

THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE
IN THE WORLD OF
THE SEVENTH CENTURY

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IN discussing some of the characteristic features of Byzantium's position as a world power in the seventh century I do not, of course, intend to make a detailed survey of the history of that period. Its salient features are well known to us. There is no need for me to go through all the stages of the Arab conquests in Western Asia and Africa, the Slavic settlement in the Balkans, or the Lombard invasion of Italy. Here we are interested not so much in the actual progress of these remarkable events as in their consequences. The important question for us is, how were these tremendous upheavals reflected in the Byzantine Empire? I shall, therefore, attempt to determine the position of Byzantium in the surrounding world after the collapse of the Empire of Justinian, and how it appeared to the Byzantines themselves at that time.

After the break-up of Justinian's restored Roman Empire in the West, the mass incursion of the Slavs into the Balkan peninsula, and the very rapid conquests of the Arabs in the East, Byzantine power was confined within territorial limits which were, by comparison, quite modest. What is more, the Empire, thus reduced on all sides, did not present any sort of unity. It was made up of several clearly differentiated parts, and conditions within these varied so widely that, in order to give any sort of picture of the general position of the Empire, we must first consider separately the state of affairs in each part.

We may begin with the most important of all, Asia Minor. Notwithstanding its quite unique importance for the very existence of the Byzantine state, I need say here only a few words about this region. Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt had all been lost in the first few years of the Arab onslaught. An immediate, urgent threat hung over Asia Minor and over the capital of the Empire itself. But after the historic victory outside Constantinople in the 670's a decisive change came about. The Empire retained its vital center and Asia Minor, too, remained in its possession. By this fact, the further existence of the Empire was assured. It is necessary to underline this fact as clearly as possible, for Asia Minor was the basis and foundation of medieval Byzantium. Many times subjected to invasion and devastation, though not permanently conquered by the enemy, Asia Minor was the most important and most enduring bulwark of Byzantine strength. Upon it depended the power and the very existence of the medieval Byzantine state.

It was in Asia Minor, too, that the renovation of the state was begun. Here the theme system first came into being – the new military and administrative organization which gave to medieval Byzantium its special strength. Within the frontiers of its much reduced territory the Empire was a more cohesive structure than before, endowed with greater internal solidity. The reconstitution of the state gave it a political strength that the later Roman Empire, gigantic but decaying from within, had never possessed, and also a much greater degree of spiritual unity, for the heterogeneous nature of the earlier Empire had caused continuous internal unrest. It is enough for us to

recall the age-old differences that had divided the central regions of the Empire from its Eastern provinces and the never-ending religious controversies in which these differences most tangibly expressed themselves, controversies which it was in fact impossible to settle, as proved by the fruitlessness of all attempts made by the tortuous imperial policy to bring about a pacification. A solution was finally reached only by the loss of the Eastern provinces—a loss which was itself brought about in no small measure by the unresolved conflict between Byzantium and the communities of the East, the Syrians and the Copts. In the East, therefore, Byzantium had come to rest upon a base which was greatly shrunken, but which was firm and had been strengthened by internal reorganization. Although, here as elsewhere, it was often menaced by hostile invasion, the power of the Empire in Asia Minor remained unshaken.

In the Balkans the situation was considerably more complicated and the position of the Empire immeasurably weaker. The stream of Slavic colonization, which had begun in some places at the end of the sixth century, had poured in an irresistible flood over the whole Balkan peninsula early in the seventh, after the failure of the Danubian campaigns of Maurice and the complete collapse of the old system in the time of Phocas. The movement extended from the Danube to Southern Greece, and from the Adriatic to the Black Sea. The former population was either wiped out or fled to the mountains, the coastal regions, and the adjacent islands. The ancient cities in the interior were ravaged, and only a few towns in the coastal areas held out in the midst of the Slavic flood. All the evidence indicates that outside these few strongholds there was no organized Byzantine power in the Balkans during the first half of the seventh century. The Balkan peninsula fell apart into numerous Slavic regions, the “Sclavinias,” as the Byzantine sources call them.

The full scale of the Byzantine catastrophe in the Balkans has not been generally appreciated. What has led to confusion is that Byzantine authority in this area was not replaced by the organized power of another state, but by a number of separate Slavic tribes or tribal confederations. Insofar as the “Sclavinias” did not constitute a sovereign power, able to substitute itself for that of the Empire, it was possible to maintain the fiction of Byzantine sovereignty in the Balkan peninsula even after the Slavic occupation. But this presumption of authority by no means reflected the actual state of affairs, and with the eruption of the Bulgars into the Balkans there came into being, about 680, a sovereign state which Byzantium was obliged to recognize as such. The Empire was confronted with a strong rival, with which it would have to wage a desperate struggle for Balkan hegemony and for influence over the “Sclavinias.”

Constantine Porphyrogenitus, describing the migration of the Croats and Serbs from the regions beyond the Carpathians into the Balkans (chapters 29–36 of *De administrando imperio*), emphasizes with tedious persistence that these two powerful Slavic tribes had always been subject to the Emperor of the Romans, and that “never were they subject to the *archon* of Bulgaria”.¹

¹ *De adm. imp.*, ed. Moravcsik-Jenkins, especially c. 31,58 and c. 32,146.

The migration of the Croats and Serbs represents the second great wave of Slavic colonization in the Balkans, brought about by the decline in the power of the Avars after their disastrous defeat near Constantinople in 626. Whereas the first wave of Slavic colonization had moved forward in alliance with the Avars and under their leadership, the Croats occupied their new lands in the Balkans after a struggle with the Avars, whom they displaced. Seen in this light, the assertion of Constantine Porphyrogenitus that the migration of the Croats and Serbs took place in agreement with the Emperor Heraclius and was accompanied by a recognition of Byzantine sovereign rights does not seem in any way improbable. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that contrasted to the Emperor's persistent repetition of this version of the facts in chapters 29 and 31-36, is the complete absence in chapter 30 of any reference whatever to participation of the Byzantine government in these events.

In any case, relations between Byzantium and the "Sclavinias" were shifting and changeable, and varied greatly at different times and in different areas. We are, thanks to the *Miracula Sancti Demetrii*, rather well informed about the group of tribes in Macedonia which, not later than the beginning of the seventh century, had permanently settled in the neighborhood of Salonica. These Macedonian Slavs often made fierce attacks against Salonica and even raided parts of Greece and the islands, both by land and sea;² sometimes, however, peace prevailed and some sort of *modus vivendi* was worked out between the inhabitants of the city and the neighboring tribes.³ But even in the few strongholds that remained in their hands the Byzantines had constantly and laboriously to keep up their defenses.

Only in 658—more than half a century after the beginning of this catastrophic phase—did the Emperor Constans II undertake a counteroffensive against the "Sclavinias," probably in the region of Thrace or Macedonia, where, as the Chronicle of Theophanes briefly notes, he "captured and subjugated many."⁴ This, it would seem, means that the Emperor was able to compel the Slavic tribes of this area to recognize Byzantine sovereignty, but it also indicates that, up to that time, they had not acknowledged it. What is more, it appears that this recognition was short-lived.

