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Barbarian Emperors? Aspects of the Byzantine Perception of the qaghan (*chaganos*) in the Earlier Middle Ages

As direct heirs to the Roman imperial tradition, Byzantine emperors had a strong claim to universal rule over the *oikoumenē*¹ and according to a well-established tradition, they only acknowledged one ruler equal to them: the Persian king of kings, whose place was later accorded to the Muslim caliph.² In the second half of the 6th century, however, the Constantinopolitan court came into contact with another type of “imperial” monarchs: the qaghans (or *khagans*) of the Eurasian steppe zone. These partly close, partly remote encounters have left their traces in a number of early and middle Byzantine sources,³ so that the Byzantine modes of perception of the steppe rulers can be discussed.⁴ Although the Eurasian nomadic polities of the earlier Middle Ages still occupy a rather marginal position in Medieval Studies in general,⁵ their relevance to the Byzantine civilization as more

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- 1 For the complex notion of *oikoumenē* in Byzantium see Koder, Johannes: “Die räumlichen Vorstellungen der Byzantiner von der Ökumene (4. bis 12. Jahrhundert)”. *Anzeiger der philosophisch-historischen Klasse der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 137(2), 2002, pp. 15–34.
 - 2 Cf. Schmalzbauer, Gudrun: “Überlegungen zur Idee der Oikumene in Byzanz”. In: Hörandner, Wolfram et al. (eds.): *Wiener Byzantinistik und Neogräzistik. Beiträge zum Symposion 40 Jahre Institut für Byzantinistik und Neogräzistik der Universität Wien im Gedenken an Herbert Hunger*. Verlag der ÖAW: Vienna 2004, pp. 408–419.
 - 3 The basic resource for any study on Byzantine-Turkic relations is Moravcsik, Gyula: *Byzantinoturcica*, vol. 2: *Sprachreste der Türkvölker in den byzantinischen Quellen*, 2nd edition. Akademie Verlag: Berlin 1958.
 - 4 See also the study by Savvides, Alexis G.C.: “Some Notes on the Terms khān and khagan in Byzantine Sources”. In: Netton, Ian Richard (ed.): *Studies in Honour of Clifford Edmund Bosworth*, vol. 1. Brill: Leiden / Boston / Cologne 2000, pp. 267–279.
 - 5 Notwithstanding the recent efforts to raise historical awareness of their important role in European Medieval history, cf. Curta, Florin (ed.): *The Other Europe in the Middle Ages: Avars, Bulgars, Khazars and Cumans*. (East Central

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or less permanent neighbours has long been recognized.⁶ Research in this field does not only concentrate on the interaction between the nomads and Byzantium,⁷ but also on their perception in the East Roman Empire.⁸ On the other hand there is a flourishing tradition of profound turkological, archaeological and historical research specifically dedicated to the steppe peoples and their polities.⁹ Scholars have not only introduced and discussed

and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages 2). Brill: Leiden / Boston 2008; Spinei, Victor: *The Great Migrations in the East and South of Europe from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Century*, 2 vols, 2nd edition. Hakkert: Amsterdam 2006. See also Pohl, Walter: “The Role of Steppe Peoples in Eastern and Central Europe in the First Millennium A.D.”. In: Urbańczyk, Przemysław (ed.): *Origins of Central Europe*. PAN: Warsaw 1997, pp. 65–78.

