on the north bank of the Lower Danube; he suggests this preference was about the region’s proximity to Thrace rather than its environment.¹⁶⁶ Justin sent the Avar ambassadors onwards for an audience with Justinian himself in Constantinople, but he also forewarned the emperor of his suspicions. From striking up a friendship with one envoy, he had learned the Avars planned to break the alliance and invade in the future.

The Avar embassy reached Constantinople and ‘received their accustomed gifts’ (*dōra synēthes*).¹⁶⁷ Menander also states that they ‘purchased’ clothing and weaponry while in the city, which strongly implies the ‘accustomed gifts’ included money. When the embassy

161 Greg. Tur. *HF*, IV. 23

162 Pohl, *The Avars*, p. 55.

163 PLRE III, ‘Iustinus 4’, pp. 750–54; PLRE II, ‘Germanus 4’, pp. 504–06.

164 Bury, *Theodosius to Justinian*, II, p. 315; cf. ‘vers 561’ in Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, II, p. 543.

165 Men. Prot., fr. 5, 4. 7–8: ἀλλ’ ἐκεῖνοι Σκυθίας οὔτι ᾤοντο δεῖν ἔσεσθαι ἐκτός· αὐτῆς γὰρ δῆπουθεν ἐσὸτι ἐφίεντο.

166 Blockley, *The History of Menander the Guardsman*, p. 254, n. 28.

167 Men. Prot., fr. 5, 4.26–30: οἱ δὲ πρέσβεις τῶν Ἀβάρων, ἐπεὶ οὐδέν τι ᾤνησαν ᾧνπερ αἰτοῦντες πρὸς βασιλέα ἀφίκοντο, δῶρα ᾧσπερ σύνηθες ἦν αὐτοῖς παρ’ αὐτοῦ εἰληφόρες, καὶ μὲν οὖν ᾧνησάμενοι τὰ ὅσα χρεών, τοῦτο μὲν ἐσθῆτος, τοῦτο δὲ καὶ ὅπλων.

reached the Danube frontier, however, Justin's troops acted on the emperor's orders to confiscate the weaponry: for Menander, this was the point at which the 'smouldering' tension broke into open hostility.¹⁶⁸ Nevertheless, in the autumn of 565, the Avars still sent a regular embassy to the Emperor Justin, expecting to receive 'usual gifts which the previous Emperor, Justinian, had given to their tribe'.¹⁶⁹

The Avar domination of the Danube frontier in the later sixth and seventh centuries has often been regarded as an epochal event. It was the catalyst for the Lombard invasion of Italy and the expansion of Slavic peoples across the Balkans and almost enabled the Arab capture of Constantinople.¹⁷⁰ The question that has concerned many historians is whether Justinian could have reasonably expected the startling success of the Avars when he formed his initial policy.¹⁷¹ If we consider the full range of events discussed in this chapter, it was surely perceivable that sponsoring the westwards expansion of the Avar *qaġanate* risked upsetting the balance Justinian had striven to achieve on the Danube frontier, even if their runaway success was less certain.

6.4. Conclusion

This chapter has examined three peoples of the Pontic Steppe and Lower Danube: the Huns, the Slavs, and the Avars. I have argued against the model popularised by Barfield of the environment of the steppe producing a unique demand for subsidies. Instead, the issues discussed in this chapter show strong similarities to those in preceding chapters. As ever,

168 Men. Prot., fr. 5, 4.30-35: ἀφέθησαν μὲν, ὅμως δ' οὖν Ἰουστίνῳ λάθρα ἐνεκελεύσατο ὁ βασιλεὺς τρόπῳ τῷ τὰ ὄπλα ἀφελέσθαι παρὰ σφῶν. καὶ οὖν ὁ στρατηγός, ἐπεὶ ἐδέξατό γε αὐθις ἐπανιόντας τοὺς πρέσβεις, κατὰ ταῦτα ἐποίει. ἐντεῦθεν ἤρξατο ἡ δυσμένεια Ῥωμαίων τε καὶ Ἀβάρων ἤδη ἐκ πολλοῦ ὑποτυφομένη, καὶ μάλιστα τῷ μὴ ὡς θᾶττον ἀφεθῆναι τοὺς πρέσβεις.

169 Men. Prot., fr. 8.

170 Pohl, *The Avars*, pp. 117–343.

171 Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, p. 396.

though, the development of Justinian's multiple and competing aims over time means that no 'standard template' of subsidies was used.

We began by reviewing this literature, seeing how subsidies are a necessary condition for the formation of 'steppe confederations' in Barfield's model. The subsequent empirical discussion has not been favourable to such a model. The first case study examined the Huns of the Pontic Steppe from the 'Bosporan Huns' of Gordas to the Kutrigur and Utigurs. The second case looked at the Slavic tribes of the Sclavenes and Antes. The third brought these cases together through an examination of Justinian's late decision to promote Avar hegemony. I have set out the case that the Avars received a subsidy, supporting the older interpretation of Pohl against revisionist arguments from Kardaras and others. This analysis shows that although sixth-century sources discuss the tactics of 'divide-and-rule' clearly and explicitly, they are not a complete explanation of Justinian's policy. Rather, like his eventual concession of annual subsidies to Persia, he was willing to subsidise hegemonic rule if it promoted stability.

Conclusion

This thesis has presented a comprehensive re-evaluation of how the emperor Justinian used cash payments in his foreign policy. The ‘historical paradox’ of sixth-century subsidies is why such an apparently efficient instrument of foreign policy engendered such a visceral domestic reaction. The only way to resolve this paradox through a purely rationalist framework would be to dismiss the viewpoints of the very sources we depend on for our primary evidence. For this reason, I have proposed an alternative approach. By drawing on Karl Polanyi’s concept of ‘the economy as an instituted process,’ this study has modelled a new approach to subsidies as an uninstituted and contested category of exchange.

Because the Romans had not developed a distinct concept of ‘subsidies’, these transactions were necessarily expressed through the ‘social grammar’ of three pre-existing registers: gift, pay, and tribute. Inherent in these registers were social values that meant these payments were never neutral, utility-maximising calculations. Since none of these registers was an exact fit, they remained subject to contestation. The result was that the substantive social meaning of the gold was not necessarily in proportion to its literal weight.

The application of this method has relied on close attention to the language and context of the primary sources to understand how these registers were drawn from existing Roman instituted economic practices. This conclusion will now synthesise the broad patterns identified across the empire’s frontiers to show how Justinian attempted to manage the empire’s survival by manipulating these registers, and why that manipulation ultimately triggered such profound ‘blowback’ from the domestic audience.