In 688/9 Justinian II once more campaigned against the "Sclavinias" and Bulgaria. Having warded off the opposition of the Bulgars, he forced his way to Salonica through the lands occupied by the Slavs and made a solemn entry into the city of St. Demetrius. Once again we are told that he, like his grandfather Constans II thirty years previously, "subjugated a great multitude of Slavs" and settled them in the theme of Opsikion, in Asia Minor.⁵ But wars with the restless inhabitants of the "Sclavinias" were to go on for a long time after this. Even when Byzantium succeeded in obtaining recognition of its sovereignty, this recognition proved to be transitory and precarious. In the middle of the eighth century the iconoclast Constantine V again fought

² *Miracula S. Demetrii*, II. 1, II. 2.

³ *Ibid.*, II. 4.

⁴ Theophanes, ed. De Boor, p. 347, 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 364, 11-15.

the Sclavinias in Macedonia, and again subdued them;⁶ in the eighties of the same century Stauracius, the logothete of the orthodox Empress Irene, once more moved against the Slavs "with numerous military forces," invaded the area of Salonica and also penetrated into central Greece, where (in the words of the chronicler) "he conquered all the people [i.e., the Slavs] and laid them under tribute," which, evidently, they had not previously been paying. He proceeded further and visited the Peloponnese, whence he carried off many captives.⁷ As the Chronicle of Monemvasia is careful to emphasize, the Slavs in the Peloponnese, an area which, according to this source, they occupied from the end of the sixth to the beginning of the ninth century, were subject "neither to the emperor of the Romans, nor to anyone else."⁸

The question whether Byzantine sovereign rights were recognized by the south Slavic tribes is interesting primarily from the point of view of Byzantine state theory, but to some extent the recognition or non-recognition of this sovereignty did undoubtedly reflect the real balance of forces. As we have seen, Byzantium did not give up its traditional pretensions to supreme authority, but was able to put them into effect only in some areas and for a limited period. However, in order to obtain a clear picture of actual conditions in the Balkans during the seventh century it is important for us to determine how far the governing power of the Empire was effectively exercised, rather than to what extent its nominal sovereign rights were acknowledged. The fundamental point is not whether the more or less theoretical supremacy of the Emperor extended over the Slavs, but whether the real force of Byzantine government did so. That is, were the "Sclavinias" directly subject to the Byzantine administrative apparatus? To this question a negative answer must be given. We may define the "Sclavinias"—that all-important concept in the history of the Balkans from the seventh to the ninth century—by saying that they were the territories occupied by the Slavs, not in themselves constituting any organized state, but separated from the Empire and outside the sphere of its direct administrative authority.

We must not forget that in this period Byzantine power in the provinces rested upon the theme organization. Wherever a Byzantine provincial administration existed and functioned, the theme system was also to be found. Where there were no themes, there was likewise no Byzantine administration. This is the one infallible gauge of the actual state of affairs. Wherever Byzantium succeeded in preserving its power through this period of crisis, or was able to overcome this crisis and reconstitute its position, the theme system was set up. Thus it was introduced within the boundaries of Asia Minor as early as the first half of the seventh century.

What state of affairs do we find in the Balkans? First of all it is noteworthy that the theme-organization arose here considerably later than in Asia Minor, and that in the beginning it developed extremely slowly and was

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 430, 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 456, 25-457, 2.

⁸ Ν. Βέης, Τὸ "Περὶ κτίσεως τῆς Μονεμβασίας" χρονικόν, Βυζαντίς, I (1909), pp. 67-68. P. Charanis, "The Chronicle of Monemvasia," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 5 (1950), p. 147.

confined to a few areas. According to Constantine Porphyrogenitus, the first theme in the Balkan peninsula, the Thracian, adjacent to the capital, was founded at the time the Bulgarians crossed the Danube—that is to say, about 680.⁹ In the famous letter of Justinian II to the Pope, dated 17 February 687, among the members of the state council is mentioned the commander of the Thracian army—the one and only *strategus* of a theme in the Balkan area, together with the *strategi* of the four themes of Asia Minor then in existence and the Exarchs of Italy and Africa.¹⁰ Soon after that, between 687 and 695 the theme of Hellas was founded: Leontius, who dethroned Justinian II at the end of 695 was the *strategus* of this theme.¹¹ So at the end of the century there were two themes in the Balkan peninsula, that of Thrace which probably embraced those regions of the former Thracian diocese which had remained intact after the Slavic colonization and the setting-up of the Bulgarian state, and the theme of Hellas which seems to have comprised Central Greece. For a century this situation remained unaltered; no new themes were set up in the Balkans. Only at the end of the eighth century was the process of organizing themes in this area taken up anew, and then it developed rapidly. This process reflects the gradual reconstitution of Byzantine power after the collapse it underwent in the time of the Slavic migrations. It gives us a clear picture of the progress of the Byzantine reoccupation—of its successes, but also of its limitations. We cannot here trace all the stages of this process which was at first extremely slow and laborious, but which later became intensive and effective. Its final result was that by the middle of the ninth century the districts of Greece and the coastal regions on both the east and west of the peninsula had been transformed into a series of Byzantine themes under Byzantine jurisdiction. Almost the whole coast-line was girdled with themes, by means of which Byzantium was able to revive its “thalassocracy.” The interior of the peninsula, however, remained unaffected by this development, and here Slavic states came into being.

With this the period of the “Sclavinias” ends. Where Byzantine administrative authority was restored they dissolved into the theme-organization; in those areas that remained outside the confines of imperial power they were absorbed by the rising Slavic states. In this way a certain equilibrium was established. Cultural zones were formed which exist even today. The frontiers between the Byzantine and Slavic spheres in the middle of the ninth century correspond fairly exactly to the cultural zones which the eminent Yugoslav geographer Cvijić has defined in modern times. The region which Cvijić calls the “Greco-Mediterranean zone” corresponds, in its type of village settlement and habitation, more or less to the region over which the theme-organization extended in the mid-ninth century as a result of the Byzantine reoccupation.¹²

⁹ *De thematibus*, ed. Pertusi, c. 1, 7. It is possible, however, that the first steps in the organization of this central theme took place at a considerably earlier date. Already in the 30's of the seventh century there is a mention of Thracian units of the army and of their commander whom, however, the Patriarch Nicephorus, (ed. De Boor, p. 24, 19,) with his customary affectation in the use of titles does not call the *strategus* but ὁ πᾶν θρακικῶν ἐκστρατευμάτων ἡγεμῶν.

¹⁰ Mansi, XI, 737 B.

¹¹ Theoph., p. 368, 21.

¹² J. Cvijić, *La péninsule balkanique* (Paris, 1918).