- 6 Cf. Schreiner, Peter: “Die Rolle der Turkvölker in der byzantinischen Reichspolitik”. In: Id. (ed.): *Studia byzantino-bulgarica*. Verein Freunde des Hauses Wittgenstein: Vienna 1986, pp. 39–50.
- 7 Inter alia Kralides, Apostolos F.: *Οἱ Χάζαροι καὶ τὸ Βυζάντιο. Ἱστορικὴ καὶ θρησκευτικὴ προσέγγιση*. Sabbalas: Athens 2003; Kardaras, Georgios: *Τὸ Βυζάντιο καὶ οἱ Ἄραροι (6–9 αἰ): πολιτικὲς, διπλωματικὲς καὶ πολιτισμικὲς σχέσεις*. Elleniko Idryma Ereunon: Athens 2010 (not consulted); Vásáry, István: *Cumans and Tatars. Oriental Military in the pre-Ottoman Balkans, 1185–1365*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2005.
- 8 Carile, Antonio: “I nomadi nelle fonti bizantine”. In: *Popoli delle steppe: Unni, Avari, Ungari*. (Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo 35). CISAM: Spoleto 1988, vol. 1, pp. 55–87; Ahrweiler, Hélène: “Byzantine Concepts of the Foreigner: The Case of the Nomads”. In: Ead. / Laiou, Angeliki (eds.): *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*. Dumbarton Oaks Library: Washington 1998, pp. 1–15; Malamut, Élisabeth: “Les peuples étrangers dans l’idéologie impériale. Scythes et Occidentaux”. In: *L’étranger au Moyen Âge. Actes du XXX^e congrès de la SHMESP*. Publications de la Sorbonne: Paris 2000, pp. 119–132; Ead.: “L’image byzantine des Petchénègues”. *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 88, 1995, pp. 105–147.
- 9 To cite only some recent works of general character: Golden, Peter B.: *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples. Ethnogenesis and State Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East*. (Turcologica 9). Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden 1992; Kljaštornyj, Sergej G.: *Die Geschichte Zentralasiens und die Denkmäler in Runenschrift*. Schletzer: Berlin 2007; Id. / Sultanov, Tursun I.: *Staaten und Völker in den Steppen Eurasiens: Altertum und Mittelalter*. Schletzer: Berlin 2006; Roemer, Hans Robert / Scharlipp, Wolfgang-Ekkehard (eds.): *History of the Turkic Peoples in the Pre-Islamic Period*. (Philologiae Turcicae fundamenta 3.1). Schwarz: Berlin 2000; Güzel, Hasan Celâl /

a wide range of sources, reaching from Chinese dynastic records and early Turkic inscriptions to literary testimonies in all major written languages of the Medieval Mediterranean world, but also developed structural concepts about the steppe empires, their economic base and their models of rulership, especially the qaghanate.¹⁰

We shall not try to summarize the history of the qaghanal institution – as far as it is known – in this place, but only mention that the title qaghan (in Chinese *ke-han*)¹¹ seems to occur in the Xianbei polity of the 3rd century CE for the first time and was later used by the Rou-ran, the supposed ancestors of the European Avars.¹² When the Türk tribes¹³ successfully revolted against these overlords in 552, their leader Bumïn consequently claimed the qaghanate for himself.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the Avars retained the same in-

Oğuz, C. Cem / Karatay, Osman (eds.): *The Turks I: Early Ages*. Yeni Türkiye Publications: Ankara 2002; Beckwith, Christopher I.: *Empires of the Silk Road. A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present*. Princeton University Press: Princeton / Oxford 2009.

- 10 Pritsak, Omeljan: “The Distinctive Features of the *pax nomadica*”. In: *Popoli delle steppe* (as n. 8), vol. 2, pp. 749–780, has analyzed the fundamental concepts that characterized steppe rulership; see also Golden, Peter B.: “The Türk Imperial Tradition in the Pre-Chinggisid Era”. In: Sneath, David / Kaplonski, Christopher (eds.): *The History of Mongolia*, vol. 1. Global Oriental Ltd.: Folkestone 2010, pp. 68–95, here pp. 71–75. There are also comparative approaches to steppe rulership, e.g. Stepanov, Tsvetelin: “Ruler and Political Ideology in Pax Nomadica: Early Medieval Bulgaria and the Uighur Qaganate”. In: Curta, Florin (ed.): *East Central and Eastern Europe in the Early Middle Ages*. University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor 2005, pp. 152–161.
- 11 The origins and meaning of the title are not yet sufficiently understood, see Golden, *Introduction* (as n. 9), pp. 71–72.
- 12 For the Rou-ran see Golden, *Introduction* (as n. 9), pp. 76–79; Kollautz, Arnulf / Miyakawa, Hisayuki: *Geschichte und Kultur eines völkerwanderungszeitlichen Nomadenvolkes. Die Jou-Jan der Mongolei und die Awaren in Mitteleuropa*, vol. 1: *Die Geschichte*. Geschichtsverein für Kärnten: Klagenfurt 1970, pp. 56–137.
- 13 For the origins and meaning of the name Türk see Scharlipp, Wolfgang-Ekkehard: *Die frühen Türken in Zentralasien. Eine Einführung in ihre Geschichte und Kultur*. WBG: Darmstadt 1992, pp. 13–17.
- 14 *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19; Kljaštornyj / Sultanov, *Staaten und Völker* (as n. 9), pp. 100–101.