Gold and Steel: Patterns of Subsidies

The East in Justinian's Early Reign

The defining feature of Justinian's frontier in the East was the presence of Sasanian Persia, a capable rival empire. The issue of Roman payments to Persia had been the cause of a major war in the reign of Anastasius and smouldering hostilities in that of Justin. Rather than immediately offer payments, however, Justinian began with a policy of confrontation. He refused the peace proposals of Kavādh, framing the Persian demand as 'tributary' and rejecting the Persian claim that the money was compensation for the cost of defending the 'Caspian Gates'.

At the same time, he began reforming the Roman alliance system along the frontier. Justinian promoted a 'supreme *phylarch*' to lead his Arab allies, and money given to the Arab leader was presented as pay for their military service. The money given to the Tzan tribes in Pontus was more difficult to justify, as it was failing to restrain the Tzans from raiding. The relationships with the emperor of Lazica and the princes of Western Armenia, however, were on equal terms. These rulers did not require money to fight alongside the Romans, having submitted to the emperor voluntarily.

After tension with Persia boiled over, Justinian launched military expeditions to defend his provinces in Syria, bolster Lazica, harass the Persians' Armenian allies, and suppress the Tzans. The mixed record of the Roman forces in battle against the Persians led, however, to a return to negotiations. Justinian's instinct for confrontation remained, however: he abandoned negotiations on the death of the Persian ruler Kavādh to try and seek military advantage that would allow him to avoid giving money that could be perceived as tribute. At the same time he gave money in the idiom of gifts to encourage the defection of Persarmenian princes. When the Roman position worsened and Khosrow emerged as the undisputed ruler of Persia, Justinian accepted the principle of paying for peace. He agreed to

give a large lump sum and agree to terms on which the Persians could request further gifts in future, in order to secure 'Eternal Peace'. These terms were broadcast widely, appearing in literary and epigraphic sources, with Justinian attempting to represent the money as a gift between 'brothers'.

Though the 'Eternal Peace' marked the commencement of a period of compromise towards Persia, in the 530s Justinian took several confrontational decisions with other polities in the East. Firstly, he provoked a revolt by revoking the Armenian princes' tax privileges and likely had to give money to restore order. Secondly, he launched a further campaign to suppress the Tzani that led him to declare he had brought them under his direct jurisdiction. Thirdly, his soldiers remained in Lazica even after the Persian threat subsided, alienating an ally. Fourthly, when his Arab allies began fighting against the Persians' Arab allies, he offered the latter money to keep the peace. The 'Eternal Peace' is not necessarily representative of Justinian's wider policy in the East in the 530s: rather, by settling the war with Persia, he felt able to take more aggressive positions with other groups.

The West and the 'Reconquests'

The early part of Justinian's reign saw no apparent attempt to 'reconquer' the former Western Roman Empire. Indeed, he established a warm friendship including gifts of money with the Vandal king Hilderic. When Hilderic was overthrown, he hesitated to intervene. After a small-scale war over the city of Sirmium on the Danube, Justinian and the Ostrogothic Kingdom reached a peace settlement too. Security in that region was bolstered by the establishment of a new client state, the kingdom of the Heruls, who would receive money annually for their friendship. Meanwhile, the north bank of the Danube was secured by the Gepid kings, who had received gold as longstanding Roman allies since the collapse of Attila's empire. The relative stability of the north-western Balkans allowed military

expeditions against Slavic tribes on the Lower Danube and, after a failed attempt to establish a client kingdom on the Crimea, against the Bosporan Huns.

The commencement of an 'Eternal Peace' with Persia allowed Justinian to turn his attention to the West. This began with the invasion of the Vandal Kingdom of Africa, where his forces enjoyed startling success. The Vandal military was quickly shattered and the royal treasury seized, allowing East Roman occupation of cities like Carthage. This was, in part, due to the restoration of the alliance and subsidies with many Moorish tribal leaders, who remained neutral rather than fight with the Vandals. When the Vandal king took refuge with the Moors of the Aures mountains, however, it was only the offer of a comfortable pension that could achieve his surrender. After Gelimer's capture, however, the new Roman governor sparked a revolt of the Moorish allies by cutting their subsidy, which took most of the 530s to settle.

The conquest of Africa was followed by the invasion of the Ostrogothic Kingdom. Justinian did this in concert with his old allies, the Gepids, and new allies, the Franks – both of whom received gold in return. The military progress was less quick than in Africa and so Justinian began negotiations to encourage the defection of the queen regent, Amalasuintha, and the king, Amalaric. After both of these were murdered, the Romans fought against king Vitigis. He eventually agreed terms to partition Italy, with the residual Gothic state in the north paying tribute to Justinian. Although abandoned after Vitigis's capture, these terms remained a negotiating point for the series of Gothic kings over later decades. Meanwhile Justinian broke the alliance with the Gepids, accusing them of disloyalty for seizing Sirmium from the Goths rather than allowing it to fall into Roman hands. On the other front, the Franks broke the treaty with Justinian to mount expeditions into Italy, seizing plunder and then territory.

Justinian's Later Reign

In the 540s and 550s Justinian faced war on all fronts. Persia and its Arab allies had invaded in the East and the Caucasus; Roman forces were fighting Goths, Franks and Gepids for control of the former Ostrogothic Kingdom; a new war with the Moors was sparked; raids across the Danube by Slavs and Huns increased. Even in Egypt, a bastion of stability, our sources darkly complain that the money given to the Nubian and Blemmyan kings to secure the Theban *limes* had not stopped raiding.

Justinian used cash in different ways in each context. In Egypt, he continued to give the money. In Arabia, he gave more money to the Persians' Arab allies, while also maintaining his own. In 545 he finally conceded the principle of annual payments to Persia, which the Romans had refused since the late fifth century. He began giving money not only to the emperor of Lazica, but constituent groups like the Misimians and the Suani. After his Herul clients collapsed into civil war, he promoted the Lombards to rival the Gepids and Goths. His offer of money was successful, but the Lombards had also been offered money from the Goths. He attempted to divide the Slavic tribes of the Antes and Sclavenes, with less success. Likewise, attempts to balance the Utigur and Kutrigur Huns by paying each party to attack each other did not always guarantee stability.

In the late 550s we can identify a clear pattern in Justinian's use of subsidies. In the East and the North, he sought to conclude alliances with Persia and the new force of the Avars, paying these rulers to secure peace. These rulers were also expected to manage intermediaries – the Arabs in the case of the Persians, the Sabirs, Sclavenes and Kutrigurs in the case of the Avars – that would otherwise threaten the Romans. Meanwhile the Lombards eventually gained the upper hand against the Gepids, but not to the extent of releasing Sirmium: Justinian concluded peace with the city still in Gepid hands. Similarly, although his

Arab allies scored a significant victory by killing the Arab king allied to Persia, Justinian appears to have continued giving gold to the Persians' allies.