However, in the early centuries of the Byzantine middle ages we are still at the beginning of this development. In the seventh and eighth centuries the Balkan peninsula, as we have seen, presented a conglomeration of Slavic settlements which—whether or not they acknowledged Byzantine sovereignty—were a foreign land, outside the Empire's jurisdiction. We have seen that Justinian II opened up a road from Constantinople to Salonica by force of arms. To do this he had to transfer cavalry forces from the themes of Asia Minor to Thrace.¹³ His entry into Salonica was celebrated as a significant triumph over the Slavs. He made lavish grants to the church of St. Demetrius, the protector of the city, in gratitude for his victory "over the common enemy,"¹⁴ and it is possible that one of the frescoes in the church depicts his entry into the city.¹⁵

In the seventh century Byzantine power in the Balkans had collapsed almost entirely; but in time it was to increase again, though this was a slow process. Moreover, the Balkan regions wrested from the Empire remained open to the influences of Byzantine culture, which, from the strongholds that were retained, was able to penetrate them on an ever-increasing scale. In the West, on the other hand, the Byzantine dominions, which in the seventh century were still extensive, were doomed to slow extinction. The Exarchates of Ravenna and Carthage were indisputably important outposts of Byzantium in the West, but these remnants of Justinian's shattered Roman Empire were moving inexorably towards their liquidation. The African possessions were all finally lost by the turn of the eighth century; the Lombards were to take possession of the Exarchate of Ravenna in the middle of that century and thereafter Rome itself, the spiritual center of the West, was to turn away decisively from Byzantium. Only South Italy, which, together with the Balkan region of Illyricum, was annexed to the Patriarchate of Constantinople by the Iconoclasts in the middle of the eighth century, and which was to preserve its Greek culture, remained for a considerable period thereafter within the orbit of Byzantine influence.¹⁶

Here once again what interests us is not the external course of these events, familiar to all, but the question of Byzantium's relations with its Western possessions and with the West in general. We shall attempt to determine

¹³ Theoph., p. 364, 8.

¹⁴ A. A. Vasiliev, "An Edict of the Emperor Justinian II, September 688," *Speculum*, 18 (1943), p. 1 ff.; H. Grégoire, "Un édit de l'empereur Justinien II daté de Septembre 688," *Byzantion* 17 (1944/5), p. 119 ff.

¹⁵ This was suggested by E. Kantorowitz, "The King's Advent," *The Art Bulletin*, 26 (1944), p. 216, note 63, and supported by A. A. Vasiliev, "L'entrée triomphale de l'empereur Justinien II à Thessalonique en 688," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 13 (1947), p. 355 ff. J. D. Breckenridge, "The Long Siege of Thessalonika, Its Date and Iconography," *BZ*, 48 (1955), p. 116 ff., points out some difficulties in this interpretation. To my mind the only real difficulty is the fact that the city wall is represented as being on fire; however, Breckenridge does not give any more probable explanation of the fresco in question.

¹⁶ V. Grumel, "L'annexion de l'Illyricum oriental, de la Sicile et de la Calabre au patriarcat de Constantinople," *Recherches de science religieuse*, 40 (1952), p. 191 ff., has suggested that this annexation did not take place in the early 730's, as had been thought, but only some twenty years later, after the fall of Byzantine power in central Italy, during the pontificate of Pope Stephen II. M. V. Anastos, "The Transfer of Illyricum, Calabria, and Sicily to the Jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 732-33," *Silloge Bizantina in onore di S. G. Marcati* (Rome, 1957), p. 14 ff., rejects this view and maintains the former date.

what significance the Byzantine government attributed to its Western lands, how far it exerted itself to preserve them, and, on the other hand, how closely connected the Byzantine people felt themselves to be with the Western portion of the Empire, to what extent they interested themselves in the West and what, if anything, they knew about this region. These are two aspects of the problem which, as we shall see, do not coincide.

The break-up of Justinian's Empire which was begun by the advance of the Lombards into Italy in 568 compelled his successors to shift the focus of their policy to the East. Above everything else, in order to assure its very existence, it was essential that the Empire's tottering position on that front be strengthened. It is nevertheless remarkable how active an interest the imperial government showed in its Western possessions for several generations after the reign of Justinian. The loss of most of his conquests in the West and the enforced preoccupation with the East did not mean the renunciation of the idea of universal Empire or the abandonment of the defense of what was left in the West. The foundation of the Exarchates of Ravenna and Carthage in the reign of Maurice, the most notable of Justinian's successors, proves the opposite to have been the case. How hard Maurice tried to maintain the old universal traditions, and how little inclined he was to abandon the West is shown by his famous will. By the terms of this will which, according to Theophylact Simocatta, was drawn up by Maurice during a serious illness in 597 and discovered after the accession of Heraclius, his eldest son Theodosius was to rule over the East from Constantinople and his second son Tiberius, as Emperor of "Old Rome," was to have authority over Italy and the Tyrrhenian islands; to his other sons Maurice bequeathed "the remaining portions of the Roman state."¹⁷ Thus Rome, as a second capital, was once more to become an imperial city. The dream of universal hegemony had not been given up, nor had the tradition of dividing the one Roman Empire between members of the ruling dynasty been forgotten.

It is also well known that Heraclius, son of the Exarch of Africa, who was brought to the throne by the power of the African fleet, considered transferring the capital to Carthage.¹⁸ Hemmed in by the Persians and Avars, the Eastern part of the Empire at the beginning of his reign seemed too weak to be an effective base for counterattack. This plan was not carried out, but its mere conception is unquestionably a clear indication not only of the extreme difficulty of the position in the East at that time, but also of the attraction which the old Western Roman region had for the imperial government.

Even more indicative, in this respect, is the story of Constans II. Whereas Heraclius had only temporarily considered transferring the center of government to the West, his grandson actually realized this idea. According to Theophanes, his intention was to remove his residence to Rome.¹⁹ In fact he

¹⁷ Theophylactus Simocatta, ed. De Boor, pp. 305, 25-306, 13. As Bury, *Late Roman Empire*, II (1889), p. 94, note 2, suggests, this probably meant that one of them was to rule over Illyricum and the other over Africa.

¹⁸ Niceph., p. 12, 10.

¹⁹ Theophanes, p. 348, 5.

contented himself with a brief visit to the Eternal City and then established himself in Syracuse, thus taking up a key position between Italy, partly conquered by the Lombards, and North Africa which was menaced by the Arab invaders.

In reality, however, historical developments increasingly confined the Byzantine sphere of activity to the East, and the violent end of Constans after five ineffective years in Syracuse merely emphasized this fact. Although Byzantium never gave up its worldwide pretensions and never ceased to insist upon its supreme authority, the dream of a universal empire nevertheless grew faint. It seems to have appealed less to the successors of Constans II, and was even more alien to the Emperors of the eighth century. The government's keen interest in Western affairs had not, for a long time, been shared by the average Byzantine citizen. It is known that Heraclius' African plans aroused much apprehension in Constantinople, and that the departure of Constans II for Italy caused open dissatisfaction. Notwithstanding imperial aspirations for a world-Empire, the bonds between East and West in fact grew constantly weaker. The seventh century is an important stage in this process of mutual estrangement, and to some extent marks its turning point.