Elsewhere, he was uncompromising. In Italy he refused numerous offers from the Goths to pay tribute and insisted on full reconquest, including of areas held by his erstwhile Frankish allies. In Africa, peace had been secured by the elevation of a Moorish leader to 'exarch' and provision of subsidies, but a dispute in the last years of Justinian's reign led to a further revolt which was suppressed. The end result in terms of relations with the Moors is unclear from our sources. In Spain, he attempted to exploit a succession dispute and gain territory, but ended with a limited and uncertain strip of land; it would appear that the failure to mobilise a third force, like the Moors in Africa and Franks in Italy, contributed to the relative lack of success.

Assessment

When Justinian died, therefore, his successor inherited a series of ongoing subsidy arrangements. The Persians, Avars and Arabs definitely expected money; the Lombards, Laz, Nubians, Blemmyes and Moors probably did, and perhaps the Huns, Slavs and Armenians too. Justinian definitely shifted towards the greater use of subsidies through his reign but was never rigid. In *Das Andere Zeitalter Justinians*, Mischa Meier outlined a hypothesis that the year 540 marked a turning point between Justinian ruling as a 'classical emperor' and as a 'medieval emperor'.¹ At the same time, he could go to war to prevent payments, while offering money to prevent a war elsewhere. At some points it was enough to receive tribute, but at others he demanded total surrender. The evidence compiled does not exactly fit current assessments in the scholarship. For example, when Michael Maas describes Justinian's reign as the 'heyday of systematic, often regularized, and always carefully calculated payments of

1 Mischa Meier, *Das Andere Zeitalter Justinians*, (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), doi: 10.13109/9783666252464

cash’, his use of subsidies sounds far more straightforward than the often-convoluted reality. To explain this, we need to understand subsidies as an uninstituted form of exchange that was expressed and contested through different registers.

The Contested Discourse of Subsidies

Men are generally more ashamed of the names of shameful things than of the things themselves.
Procopius²

To understand the role of subsidies in Justinian’s foreign policy, we must abandon the formalist economic assumption that these represented straightforward financial transactions. As the substantivist framework of this thesis has shown, the conceptualisation of subsidies drew upon discourses with deep moral and social meaning. These discourses can be grouped into the moral obligations of the ‘Gift’ (*dōra*), the contractual expectation of ‘Pay’ (*stipendia* or *syntaxeis*), and the claim to universal sovereignty involved in ‘Tribute’ (*phoros* or *dasmos*).

The Discourse of the Gift

Previous studies have asserted an ontological difference between the exchange of gifts and the exchange of subsidies. In gift exchange objects bear symbolic value, whereas objects paid as subsidies bear economic value.³ However, the most important observation by Mauss was that gifts were not given ‘freely’, but within a set of social rules by which a person would both be obliged to give and obliged to receive. Gift-giving is the surrender of economic value for social prestige and the expectation of reciprocation. Mauss has been directly cited in discussions of subsidies: that ‘a display of generosity - giving more than the recipient can afford to return - is in itself an assertion of superiority’.⁴

2 Procop., *BG*, VIII. 15. 7: τὰ γὰρ αἰσχροὶ ὀνόματα, οὐ τὰ πράγματα, εἰώθασιν ἄνθρωποι ἐκ τοῦ ἐπὶ πλεῖστον αἰσχύνεσθαι.

3 Canepa, ‘Empires and Exchanges in Eurasian Late Antiquity’, pp. 54–69.

4 Peter Heather and John Matthews (eds), *The Goths in the Fourth Century* (Liverpool University Press, 1991), p. 21, doi:10.3828/978-0-85323-426-5.

Justinian invoked the discourse of the Gift when he sought to legitimise the use of subsidies. As we saw in Chapter One, Justinian's intermediate policy with Persia was to offer money as a gift between fraternal monarchs. This language is recorded in Malalas, who is accepted to have reflected imperial propaganda closely. This is validated by the remarkable epigraph from Hierapolis, which records the emperor's own words to his eastern subjects on how he 'gave' money to achieve the 'Eternal Peace'.

Chapters Four and Five demonstrated the instability of this claim, however. The exchange of gifts of money with the Vandal king Hilderic made him a 'guest friend', creating a *casus belli* after his overthrow. The money given to the Franks to solicit their intervention in the invasion of Italy was initially successful. When the Franks began to pursue their own agenda, Justinian had no enforceable mechanism apart from the moral force of gift exchange. Relations with the powerful Moorish leaders in post-conquest Africa were smoothed by the provision of 'customary gifts' of money, but Roman governors and military leaders repeatedly misunderstood this relationship and provoked revolts.

Finally, the attempt by the Romans to express the money given to the Avars as 'gift' has led revisionist historians to doubt Justinian paid them subsidies at all. Chapter Six showed that this was a discursive contest between the Romans and Avars, and that historians cannot rely on an assumed substantive distinction between gifts of money and gifts of luxury goods.

The Discourse of Pay

In contrast to the moral and reciprocal obligations of the 'Gift', the discourse of 'Pay' (*stipendia*, *syntaxeis*, or *annonae*) was fundamentally contractual and conditional. Within a substantivist framework 'Pay' represents a formal economic exchange: the provision of state cash in direct return for specific, measurable services. In reducing the relationship to a

transaction, the use of ‘Pay’ blurred the distinction between foreigners and subjects, friends and servants, or barbarian and Roman.

This has led to debates in the secondary literature about the distinction between ‘internal federates’ and ‘external allies’. Federates were barbarians who became subjects of the Roman emperor and gave military service, while maintaining their own political identity and leadership. In practice, however, the primary texts employ the language of pay when discussing arrangements that were clearly transfers to foreign powers. Elements of this model can be detected in the primary texts. For example, in the case of the Nubian frontier, Procopius clearly expresses a financial cost-benefit analysis of the taxes from certain territories, versus the cost of defence, versus the cost of subsidies. This shows a capacity for a more sophisticated level of economic analysis than is often appreciated.⁵ We have shown that beginning with rigid distinctions of insiders and outsiders is unhelpful, because the disputes over pay were constitutive of these relationships.

The primary sources offer several examples where the discourse of ‘Pay’ appears to have worked exactly as intended. Chapter Six showed that by offering the fortress of Turris and a cash subsidy to the Antes, the emperor secured their service to ‘constantly block the Huns’. In Chapter Five, we saw a longstanding arrangement with the Gepid Kingdom to secure the Middle Danube in return for a fee (*syntaxeis*). This continued for decades, until Justinian argued the Gepid occupation of Sirmium voided the arrangement.

This case raises the dangers of the discourse of ‘Pay’. When the Romans argued that the recipients had broken their contract and suspended payments, the recipients rarely agreed. The Gepids became a major challenge through the middle of Justinian’s reign, only resolved by offering money to the Lombards. The tragic consequences of this misalignment were most evident in post-conquest Africa. Revolts by Justinian’s erstwhile Moorish allies were triggered

5 As argued by Kruse, ‘Economic Thought and Ideology in Procopius of Caesarea’, pp. 39–54.

in the 530s, 540s and 560s by Roman officials abrogating agreements to pay them for their service.

The most well-developed area of ‘Pay’ was in the North Caucasus where, as we saw in Chapter Three, the Romans and Persians operated a quasi-market with different Hunnic groups. Yet eventually, Justinian sought to impose a monopoly by sponsoring the Avars to establish their rule over the steppe groups. Payments made on an *ad hoc* basis may have avoided accusations of tribute, but created an instability and uncertainty in a crucial frontier region.

The Discourse of Tribute

The discourse that caused most debate in ancient and modern times is that of ‘Tribute’. To understand why this language was so highly charged, we must reflect on its interconnection with the fundamental claims of Roman ideology. The premise of Roman rule was the idea that the emperor exercised absolute authority on behalf of the Roman people and, in the Christian era, God. Authority came up to the emperor from the Roman people, who surrendered all sovereign authority and power to him.⁶ It also came down from God, with the emperor acting ‘through the favour of heaven’ (*caelesti favore*).⁷ Absolute power to act was thus held conditionally, that it be exercised for the good of the Roman public and in a Christian manner. Its exercise was further tempered by cultural expectations that a ruler of good character would govern through written law, respect for precedent and by engagement with the ‘best of men’.⁸

Above all, Justinian claimed the emperor oversaw two interlinked activities that were preconditions for a good society: ‘the force of arms and the observance of the laws’.

6 Just., *Inst.*, I. 2. 6: sed et quod principi placuit, legis habet vigorem, cum lege regia, quae de imperio eius lata est, populus ei et in eum omne suum imperium et potestatem concessit. quodeumque igitur imperator per epistulam constituit vel cognoscere decrevit vel edicto praecipit, legem esse constat. See also *Digest*, I. 4. 1, ‘Proemium’.

7 Just., *Inst.*, ‘Proemium’, line 2.

8 Agapetus 27: ‘Impose upon yourself the obligation of preserving the laws since no mortal can compel you’. Lydus, *De Mag.* 1.3: ‘while the law is king’s way, a tyrant’s disposition is law’.

Establishing order at home and abroad were intimately connected: ‘as military affairs are rendered secure by the laws, so also are the laws preserved by force of arms’.⁹ It was a combination of law and force which had enabled ‘the fortunate race of Romans [to obtain] power and precedence over all other nations’ in the first place.¹⁰

To fulfil these public goods the emperor could claim contributions from the Roman people in the form of taxes. Though citizens owned private property by right of natural law, they had given the emperor the powers of civic law through which public funds could be raised.¹¹ This was explicitly presented and justified as in the public interest, as was expressed by Justin II: ‘the taxes paid by our subjects are used and expended for their own benefit’.¹² We have thus seen that the crux of East Roman ideology was that the emperor had the power to tax the public to raise money for public goods, outstanding amongst which was security. Foremost among the public expenses listed by Justin was the maintenance of the army. A similar statement justifying tax while emphasising this point was included in the *Peri Strategikes* handbook:

the financial system was set up to take care of matters of public importance that arise on occasion, such as the building of ships and of walls. But it is principally concerned with paying the soldiers. Each year most of the public revenues are spent for this purpose.¹³

By this account, the Roman public understood their contributions as primarily providing for a powerful army that could defend the empire.

The intimate connection between force of arms and observance of law means Justinian’s novels are peppered with commentary on foreign affairs, demonstrating his legitimacy in that field. Despite the rhetorical flourish of the notion of ‘force of arms’, treaties and diplomacy were encompassed. For example, the preface to *Novel* I in 535

9 *Codex Iustinianus*, Preface, 2.

10 *Codex Iustinianus* Preface, 2.

11 Justin., *Instit.* II. 1. 11.

12 Justin II, *Novellae*, CXLIX. 2: ἡμῖν γὰρ ἡγουμένου θεοῦ μία τίς ἐστὶν αὕτη σπουδὴ τὰς ἐπαρχίας εὐνομεῖσθαι τε καὶ ἀσφαλῶς οἰκεῖσθαι καὶ τῆς τῶν ἀρχόντων ἀπολαύειν δικαιοσύνης.

13 *Peri Strategikes*, II. 18–21.

presents ‘how Persia is to remain quiet, how the Vandals, with the Moors, are to be obedient’ as a continuum.¹⁴ The first of those achievements was achieved through subsidies, the second through war, and the third through a combination. Such a view is evidenced elsewhere in the literary sources: John Lydus describes Justinian as defeating the Persians ‘first with gold’ and then ‘with steel’.¹⁵ The result of giving money could thus be represented as a victory which achieved the fundamental task of the Roman state.

But did the concession of money surrender the very Roman state itself? This is the charge that the emperor was subjecting himself to ‘tribute’. This charge is constructed in two ways. The first is the straightforward charge that the emperor should maintain a strong military that can defeat barbarian enemies by force. It is no coincidence that Procopius is also concerned about what he regards as the sapping of Roman strength by cutting the pay of the army. This charge reflects the very basis on which an emperor claimed to raise taxes to pay for public goods, especially the army. Procopius essentially asked, ‘if soldiers’ wages are being cut, where is that money going?’; he found the answer to be foreign tribute.

The second sense in which ‘tribute’ resonated was more cosmological. By giving money annually, the emperor was recognising the authority of another king to levy taxes, like the emperor did himself. The sense of annual cycles was deeply felt in an agrarian society. The tax year began and ended in September because of the harvest. As the bureaucrat John Lydus explained in his book on the months, this originated because:

14 Justinian, *Novellae*, I, pref.

15 John Lydus, *De Mag.*, III. 55: καὶ Πέρσας μὲν οὖν καὶ Χοσρόην τὸν ἄτακτον χρυσίῳ μὲν πρῶτον, εἶτα παλιμμαχοῦντα καὶ σιδήρῳ κατέχωσε. Cf. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, XXV. 6. 10, when the emperor Julian refused to give money to the Saracens because ‘a warlike and watchful emperor had steel and not gold’.