This assertion is, in itself, by no means new. Henri Pirenne pointed out with particular insistence how the ties between West and East were weakened in the seventh and eighth centuries, and, as is well known, he considered the principal cause of this weakening to be the penetration of the Arabs into the central Mediterranean basin.²⁰ It is unnecessary to enter here into a detailed examination of this famous theory. We are familiar with the very telling objections which have been brought against it, objections which demonstrated the insufficiency of its principal arguments.²¹ Nobody, of course, would wish to dispute the claim that the Arab invasion furthered a division between East and West, nor would anybody fail to recognize the ingenuity of Pirenne's very provocative ideas. But no-one at the present time could agree that the Arab invasion was the only, or even the principal, cause of the separation between the two halves of the former Roman Empire.

In this connection Professor Dvornik has recently indicated how important was the occupation of the Balkan peninsula by the Slavs.²² His observations are most pertinent, although the point here, it seems to me, is not so much the destruction of Christianity in Illyricum, on which he lays chief emphasis, as the actual fact of the Slavic occupation of the Balkans, which erected a new barrier between East and West. This did more to destroy normal relations than did the Arab attacks on the sea.

An example taken from a somewhat later source will illustrate this state of affairs clearly enough. I have in mind the life of St. Gregory the Decapolite, composed in the first half of the ninth century, which Professor Dvornik has

²⁰ Cf especially his *Mahomet et Charlemagne* (Paris—Brussels, 1937).

²¹ Cf. for instance R. S. Lopez, "Mohammed and Charlemagne: A Revision," *Speculum*, 18 (1943), pp. 14-38; Anne Riising, "The Fate of Henri Pirenne's Theses on the Consequences of the Islamic Expansion," *Classica et Mediaevalia*, 13 (1952), pp. 87-130 (with complete bibliography).

²² F. Dvornik, *The Slavs, their Early History and Civilization* (Boston, 1956), p. 44 ff.

edited. This tells of the Saint's numerous voyages by sea. Many other sources, and in particular hagiographic works, also contain information about sea travel in the Mediterranean in the early middle ages, but we must here confine ourselves to this one very clear example. About the year 820 Gregory the Decapolite, having decided to travel from Ephesus to Constantinople, learned that a large number of merchant vessels in the harbor of Ephesus was ready to put to sea, though their captains were unwilling to weigh anchor because of the Arab pirates who were lying in wait for them.²³ Nevertheless, protected by the prayers of the Saint, they reached Proconnesus safe and sound. From Proconnesus Gregory did not continue his journey to Constantinople, but took another ship to Aenus and thence, again by sea, went on to Christopolis²⁴ where he went ashore and continued his journey by land. However, near a river—probably the Strymon, which was not far distant—he was captured by “Slavic brigands.”²⁵ Impressed by the Saint's personality and bearing, the Slavs released him and thus he came to Salonica. There he met a monk with whom he decided to travel to Rome, but, instead of setting out along the Via Egnatia as anyone would have done in Roman times, since it was by far the shorter route, he once more chose the sea route, ignoring sailors' warnings about Arab pirates.²⁶ So, by devious ways, he came, via Corinth, to Reggio, and there took a ship which had just arrived from Naples.²⁷ After spending three months in Rome, he once more set sail, this time to Syracuse, thence to Otranto,²⁸ and, finally—it is not stated by what means—returned to Salonica, where he remained for some time. Later, however, desiring rest and quiet, he decided to journey to “the mountains of the Slavic regions” with one of his disciples. But they had no sooner set out than the Saint, oppressed with terrible premonitions, hastened home, and in fact a few days later a bloody revolt of “the archon of that Sclavinia” broke out; whereupon Gregory told his disciple that he never travelled from place to place without having procured an imperial pass, properly sealed.²⁹ Later on Gregory twice travelled to Constantinople again, undoubtedly by sea.

We have dealt at some length with the information provided by this hagiographic work, for it enables us to make a number of significant deductions. First of all, it bears witness to a lively sea traffic over the whole Eastern half of the Mediterranean, although it in no way glosses over the dangers of Arab piracy. Franz Dölger has already pointed out the importance of this evidence and has rightly used it against the arguments of Pirenne.³⁰ At the same time the Life of St. Gregory the Decapolite shows—and this has not been sufficiently noted—that travel by land in the Balkan peninsula, even in the first half of

²³ F. Dvornik, *La vie de saint Grégoire le Décapolite* (Paris, 1926), chap. 9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, chap. 10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, chap. 10, p. 54, 24. Cf. *Vizantiski izvori za istoriju naroda Jugoslavije*, I (Belgrade, 1955), p. 254.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, chap. 11.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, chap. 12.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, chap. 13.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, chap 17, p. 61, 20-62, 4.

³⁰ F. Dölger, *Byzanz und die europäische Staatenwelt* (1953), p. 365ff.

the ninth century was almost completely paralyzed. Gregory journeys to and fro across the Mediterranean on his numerous and lengthy voyages; but as soon as he travels the short distance from Christopolis to Salonica by land he falls into the hands of the Slavs. More remarkable, as I have already mentioned, is that he avoids travelling along the celebrated Via Egnatia and makes his way from Salonica to Rome by the lengthy and roundabout sea route. The Slavic penetration thus weakened the link between East and West in a smaller area, but much more seriously than did the maritime incursions of the Arabs. In short, the Life of Gregory the Decapolite shows us that navigation in the Mediterranean continued, whereas communications by land in the Balkan peninsula were still practically paralyzed at the beginning of the ninth century.

The causes of the separation of West and East were numerous and varied and cannot by any means be due solely to the difficulties along the lines of communication. The process of mutual estrangement between the two worlds had begun long before these difficulties developed, and was already in evidence in many ways in the early Byzantine period. In the seventh century this process was intensified to a marked degree. It is not my purpose to go into all of its effects on political, ecclesiastical, and cultural history. But if we wish to determine what conception the inhabitants of the seventh-century Empire had of the world around them, we must note that the average Byzantine showed surprisingly little interest in the West and knew remarkably little about it. For all the attempts of the imperial government to live up to the high traditions of the Roman idea and to cling to the remnants of its former power in the West, this region lay beyond the horizon of most cultured Byzantines at this time.

It is sufficient to refer to our two chief sources for this period to be convinced of this fact. Upon reading the chronicle of either Theophanes or the Patriarch Nicephorus one becomes aware of the pronounced infrequency with which they refer to Western affairs in the seventh century. This indicates that their sources—those seventh-century chronicles which are lost to us but which they used—had little or nothing to say about the West, for neither Theophanes nor Nicephorus was notable for the independence of his thinking; each merely handed on what he found in his sources.