The Greeks named it ‘*epinemesis*’ [apportionment] on the basis of the facts. For when the sun is in the sign of Libra, it reveals the quality of the harvests. It was at this time that the ancients would with kindness allocate the tribute payments (*phorous*) to the subjects— so that those subject to tribute would not seem to be impiously burdened because of the increase of these tribute-payments. Quite logically, then, they called it ‘*epinemesis*’: that is, a sort of distribution of tributes (*dasmōn*).¹⁶

The idea that the Persian king could ask for a share of the forthcoming harvest each year implied that he had usurped a power held solely by the Roman emperor, on behalf of the Roman people.

Thus we can propose a definition of the concept of ‘tribute’ or ‘tax’ (*dasmos* or *phoros*) that operated in Justinian’s era. Tribute was paying a share of a person’s wealth to another party in recognition of their legitimate authority, or dominium. If Romans paid tribute to the emperor, who ruled on their behalf and in God’s name, how could the emperor be seen to be obliged to pay tribute to another ruler? Yet it went deeper than this. The same concept was why tenants were obliged to pay landlords. In a society fundamentally based on agriculture, annuity had special meaning, as John Lydus makes explicit. An annual payment was literally or figuratively a share of the harvest.

We do not possess extant evidence allowing a definitive judgement on how Justinian or his advisors viewed the issue of tribute, but we do have strong circumstantial evidence. The first is, of course, the persistent concern about ‘tribute’ in the works of Procopius. The second is that earlier and later sixth century sources were concerned with this issue: it was not an idiosyncrasy of Procopius. Finally, the actions of Justinian strongly imply that the emperor was aware of the risks of being perceived to give tribute. In Chapter One we saw how Justinian’s ambassador Peter the Patrician took care to ensure the written records of Roman

16 John Lydus, *De Mensibus*, III. 23. 7: Ἐπινέμησιν δὲ αὐτὴν Ἕλληνας ἐκ τοῦ πράγματος ὠνόμασαν. ἐπὶ γὰρ ζυγῷ γενόμενος ὁ ἥλιος δείκνυσι τὴν τῶν καρπῶν ποιότητα· κατ’ αὐτὴν δὲ φιλανθρώπως οἱ πάλαι τοὺς φόρους τοῖς ὑπηκόοις ἐπένεμον, ὥς μὴ παρὰ τὴν τούτων ἐπίδοσιν ἀσεβῶς δοκοῖεν βαρύνεσθαι οἱ φορολογούμενοι. εἰκότως οὖν αὐτὴν ἐπινέμησιν οἰοῦναι διανομὴν τινα τῶν δασμῶν ἐκάλεσαν.

commitments to pay Persia were kept separate to the main treaty and that the Persians pledged to destroy these once the commitment was fulfilled.

Synthesis

This section has presented a review of the typology of ‘Gift’, ‘Pay’ and ‘Tribute’ and explored the issues raised by the examples. It has demonstrated that these were distinct categories, drawing on different social values and implying different relationships. Yet the category of ‘subsidy’ that we distinguish today remained uninstituted. This was the cause of the fundamental instability of the use of subsidies: the need to express the relationship in terms drawn from other embedded institutions. In this way the characterisation of payments remained discursive contest both within the empire and between the Romans and their neighbours.

Further Applications of a ‘Social Grammar’ Approach

This thesis has drawn on Polanyi’s concept of ‘the economy as an instituted process’ to offer a new theoretical framework for analysing cash subsidies in the reign of Justinian. The application of this method has relied on close attention to the language and context of the primary sources to understand how gift, pay, and tribute were instituted within the sixth-century Roman Empire. While this methodology requires sensitivity to cultural specificity, its core principles are portable. In this final section, I suggest potential ways forward for this research agenda, both for historians of Late Antiquity and for the wider field of comparative imperial history.

Other Roman Cases

The first candidate for applying this method would be the Constantinian dynasty, established by Constantine I (306–37) and lasting until Julian (361–63). Like the age of Justinian, the age

of Constantine has left us an unusually dense corpus of primary texts. These provide the raw material for an analysis like this. The church historians Eusebius and Socrates praised Constantine for ending the practice of paying barbarians.¹⁷ Yet Constantine's policy was attacked in much the same style as Procopius by none other than the emperor's nephew Julian. Whereas in this study we have few texts about subsidies written in the emperor's voice, Julian's criticism is preserved in his satirical play *The Caesars*. In this play, Julian's imperial ancestors appeared one-by-one to regret their shortcomings. While the famous Hellenist might be expected to have lamented Constantine's religious policies, Julian emphasised his foreign policy. He wrote that: 'his dealings with the barbarians were laughable: for he had paid tributes (*phorous*) as if he were obliged, and he looked towards Luxury'.¹⁸ By re-categorizing Constantine's diplomatic gifts as shameful tributes, Julian attempted to delegitimize the Constantinian settlement using the same discursive strategy that Procopius would later employ against Justinian. The Constantinian dynasty therefore presents an excellent candidate for applying my methodology.

The second candidate is the Theodosian dynasty, begun by Theodosius I (379-95) and lasting until Marcian (450-57). Unlike Justinian or the Constantinians, the corpus of texts for the Theodosians is challenging. Historians like Priscus of Panium only survive in fragments, filtered by later sources. Yet the Theodosians' use of subsidies appears to have been pivotal to the history of the East Roman Empire. This includes the most famous example of all: the payments to Attila 'the Hun'. As discussed in Chapter Four, the cash given to Attila had a long legacy in Roman attitudes to subsidies on the Danube frontier and beyond. In the course of this thesis we have also identified a cluster of examples where the Theodosians established subsidies which were important into the sixth-century. When Procopius wrote of subsidy

17 Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, IV. .5; Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 1.28.

18 Julian, *Caesars*, 390A: τά γε μὴν εἰς τοὺς βαρβάρους ἦν γελοῖα αὐτῶ: φόρους γὰρ ὥσπερ ἐτετέλεκε, καὶ πρὸς τὴν Τρυφὴν ἀφεώρα.

arrangements ‘of old’ in the case of the Tzani, Noubades, Blemmyes and Gepids, our research has demonstrated all these arrangements originated in the 450s. Likewise, the Sasanian claim to subsidies is often presented by historians ancient and modern as centuries old. Yet the specific claim transmitted through Malalas, that ‘ancient texts’ pledged the emperor and shāhanshāh to give each other ‘money or men’, would also appear to date from the reign of Yazdgerd in the early fifth century.

The third strong candidate would be the successors of Justinian: Justin II and Sophia, Tiberius II and Maurice. Their reigns were directly informed by the political context of Justinian’s, so such research would build directly on this thesis. They share many of the same sources, such as Menander Protector. Further research specifically on Justinian’s successors would more clearly establish the legacy of his payments both in practice and in discourse. I have begun this research with my chapter, ‘The Empress Sophia and East Roman Foreign Policy’.¹⁹

‘Barbarian’ Perspectives

Perhaps the biggest challenge of this research has been working with the perspectives of the ‘barbarian’ recipients of Justinian’s payments. There are very few contemporary texts authored by the recipients of Roman gold. Even if Roman writers employed an empirical method which means they communicate valuable information within the dense ideology and exonyms, it would be regrettable to only see the sixth-century through Roman eyes.