The data which Theophanes supplies in the tables that form a kind of chronological skeleton for his chronicle are very informative in this respect. As is known, the work of Theophanes is distinguished by its detailed and complicated chronological system. The narrative is divided according to years, and at the beginning of each year are indicated, in addition to the date reckoned both by the creation and by the birth of Christ, the years of the reign of the ruling Byzantine emperor and the Persian king—or, later, the Arab caliph—and also the years of the episcopates of the pope and the four Eastern patriarchs. These five supreme representatives of the Christian church are, for the early Byzantine period, introduced with absolute regularity; the pope is cited first, after him the patriarch of Constantinople and thereafter the three other Eastern patriarchs. But as early as the seventies of the sixth century the list of Roman bishops is suddenly cut short; from 574/5 (A.M.6067) the representa-

tives of the Roman Church disappear (in some mss. their years are not indicated after 569/70). They are not cited in Theophanes' tables for an entire century and a half—that is to say, all through the seventh and the first quarter of the eighth century, and reappear only when he reaches the period of the Iconoclasts.

Similarly, the loss of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt removed the Eastern patriarchs from the Byzantine field of vision. Those of Antioch cease to be commemorated in Theophanes' tables as early as 610/11 (A.M. 6102); those of Jerusalem in 636/7 (A.M. 6128); and those of Alexandria in 654/5 (A.M. 6146). Thereafter the tables contain the names of only the emperors, the caliphs, and the patriarchs of Constantinople. In fact the patriarch of Constantinople had become, in the eyes of the Byzantines, the one supreme authority in the Church, and was the only one of the five patriarchs who was of immediate concern to them.³¹

The popes cease to figure in Theophanes' tables not in consequence of any papal clash with Constantinople, but purely and simply because they were no longer of interest to the Byzantines, just as the Eastern patriarchs, cut off by the Arab conquests, had ceased to be of interest to them; seemingly Theophanes found no more information about either in his sources. As I have just pointed out, the names of the Roman popes reappear in Theophanes' tables with the beginning of the Iconoclast period. The opposition of the Roman church to the Iconoclasts caused Theophanes, after an interruption of 150 years, to turn his attention once again to its representatives. Interest in Rome was awakened in orthodox iconodule circles, but knowledge of Roman affairs lagged behind.

Above his entry for A.M. 6217 (= 725/6), in which he speaks of Leo III's first measures against the cult of images, Theophanes first notes: The bishop of Rome, Gregory—9 years. In fact Gregory II had occupied the throne of St. Peter for at least ten years prior to this. What is more, Theophanes was unaware that two popes of this name held the Roman See, one after another. For him Gregory II and Gregory III were one person, whose pontificate he extends from 726 to 735, whereas in fact Gregory II reigned from 715 to 731 and Gregory III from 731 to 741. The latter's successor, Pope Zacharias, was in office, according to Theophanes, from 735 to 756 instead of from 741 to 752 that is, for twenty-one, instead of eleven, years. Pope Stephen II does not appear at all in his chronological tables, and so on.³² None of his data about the

³¹ As an exception, Theophanes, from 707/8 (A.M. 6199) to 735/6 (A.M. 6227), enters in his tables the name of John, Patriarch of Jerusalem, who, he knows "together with the Eastern bishops" anathematized the Iconoclast Leo III (p. 403, 29, A.M. 6221); the names of the other "Eastern bishops" seem to have been unknown to him. Similarly, in 742/3 there suddenly appear the names of the Antiochene patriarchs Stephen, Theophylact, and Theodore, but they break off again as early as 755/6 (A.M. 6247), in the fifth year of the Patriarchate of Theodore, although, as Theophanes himself notes, he was patriarch for six years. It is interesting to see that the Eastern patriarchs are not listed in Theophanes' tables even in the years of the sixth and seventh Oecumenical Councils, although their representatives took part in these Councils. No mention is made of their participation in the narrative of either Theophanes, or the Patriarch Nicephorus. Nor does either of them refer to the participation of the pope's representatives in these councils.

³² Theophanes' narrative, however, deals in some detail with Pope Stephen's "flight" to Pippin's court, dating it as early as 724/5 (A.M. 6216, where the name of the Roman Pope is still not included in the tables)—that is to say, some thirty years too early.

representatives of the Roman church in the eighth century is accurate. His information about the Roman Church in the seventh century is even more meagre.³³ This is particularly striking since his contemporary information about the Arab Caliphs is remarkably exact. The years of their reigns are as well known to him as are those of the Byzantine Emperors themselves, and his data here are so faultlessly accurate that they have provided the main basis for elucidating the notorious chronological problem posed by his chronicle—the discrepancy between years and indictions.³⁴

An examination of the data provided by the second of our chief sources for the early Byzantine middle ages, the *Breviarium* of the Patriarch Nicephorus, is no less instructive in this connection. Apart from a brief reference to the murder of Constans II in Sicily³⁵ (the history of Constans' reign is not dealt with in his work), Nicephorus mentions the Western possessions of Byzantium only twice in dealing with the seventh century, and then very briefly and in passing, and he has nothing at all to say about Western regions lying outside the imperial boundaries. In the first instance he reports that the sacellarius Philagrius was exiled by Heraclonas "to the fortress called Septas, situated in the West, beyond the pillars of Hercules, in Libya";³⁶ in the second, he reports the capture of the Exarchate of Carthage by the Arabs, doing so, however, only in order to narrate the dethronement of Leontius and the accession of Tiberius Apsimar.³⁷ And that is all; there is no word about Ravenna and its Exarchate, no mention of Rome and the Roman church, or of Italy in general.

It is with the East, Asiatic and European, that the chronicles of Theophanes and Nicephorus mainly deal, recounting the great events of external policy during that period. Eastern sources, in turn—especially Armenian and Syriac, sometimes Arab and even Ethiopic—also provide much precious information about Byzantium in this period, incomparably more than do Western sources which, nevertheless, devote more attention to Byzantium than do the Byzantine sources to Western affairs.

Of first importance in the chronicles of Theophanes and Nicephorus are, naturally, the descriptions of the wars with the Persians and, later, from the thirties of the seventh century onward, with the Arabs. One following the other, these two Eastern powers were the only states that stood opposed to Byzantium on terms of equality—often, in fact, as contenders for a position of superiority—and that the Byzantines themselves tacitly accepted as such. We may recall that in his chronological tables Theophanes regularly comme-

³³ As we have seen, the names and years of the bishops of Rome are entirely omitted in his tables during the seventh century, and when he does refer to them in the text, his information is extremely inaccurate. In contrast to Nicephorus, whose chronicle does not say a single word about the Roman Church in the seventh century, Theophanes mentions, e.g., the Lateran Synod of Pope Martin and dates it correctly to A. M. 6141 (Oct. 649); yet he antedates to 6121 (629/30) the conflict between Martin and the imperial government and refers to Agathon as Martin's successor (p. 332, 4). Actually Agathon (678–81) is separated from Martin (649–55) by twenty-three years and no less than four popes.

³⁴ Cf. G. Ostrogorsky, "Die Chronologie des Theophanes im 7. und 8. Jahrhundert," *Byz.-Neugr. Jahrb.*, 7 (1930), p. 1 ff.

³⁵ Niceph., p. 31, 28; on p. 33 he repeats the statement that Constans II died in the West.

³⁶ Niceph., p. 29, 15.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39, 12 ff.

morates, together with the names and years of the Byzantine emperors, those of the Persian king or the Arab caliph, which it does not occur to him to do in the case of any other foreign ruler.

The Empire's rivals in the Balkan peninsula constituted the other factor of chief significance in Byzantine external politics during the seventh century. For the Byzantines the Balkans were part of "the West", of "Europe" and indeed, they most frequently applied these terms to the peninsula. This was the European West which was of immediate concern and interest to them. However, the information given by Theophanes and Nicephorus about the Slavs is, once more, poor and scanty. The clashes with the Slavs were mostly of a local character at that time, and escape the notice of the Byzantine chroniclers, whose attention is turned towards the capital and who record only a few of the most important campaigns organized from Constantinople against the "Sclavinias."

The chroniclers have a good deal to say about relations with the Avars at the end of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh century. Here the central place is taken by the imposing figure of the Khagan Bayan whose name, however, is not given by either Theophanes or Nicephorus. After the unsuccessful siege of Constantinople by the Avars and Slavs in 626 and the subsequent decline of Avar power, dealings with them are pushed further into the background. From the year 680 onward relations with the Bulgars come to the forefront. Nicephorus and, more particularly, Theophanes have preserved a fairly detailed account of the appearance of Asparuch's tribesmen on the Danube and of the foundation of the Bulgar state in the northeastern part of the Balkan peninsula—an account which they take from a common source, contemporary with these events.³⁸ Both chroniclers likewise write at some length about relations with the Khan Tervel, who helped Justinian II regain the imperial throne, was dignified by him with the title of Caesar, and was enthroned beside him to receive the plaudits of the Byzantine population. Thereafter, relations with the young Bulgarian state occupy an increasingly large part of their narratives. Bulgaria quite clearly becomes the chief rival of Byzantium in "Europe," and has the same central importance in its external policy in the West as does the Caliphate in the East.

But, along with those peoples with whom Byzantium had continuous dealings during the seventh century, and with whom it was engaged in an almost constant struggle, the chroniclers also refer to a number of other countries and peoples of Eastern Europe and hither Asia. Some of Nicephorus' information about them is of particular interest. These Eastern peoples were an important factor in the political network surrounding Byzantium, and the story of its dealings with them serves to fill in the picture of its external politics at this time.

As early as the second half of the sixth century the Empire had begun relations with the Turkic nomads in Western Asia, and had exchanged diplomatic missions with them in the reigns of Justin II, Tiberius, and Maurice. Especially notable are the relations with the Bulgaric Onogur principality which

³⁸ Cf. J. Moravcsik, "Zur Geschichte der Onoguren," *Ungarische Jahrbücher*, 10 (1930), p. 70ff.

had arisen in the Kuban region in the first half of the seventh century. It was without doubt the ruler of this so-called "great Bulgarian Kingdom" who in 619 visited Constantinople and there adopted Christianity. This prince, it would seem, was Orhan (Organas). Heraclius received him with great cordiality and became his baptismal father. Byzantine notables stood godfather at the baptism of his lieutenants, and their wives became godmothers of the converts' wives. All of the visitors were rewarded with gifts and honorary titles, and the Bulgar ruler himself was honored with the dignity of patrician.³⁹ Nicephorus calls him ὁ τῶν Οὐννων τοῦ ἔθνους κύριος, but does not mention his name, omitting it apparently through an oversight. There is good reason to believe that the name was given in his source, since further on Kuvrat, the ruler of the Hunnogoundours (ὁ τῶν Οὐνογουνδούρων κύριος) is represented as being the nephew of Orhan, the latter name being mentioned as though it were already familiar to the reader.⁴⁰

This nephew is the celebrated Kuvrat, known both to Byzantine and Eastern historians and mentioned in the list of ancient Bulgar rulers, who has in modern times been the subject of a good deal of historical investigation. According to the indications of Nicephorus, Kuvrat revolted against the authority of the Avar Khagan and drove the Avars out of his country; he apparently succeeded because of the collapse of Avar power after the Khagan's defeat near Constantinople just as, at about the same time, the Croats succeeded in ousting the Avars from the western part of the Balkan peninsula, at the other end of the Empire. Having risen against the Avars, Kuvrat sent a mission to Heraclius and concluded a peace treaty with him "which they observed to the end of their lives," writes Nicephorus; furthermore, the Emperor sent him gifts and conferred on him the title of patrician.⁴¹ John of Nikiu reports that Kuvrat while still a child, had been baptised in Constantinople and brought up at the imperial court; apparently he had gone to Constantinople with his uncle Orhan and had been left there as a hostage.⁴²

³⁹ Niceph., p. 12, 20–28.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24, 9. That Kuvrat was the son of Orhan's brother is also stated by John of Nikiu, ed. Zotenberg, p. 460.

⁴¹ Niceph., p. 24, 12–15.

⁴² This being so, there is no reason to conflate Nicephorus' references to two treaties, concluded with two different rulers of the Bulgars—one around 619; the other around 635—by eliminating the later one, as was done by Zlatarski, *Istorija na bŭlgarskata dŭrŭŭava prez srednite vekove*, I, 1, 33 ff. The argument by which he justified this, viz., that after 626 the Emperor would have had no need of a treaty against the Avars, is very weak. On the other hand, there is no reason to suppose that both of the treaties mentioned by Nicephorus were concluded with Kuvrat, as does Grégoire, "L'origine et le nom des Croates et des Serbes," *Byzantion*, 17 (1944/5), p. 100 ff., for it is obvious that Kuvrat could not have received the title of patrician twice over, and, what is more, it is entirely clear from the narrative of John of Nikiu, upon which Grégoire himself places such emphasis, that Kuvrat was converted to Christianity before he had become ruler of the Bulgars. J. Marquart, "Die altbulgarischen Ausdrücke in der Inschrift von Čatalar und der altbulgarischen Fürstenliste," *Izvestija Russk. Archeol. Inst. v Konst.*, 15 (1911), p. 7, and esp. p. 21, was inclined to identify Orhan with the unnamed ruler of the "Huns" who visited Constantinople in 619, and he was followed in this by J. Kulakovskij, *Istorija Vizantiï*, 3 (1915) p. 91. Marquart himself, however, immediately rejected this very likely identification because it appeared to him incomprehensible that the name of Orhan, obviously well known to the Byzantines, should not be mentioned by Nicephorus under 619. But the matter is resolved quite simply if, as we have supposed, the name omitted by Nicephorus appeared in his source under 619, and this was the reason why Nicephorus, under 635, mentions Kuvrat as the nephew of Orhan. How little concerned Nicephorus was to bring his various references into harmony with each other may be seen, for example, in his later account of the five sons of Kuvrat, when he writes of the latter: Κοβρατός τις θυομα κύριος

It follows from this that Orhan, and not Kuvrat, must be regarded as the founder of Bulgarian power in the Northern Caucasus. It was also he who initiated the alliance with Byzantium. Kuvrat, when he in turn became ruler, strengthened this alliance by means of a further treaty, directed against the common enemy, the Avars. His personal relations with Heraclius, if we are to believe John of Nikiu, were so close that after the Emperor's death he intervened in the internal struggle that broke out in Byzantium, upholding the rights of Heraclius' widow Martina and her son Heraclonas.⁴³

The mutual interest of Byzantium and the Bulgar Onogur state in the Northern Caucasus, and the firm and friendly relations between the two powers are very characteristic of this period. Equally characteristic and remarkable are the close personal links which bound the Imperial court to the rulers of this barbarian state, who had associated themselves with the culture and religion of the Empire and had been completely drawn into the orbit of Byzantine politics.