The first group are those who left some textual evidence providing circumstantial evidence. We have the letter collections of Cassiodorus and the *Epistolae Austrasicae*, pertaining respectively to the Ostrogothic and Merovingian perspectives. Epigraphy and papyri give similarly circumstantial evidence for the Arabs, Noubadae, Blemmyes and

19 Dagnall, ‘The Empress Sophia and East Roman Foreign Policy’, pp. 115–36.

Moors. Then there are sources written by Roman subjects for a Roman audience, which purport to represent barbarian views: the *Getica* of Jordanes and the speeches attributed to barbarians in the classicizing historians.

The second group are those recipients whose perspectives are attested by later sources. These sources often give rich information about payments but were written in radically different political contexts. Even if the writers claimed descent from sixth-century *gentes*, they do not truly provide ‘insider’ voices. The most significant group are texts produced after the advent of Islam by Arabic and Persian writers such as al-Tabari or Ferdowsi. Modern scholarship is divided about whether these can be relied upon for histories of the sixth-century Saracens and Sasanians. However, some interesting research has been produced, particularly in the case of the Sasanians. In the case of Lazica and Iberia, the later Georgian language texts present enormous difficulties. Their accounts of sixth-century kings of Egrisi and Kartli are almost incompatible with contemporary classical sources, despite the best efforts of historians to reconcile the two. There is a similar challenge with Armenian sources. Both Georgian and Armenian texts from later periods are part of ‘nation-building’ projects which provides a further challenge. This problem is not confined to the East, however. Our self-testimony of the Lombards was produced within Lombard Italy, a radically different context to their Pannonian forebears.

Finally, there are groups for whom we have no extant textual evidence. There are no known texts giving the history of the Abasgi, Souani, Tzani, Gepids, Sclavenes, Antes or any steppe nomads from their own perspectives. The histories of these peoples have thus heavily relied on combinations of archaeological and philological evidence. As we have sought to develop arguments based on texts, there has been limited opportunity to express these peoples’ own views. Unless new caches of papyri or palimpsests are discovered – an unlikely,

but not impossible event – we will struggle to ever provide an account of how these peoples wrote about the subsidies they received.

Thus we can summarise the challenges, which have been discussed concretely throughout the thesis. The rationale for this thesis was partly that we can, at least, recover authentic Roman perspectives given the dense corpus of texts. The challenges I have listed with other cultures are profound, but as historians like Richard Payne have demonstrated, it is not impossible to write histories of Roman payments from the ‘barbarian’ perspective. The most important task I see for this research agenda would be to study the recipients of Justinian’s subsidies comparatively and assess the extent to which gift, pay and tribute were understood similarly by different recipients. This research agenda would be a key test of whether the ‘social grammar’ described in this thesis was shared across cultures or limited to the Romans.

Comparative Imperial History

There has been a welcome increase in comparative imperial history in recent decades. Works like Walter Scheidel’s have compared subsidies through the ‘protection costs’ model between Rome and China.²⁰ The risk with this approach is whether the two cases are commensurable and, even if so, whether rational protection costs capture the social logic. There is a need for a deeper examination of whether the registers of gift, pay and tribute are recognisable in other cultures.

The clearest candidates for such a study are Rome and China, continuing Scheidel’s work.²¹ Both Roman and Chinese empires bordered the Eurasian steppe and dealt with steppe polities; sometimes, indeed, the same steppe polities, in cases like the Avars. A close

20 Walter Scheidel, ‘State Revenue and Expenditure in the Han and Roman Empires’, in *State Power in Ancient China and Rome*, ed. by Walter Scheidel (Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 150–80 (p. 175).
 21 Scheidel, ‘State Revenue and Expenditure in the Han and Roman Empires’, pp. 150–80.

comparison therefore promises potential insights into whether the practice of payments by the imperial powers shaped each other, via the medium of the steppe polities. If such research is to be valid, however, there needs to be greater precision in periodisation. Thomas Barfield's arguments covered a vast chronological extent. Scheidel's own work often compares the Han dynasty which extended from the third century bc to the third century ad against the Later Roman Empire on the basis of formal structural similarities. If we hope to understand the Eurasian steppe as a system, there needs to be greater rigour in comparing like with like. Given this, there would be great value in introducing the Sasanian empire as a third component of comparative study. There has been tentative work on the Sasanian empire that provides a basis for comparative study. This work is complicated by the problems with primary sources enumerated in the previous section.

The obvious challenge with such far-reaching comparative histories is the historian's skills. Our field privileges the individual scholar and expects mastery of source material. This thesis has drawn on texts in Latin, Greek and Syriac, as well as secondary literature in English, French and German. The method I have employed relies on close examination of the texts. A comparative study as proposed would require Classical sources to be studied alongside texts in Middle Chinese, Middle Persian, New Persian and Classical Arabic; depending on where it led, perhaps languages like Sogdian or Old Turkic would become necessary. There are then the specific skills to work with epigraphy and manuscript traditions in those different languages. Even nineteenth-century Orientalists like Theodor Nöldeke would struggle with such a task. Yet while this is an obvious problem, there is also an obvious solution. A comparative project like this would be best conducted by a team of scholars who combined these specialist skills. While this is standard practice in many other disciplines, it is relatively rare in ancient history.

The Price of Empire

In this thesis I have presented a comprehensive reassessment of the use of cash subsidies by the emperor Justinian. I have shown that in order to ‘re-enact the thought processes’ of sixth-century Romans, to use Collingwood’s phrase, we need to take the discourses of gift, pay and tribute seriously. These discourses were not simply formal rhetoric overlaying a cold, utility-maximising logic. By invoking values embedded into the basic social and economic institutions of their world, Justinian and his contemporaries were employing substantive values that shaped their knowledge and understanding. Because ‘subsidy’ was uninstituted as a distinct category of exchange, the use of cash in foreign policy was shaped by the values, status and logic that these registers carried with them.

Having moved beyond the ‘great man’ theory of history, modern historians face a challenge in writing a history of the sixth century. Justinian successfully cast himself as the main character of his age to a remarkable extent²². Whether critical or laudatory of the emperor’s ideology, his centrality was mirrored in the primary sources whether the writers were inspired or revolted.²³ We are thus compelled to dwell on re-enacting the thoughts of Justinian, his allies and his rivals if we are to understand the ‘instituted’ logic of exchanging cash during his reign.