Kuvrat, the ruler of the North Caucasian Bulgar State (Κούβρατος or Κοβράτος in Nicephorus, Κροβᾶτος in Theophanes, *Kurt* in the list of ancient Bulgar rulers, *Qetrades* in John of Nikiu, *Kuvrat* in Moses of Chorene) must not, in spite of Grégoire,⁴⁴ be confounded with the Kuver (Κούβερ) who appears in the *Miracula Sancti Demetrii*. The activities of the latter took place in an entirely different area, in the Balkans and Pannonia,⁴⁵ and relate to a later period.⁴⁶ But Kuver, though he was a vassal of the Avar Khagan, is another example of a barbarian chieftain who had close links with the Empire. Having been appointed by the Khagan to be leader of the Byzantine community which, drawn from all parts of the Balkans, had been settled in the region of Sirmium, in Pannonia, Kuver withdrew his allegiance from the Avar chief and, at the head of the Byzantine population subject to him, moved into Macedonia, and even sought, through a stratagem, to take possession of Salonica. In this he was greatly assisted by his lieutenant Maurus, who, in the words of the *Miracula* "was skilfull in all things and knew the Greek, Latin, Slavic, and Bulgar tongues," and whom the Em-

γινόμενος τῶν φύλων τούτων, p. 33. 16. Having rejected the correct identification which he himself had put forward, Marquart preferred the arbitrary supposition that the ruler who visited Constantinople in 619 was the chieftain of the Caucasian Huns or Hephthalites from Varachan in N. Daghestan, into whose country Heraclius was obliged to retreat in 625; in support of this he refers to Theophanes, 310, 19, who, however, simply mentions τὴν τῶν Οὐννων χώραν, without any more precise qualification.

⁴³ John of Nikiu, ed. Zotenberg, p. 460.

⁴⁴ Grégoire, *op. cit.*, p. 104 ff.

⁴⁵ This has been clearly shown by A. Maricq, "Notes sur les Slaves dans le Péloponnèse et en Bithynie," *Byzantion*, 22 (1952), p. 345 ff., whose conclusions are manifestly correct.

⁴⁶ Kuvrat died in the reign of Constans II (641-68): cf. Theoph., p. 357, 11; Niceph., p. 33, 17. Kuver's activity in Macedonia must be, however, dated to the time of Constantine IV (668-85). Cf. F. Barišič, *Čuda Dimitrija Solunskog kao istorijski izvori* (Belgrade, 1953), p. 126 ff. One consideration, in my opinion, is decisive: In the chapter in which he writes about Kuver (II. 5) the author of *Miracula*, II refers to the then emperor as "our Emperor" (τὸν βασιλέα ἡμῶν, Migne, *PG*, 116, 1376), "him who is ordained by God to rule over us" (τὸν ἀπὸ θεοῦ βασιλεύειν ἡμῖν λαχόντα, *ibid.*, 1365), i.e. to an Emperor who was still on the throne when Book II of the *Miracula* was being written. But it now seems to be generally recognized that this Book dates from the reign of Constantine IV. As for the resemblance between the names of the Bulgar Kuvrat and the Avar Kuver, such a coincidence, taking into account the fact that one common barbarian milieu extended over the whole area of Central and Eastern Europe, is in no way surprising. Without having to look far for another example, we may cite the eldest son of Kuvrat, who was called Bayan or Batbayan (Βατανός: Niceph., p. 33, 26; Βατβαϊᾶν: Theoph., p. 357, 19)—the same name as that of the great Avar Khagan.

peror, misled by his apparent submissiveness, honored with the title of consul (*hypatus*).⁴⁷

Similarly the Slavs and their leaders not only made war with Byzantium but, at times, were also in peaceful contact with the Byzantine population and might be found living on very amicable terms with them. The *Miracula S. Demetrii* tell the story of Pervud, chief of the tribe of the Rinkhinians, who had lived for some time in Salonica.⁴⁸ Naturally, as is explained subsequently, he spoke Greek. On the strength of a slanderous report he was arrested by the Prefect of Salonica and sent to Constantinople; whereupon a deputation made up of both Slavs and inhabitants of Salonica went to the capital and petitioned for the release of the unjustly arrested prince—a remarkable demonstration of this friendly relationship.

But we must return to the barbarian world beyond the Black Sea. The friendly alliance that bound the Empire to the old Bulgar-Onogur Kingdom against the Avars also linked it with the rising power of the Khazars—first against the Persians and later against the Arabs. With the Khazar principality, which was soon to replace the power of “Great Bulgaria” in the North Caucasus and in the lower Don-Volga region, Byzantine relations in the seventh and eighth centuries were especially friendly.

As early as the time of his great campaigns against Persia, Heraclius, having reached the Caucasus, sent gifts πρὸς τὸν τούρκων κύριον, as Nicephorus calls the Khazar Khagan, inviting this potentate to join in an alliance against the Persians.⁴⁹ The alliance was confirmed by a meeting between the two rulers. The Khagan came out to meet Heraclius with a numerous suite and, dismounting, both he and his retinue greeted the Emperor with a *proskynesis*. Heraclius addressed the Khagan as his son, placed his own crown on the Khazar ruler’s head and promised him in marriage his daughter Eudocia, “the Augusta of the Romans.” It is interesting to note that he also showed her portrait to the Khagan, who, on seeing it, was consumed with love for its “archetype.”⁵⁰ The proposed marriage did not take place because of the Khagan’s death.⁵¹ But later Justinian II, who spent some years at the Khazar court during the period of his exile, married the Khagan’s sister and after his restoration crowned both her and his son by her, making him his co-ruler.⁵² Constantine V was also wedded to a Khazar princess and his son, Leo IV, was known as “the Khazar.” These princesses were thus the first foreign-born Byzantine Empresses. The fact is noteworthy if we recall the haughty attitude of the Byzantine court concerning marriages between the imperial family and foreign dynasties. The alliance with the Khazar Kingdom became a most important factor in Byzantine policy during the early middle ages.

The Empire also entertained relations with the Caucasian tribes. At the time

⁴⁷ *Miracula*, II. 5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, II. 4.

⁴⁹ Theophanes, too, considers the Khazars as Turks. Writing about this same treaty he calls them τοὺς τούρκους ἐκ τῆς ἐφάσ οὗς χάλωρει δνομάλουσι (p. 315, 15; cf. pp. 407, 6, 11, 14; 433, 26).

⁵⁰ Niceph., pp. 15, 20–16, 20.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 28–22, 2.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 43, 8; Theoph. p. 375, 28.

of his Persian campaigns Heraclius had already attracted a number of Caucasian chieftains into his camp, as both the Byzantine and the Armenian sources make clear.⁵³ Like Armenia, the Caucasian regions were a subject of conflict between Byzantium and Persia and, later on, even more vehemently, between Byzantium and the Arabs. In particular, Lazica, the ancient Colchis, was a crucially important area in Byzantine relations with both Persia and the Caliphate as well as with the northern nomadic tribes. The possessions on the south coast of the Crimea, centered around Cherson, were even more consistently important outposts. Although, with the increasing power of the Khazars, the greater part of Taurica came under their control at the end of the seventh century, Cherson remained Byzantine, and gave the Empire direct access to the wandering peoples of the East European plain, over whom a close watch was kept at all times.⁵⁴

Such was the environment of the Byzantine Empire in the seventh century; such were the partners—rivals and allies—of the Emperors of the Heraclian dynasty. In the East, their most powerful opponents were first the Persian kings and thereafter the Arab caliphs, beginning with Omar the Conqueror, and the great founder of the Umayyad Caliphate, Muawiya; in the Balkans, the Avar Khagans, headed by the terrible Bayan, the princes of the numerous “Sclavinias” who, though frequently at war with the Empire, were also at times in peaceful contact with it, and, from the end of the century onwards, the Bulgar Khans—Asparuch, the founder of the Bulgarian state in the Balkans, and Tervel, the ally and helper of Justinian II, who was honored by the Emperor with the appellation of Caesar. Beyond the Black Sea, the allies of the emperors against the Avars on one side and the Persians and Arabs on the other were the rulers of the old Bulgar-Onogur principality, Orhan and Kuvrat, baptized in Constantinople and granted the title of Byzantine patrician; and later on the Khagans of the Khazars, linked to the Byzantine court by treaties of alliance and by bonds of marriage as well; and finally, the semi-dependent princes of the many Caucasian tribes and the Armenian *Curopalati*.

Thus Byzantium in the seventh century had many strong ties with the Orient, not only with the world of Islam but also with the barbarian nations of Eastern Europe. This barbarian, semi-nomadic world was subjected to the Empire’s cultural influence and brought into the sphere of its political schemes; its chieftains associated themselves with Byzantine civilization, and some of them even adopted its religion and formed ties of kinship with the Imperial dynasty.

⁵³ According to Moses of Kagankatvaci, Heraclius had dealings with the princes of Albania, Iberia, and Armenia and demanded “that they should go to him of their own accord and serve him with their armies in wintertime” (Russian trans. by K. Patkanian [St. Petersburg, 1861], p. 102; cf. German trans. in A. Manandian, *Beiträge zur albanischen Geschichte*, [Diss. Leipzig, 1897], p. 38). Theophanes, p. 309, 14, mentions the Lazi, Abasgians, and Iberians among the allies of Heraclius.

⁵⁴ A. L. Jakobson, “Vizantija v istorii rannesrednevekovoj Tavriki,” *Sov. Archeologija*, 21 (1954), p. 152 f., exaggerates a good deal when he speaks of a complete downfall of Byzantine power in Taurica from the seventh to the ninth century (i.e., to the creation of the theme of Cherson). On p. 154 of his interesting and useful paper he himself, however, notes “the balance of power rather favorable to Byzantium, which was established on the north coast of the Black Sea after the arrival of the Khazars, who afterwards, as is known, became the allies of Byzantium.” Cf. also his remark that the activity of the Christian church in Taurica reached “unprecedented proportions” in the eighth century.

Honored with Byzantine titles, they were brought into the hierarchy of the Empire and so were led to acknowledge that ideal sovereignty which resided in the Emperor. Byzantium was, in some sense, indisputably the head of all this diversified congeries of nations, and Constantinople was its center. But in the process of subjecting this barbarian world to its political and cultural influence, Byzantium became more akin to it, and was in turn subjected to its influences, adopted its manners, and took over its styles of dress and decoration. This was pointed out by N. P. Kondakov, who rightly emphasized that the world of the Eastern nomads played a historic role that is deserving of more attention than is usually devoted to it.⁵⁵

Byzantium, after the break-up of Justinian's Empire, was never again to be a world monarchy. But it continued to exert a very great influence, both political and cultural, on the world around it, an influence which expanded in the East as it diminished in the West. As we observed at the outset, Byzantium in the seventh century was far from being a unified body; it was made up of a number of clearly distinct parts, with varying outlooks and separate destinies. In Asia Minor the Empire stood firm and unshaken; here was the source of its external and internal strength and the bulwark of its reviving might. In the Balkan peninsula, its power, shattered by the Avar invasions and the Slavic colonization, was confined to a few towns in the coastal area, but from these few remaining centers began the gradual and partial restoration of that power; from them its cultural influence radiated out into the neighboring Slavic lands. In the West both the political power of Byzantium and its cultural influence were in a process of slow but steady liquidation. Finally, on the North coast of the Black Sea the Empire maintained its positions. From here it was able to exert an influence over the barbarian nations of Eastern Europe, with which in this period it had connections incomparably closer and more durable than it had with the alien and far-off West.

Byzantium in the seventh century faced eastward. This, however, does not mean that it became an "oriental" state, as is often asserted. We must not forget that catastrophe had fallen on the old Roman world-Empire both in the West and in the East; that it had lost not only its Western possessions but its Eastern provinces as well—these having now entered the orbit of Islam. Byzantium occupied a special place between the Romano-Germanic West and the Islamic East as a Greek state, which it finally became just at this time, in the seventh century. It did not, of course, become Greek either in the ethnic sense, since it remained multi-national, or in its political ideology, since it jealously preserved its claims to the inheritance of Rome. It became a state that was Greek in culture and language, and no longer resistant to the natural process of Hellenization, the victory of which had been assured long before by the transfer to the East of the center of the Empire, but which finally triumphed only after the collapse of the restored Roman Empire of Justinian.

⁵⁵ N. P. Kondakov, "Les costumes orientaux à la cour byzantine," *Byzantion*, 1 (1924), p. 7 ff., and *Očerki i zametki po istorii srednevekovogo iskusstva i kul'tury* (Prague, 1929), p. 61 ff. Cf. also J. Moravcsik, "Proischozhenie slova τζιτζάκιον," *Sem. Kond.*, 4 (1931), p. 69 ff.

At once Greek and medieval, seventh century Byzantium was in its general features strikingly different from the half-antique, half-Latin Empire of the preceding epoch, and, at the same time, was separated more and more clearly from the contemporary Romano-Germanic West. It was not the incursions from without, but the inherent process of cultural and linguistic separation that played the decisive role in the gradual estrangement between the Latin West and the Greek East, an estrangement which, after the unsuccessful endeavor made in the time of Justinian to re-unite the two worlds, found such clear expression in the seventh century.