However, to have spent so long with a small group of elite men does not make this an elite history. The contest of discursive registers might have taken place in the cloistered palaces of Constantinople and Persia but had visceral consequences for the millions of people living in the shadow of Justinian. To illustrate this point, I wish to end by recalling the consequence of Justinian’s policies for those people affected by the outcome of these

22 Peter Sarris, *Justinian*, p. 8, notes that ‘the emperor’s strong sense of personal mission and commitment to what he perceived to be the common good was matched by his strongly autocratic tendencies and his keen (and often prickly) sense of his own dignity and pride’.

23 Sarris, *Justinian*, p. 413: ‘without the wars which Justinian initiated, what would the author have had to work with? For good or ill, Procopius ultimately owed his inspiration to Justinian’.

contests. As an eyewitness to the famine that followed Justinian's attempt to 'repossess' Ostrogothic Italy, Procopius recorded this account:

Gripped by the necessity of hunger, if any grass was anywhere chanced upon, most people went towards it with great haste; sinking to their knees, they tried to pull it up. Then – for they were no longer able, since all strength had failed them – falling over both the grass and their own hand, they died. And nobody buried them in the earth in any way, for the thought of burial did not occur to anyone.²⁴

These people might have had little regard for whether the gold exchanged between their rulers was expressed as gift, tribute, or pay. Yet they were the ones whose labour generated the wealth and whose lives paid the price for Justinian's empire.

24 Procop., *BG*, VI. 20. 30–33: οἱ δὲ πλεῖστοι τῇ τοῦ λιμοῦ ἀνάγκῃ ἐχόμενοι, εἴ ποὺ τις παρατύχη πόα, πολλῇ μὲν σπουδῇ ἐπ' αὐτὴν ἦεσαν, ὀκλάσαντες δὲ ἀνέλκειν αὐτὴν ἐκ γῆς ἐπειρῶντο. εἶτα (οὐ γὰρ ἠδύναντο, ἐπεὶ πᾶσα αὐτοῦς ἰσχὺς ἐπελελοίπει) ὑπὲρ τε τῆς πόας [τε] καὶ τῆς χειρὸς πίπτοντες ἔθνησκον. καὶ γῇ μὲν αὐτοῦς ἔκρυπτεν οὐδεὶς οὐδαμῶς· οὐ γὰρ ἦν τις ὅτῳ καὶ ταφῆς λόγος γένοιτο.

Appendix 1: Chronological Tables

This appendix sets out the basis of chronological reconciliation I have used for the different dating systems in our primary sources.¹ The traditional system of consular years (January–December) used the names of office-holders.² After Justinian abolished the consulship the system ‘after the consulship of Basilius’ (*p.c. Basilii*) was used. Justinian favoured the system of regnal years, running from the anniversary of his accession in April to the following March.³ The system of indictional years counted within a fifteen-year tax cycle, running from September to the following August.⁴ Each Indiction number occurred multiple times in Justinian’s reign. The system of *Anno Mundi* used by Theophanes the Confessor can be converted to AD by subtracting 5509 between January and August and 5508 between September and December. Table 1 presents the correspondence between years in AD and the consular, regnal and indictional systems. It also includes the dates of Easter Sunday.⁵ Table 2 gives an index of consuls with PLRE references.

- 1 Venance Grumel, *Traité d’études byzantines: vol. 1: La chronologie* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1958), pp. 244–45.
- 2 Roger S. Bagnall and others, *Consuls of the Later Roman Empire* (Scholars Press, 1987), pp. 589–617.
- 3 Grumel, *Traité d’études byzantines: vol. 1: La chronologie*, p. 356.
- 4 Grumel, *Traité d’études byzantines: vol. 1: La chronologie*, p. 354; Bagnall and others, *Consuls of the Later Roman Empire*, p. 95.
- 5 Grumel, *Traité d’études byzantines: vol. 1: La chronologie*, pp. 244–45.

Table 1. Correspondence of chronological systems in the reign of Justinian I

AD/CE	Regnal	Indiction	Consulships	Easter Sunday
527	-/1	V/VI	Mavortius	4 April
528	1/2	VI/VII	Justinian (<i>cos.</i> II)	26 March
529	2/3	VII/VIII	Decius	15 April
530	3/4	VIII/IX	Lampadius & Orestes	31 March
531	4/5	IX/X	<i>p.c. Lampadii et Orestis a. I</i>	20 April
532	5/6	X/XI	<i>p.c. Lampadii et Orestis a. II</i>	11 April
533	6/7	XI/XII	Justinian (<i>cos.</i> III)	27 March
534	7/8	XII/XIII	Justinian (<i>cos.</i> IV) and Paul	16 April
535	8/9	XIII/XIV	Belisarius	8 April
536	9/10	XIV/XV	<i>p.c. Belisarii a. I</i>	23 March
537	10/11	XV/I	<i>p.c. Belisarii a. II</i>	12 April
538	11/12	I/II	John	4 April
539	12/13	II/III	Apion	24 March
540	13/14	III/IV	Justin	8 April
541	14/15	IV/V	Basilus	31 March
542	15/16	V/VI	<i>p.c. Basilii a. I</i>	20 April
543	16/17	VI/VII	<i>p.c. Basilii a. II</i>	5 April
544	17/18	VII/VIII	<i>p.c. Basilii a. III</i>	27 March
545	18/19	VIII/IX	<i>p.c. Basilii a. IV</i>	16 April
546	19/20	IX/X	<i>p.c. Basilii a. V</i>	8 April
547	20/21	X/XI	<i>p.c. Basilii a. VI</i>	24 March
548	21/22	XI/XII	<i>p.c. Basilii a. VII</i>	12 April
549	22/23	XII/XIII	<i>p.c. Basilii a. VIII</i>	4 April
550	23/24	XIII/XIV	<i>p.c. Basilii a. IX</i>	24 April
551	24/25	XV/I	<i>p.c. Basilii a. X</i>	9 April
552	25/26	I/II	<i>p.c. Basilii a. XI</i>	31 March
553	26/27	II/III	<i>p.c. Basilii a. XII</i>	20 April
554	27/28	III/IV	<i>p.c. Basilii a. XIII</i>	5 April
555	28/29	IV/V	<i>p.c. Basilii a. XIV</i>	28 March
556	29/30	V/VI	<i>p.c. Basilii a. XV</i>	16 April
557	30/31	VI/VII	<i>p.c. Basilii a. XVI</i>	1 April
558	31/32	VII/VIII	<i>p.c. Basilii a. XVII</i>	21 April
559	32/33	VIII/IX	<i>p.c. Basilii a. XVIII</i>	13 April
560	33/34	IX/X	<i>p.c. Basilii a. XIX</i>	28 March
561	34/35	X/XI	<i>p.c. Basilii a. XX</i>	17 April
562	35/36	XI/XII	<i>p.c. Basilii a. XXI</i>	9 April
563	36/37	XII/XIII	<i>p.c. Basilii a. XXII</i>	25 March
564	37/38	XIII/XIV	<i>p.c. Basilii a. XXIII</i>	13 April
565	38/39	XV/I	<i>p.c. Basilii a. XXIV</i>	5 April

Table 2. Index of Consuls in the reign of Justinian I (527-565)

Name	Full Name	PLRE Reference
Apion	Fl. Strategius Apion	PLRE II, 'Apion 10', p. 112
Basilus	Anicius Faustus Albinus Basilius	PLRE II, 'Basilius 12', pp. 216–219
Belisarius	Fl. Belisarius	PLRE III, 'Belisarius 1', pp. 181–224
Decius	Fl. Decius	PLRE II, 'Decius 5', p. 343
John	Fl. Iohannes	PLRE III, 'Iohannes 28', p. 651
Justin	Iustinus	PLRE III, 'Iustinus 8', p. 754
Justinian	Fl. Petrus Sabbatius Iustinianus	PLRE II, 'Iustinianus 1', pp. 645–48
Lampadius	Fl. Lampadius	PLRE II, 'Lampadius 6', p. 655
Mavortius	Vettius Agorius Basilius Mavortius	PLRE II, 'Mavortius 5', p. 732
Orestes	Fl. Rufus Gennadius Probus Orestes	PLRE II, 'Orestes 2', p. 811
Paulinus	Fl. Decius Paulinus	PLRE II, 'Paulinus 11', p. 855

Appendix 2: Tables of Primary Evidence

This appendix summarises the primary evidence of subsidies discussed in the thesis. Table 3 summarises the cases of subsidies paid by Justinian, indicating the chapter and section where discussions can be found. As I have consistently argued for the complexity of subsidy relationships, I have chosen minimalist tables rather than give the false impression of certainty that information like date ranges would suggest. Table 4 summarises all quantities enumerated by the primary sources. It includes examples from before and after Justinian that have been discussed as comparators. It also includes cases that are not strictly subsidies, but provide helpful comparators.

Table 3. Index of Justinian's subsidies

Polity	Chapter/Section Reference
Alans	Chapter 6, Section 6.3
Antes	Chapter 6, Section 6.2
Armenians (including Persarmenians; Bagratids)	Chapter 3, Section 3.1
Avars	Chapter 6, Section 6.3
Blemmyes	Chapter 2, Section 2.2.
Gepids	Chapter 5, Section 5.3.
Heruls	Chapter 5, Section 5.3.
Lazica (including the Suanians, the Misimians)	Chapter 3, Section 3.2.
Lombards	Chapter 5, Section 5.3.
Merovingian Franks	Chapter 5, Section 5.2.
Moors (incl. Antalas, Cusina, the Laguatan)	Chapter 5., Section 5.1.
Nubians/Nobadians	Chapter 2, Section 2.2.
Ostrogothic Kingdom	Chapter 4, Section 4.2.
Pontic Huns (incl. Bosporan Huns, Kutrigurs, Utigurs)	Chapter 6, Section 6.1.
Sabir Huns	Chapter 3, Section 3.3.
Saracens (incl. Jafnids/ <i>Banū Ghassan</i> and Nasrids/ <i>Banū Lakhm</i>)	Chapter 2, Section 2.1.
Sasanian Persia	Chapter 1
Tzani	Chapter 3, Section 3.1.
Vandal Kingdom	Chapter 4, Section 4.1.

Table 4. Amounts of money quantified by primary sources

Primary Source	Quantity	Description
Agath., <i>Hist.</i> , IV. 20. 9	28,800 <i>solidi</i>	Sum carried by Soterichus to the subjects of Lazica
Greg. Tur. <i>HF</i> , III. 31	50,000 <i>aurei</i>	Sum given by Vitigis to Franks as wergild for Amalasuintha
John of Epiphania, fr. 2. 73–78	500 <i>librae</i> per year (36,000 <i>solidi</i>)	Annual sum paid by Romans to Persia (Treaty of 561)
Josh. Styl., <i>Chron.</i> , VIII. 8	90,000 <i>staters</i>	Roman and Persian mutual defence agreement
Men. Prot., fr. 27. 3	80,000 <i>nomismata</i>	Annual sum paid by Tiberius to the Avars
Men. Prot., fr. 6. 1.	30,000 <i>solidi</i> per year	Annual sum paid by Romans to Persia (Treaty of 561)
Nikephoros, <i>Historia syntomos</i> , XX. 15–21	30 <i>librae</i> of gold	Sum given to the Arabs in the time of Heraclius
Priscus, fr. 37, 1–6; fr. 9. 4. 17–20; fr. 9. 3. 5–6	300, 1000 and 2000 <i>librae</i>	Sums paid annually to Attila's Huns
Procop., <i>BG</i> , V. 13. 14–15	20 <i>centenaria</i> (2000 <i>librae</i>)	Sum offered by Theodahad to the Franks to switch sides
Procop., <i>BG</i> , V. 2. 26–28	400 <i>centenaria</i>	Sum Amalasuintha prepared for her escape plan
Procop., <i>BG</i> , V. 6. 2	golden crown weighing three hundred <i>librae</i>	Amount offered by Theodahad for peace
Procop., <i>BG</i> , VIII. 25. 1–5.	1 gold <i>stater</i> per man	Price set by Gepids for Slavene raiders
Procop., <i>BP</i> , I. 15. 26–30	200 <i>librae</i>	Tax relief for the gold mine of Pharangion
Procop., <i>BP</i> , I. 22. 2–5	110 <i>centenaria</i> (792,000 <i>solidi</i>)	Justinian's payment for the 'Eternal Peace' of 532
Procop., <i>BP</i> , II. 10. 25	50 <i>centenaria</i> (360,000 <i>solidi</i>)	One-off sum demanded by Khosrow for peace in 540
Procop., <i>BP</i> , II. 10. 25	5 <i>centenaria</i> (36,000 <i>solidi</i>)	Annual sum demanded by Khosrow for peace in 540
Procop., <i>BP</i> , II. 29. 29	3 <i>centenaria</i> (21,600 <i>solidi</i>)	Sum agreed by Gubaz for service of Alans and Sabirs
Procop., <i>BP</i> , II. 6. 17–19	10 <i>centenaria</i> (72,000 <i>solidi</i>)	Sum agreed by Megasp and Khosrow for withdrawal from Antioch

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