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stitution when they established their control over Pannonia around 568.¹⁵ Avar domination over the Western margins of the Eurasian steppe zone proved much more persistent than the Türk Empire as the latter's history is indeed troubled: de facto subdivided into an Eastern part under the direct rule of the *qaghan* from the Ashina-clan¹⁶ and a Western part headed by his relative, the *yabghu*, the strength of this empire depended on the shifting loyalties of tribes and tribal confederations and on its relations with powerful neighbours such as Tang China. The decomposition of the Western Türk polity led to the ascent of the long-lived and much studied¹⁷ Khazar qaghanate in northern Caucasia and the lower Volga region during the 7th century CE. The original structures of rulership in the Khazar polity seem to be derived from the Türk model.

The Türk tradition thus exercised a strong influence on patterns of rulership with various political forces of the Eurasian steppe zone. The Türk qaghanate has therefore been interpreted as the prototype of a specific model of sacralized monarchy in the steppe zone with strong imperial connotations.¹⁸ Among the criteria which gave steppe rulers a legitimate claim to qaghanal status, heavenly fortune (*qut*) surely played the central role. This became particularly visible by successful conquests. Further aspects having been proposed in research are e.g. the possession of sacred places (mountains or forests) and a direct connection to the charismatic Ashina

15 For the formation of Avar rule in the Hungarian plain in these decades see Pohl, Walter: *Die Awaren. Ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa 567–822 n.Chr.* Beck: Munich 1988, pp. 43–76.

16 See Golden, *Introduction* (as n. 9), pp. 121–124 for a discussion of the origins of this probably non-Turkic name and related questions.

17 For an excellent outline of the development and current state of this particularly rich field of study see Golden, Peter B.: “Khazar Studies: Achievements and Perspectives”. In: Id. / Ben-Shammai, Haggai / Róna-Tas, András (eds.): *The World of the Khazars. New Perspectives. Selected Papers from the Jerusalem 1999 International Khazar Colloquium.* (Handbuch der Orientalistik 8, 17). Brill: Leiden / Boston 2007, pp. 7–57.

18 Golden, *Introduction* (as n. 9), p. 71: “the title qağan, which we may translate as ‘Emperor of the nomadic, steppe peoples’”; Pritsak, “The Distinctive Features” (as n. 10), p. 754: “The qayan was an autocrat (*bilgä*) and sole intermediary between the sedentary empire (China, Byzantium) and the *el*, both as a negotiator (peace, money, trade) and a war leader.”

clan (which does of course not apply to the Avar qaghans).¹⁹ These and other criteria can certainly be evidenced in several cases, but it should be stressed that the defining characteristics of a qaghan have never been fixed in written form by the nomads. Moreover, there were some powerful and long-lived political entities in the steppe zone which seemingly ignored the qaghanal institution, such as those of the Pechenegs and the Cumans.²⁰ Their emergence in the 10th and 11th centuries in fact marks the very end of the occurrence of qaghans in the Byzantine sources.

Consulting Gyula Moravcsik's *Byzantinoturcica*, one easily finds out that Byzantine historiographers used the term *chaganos* (χαγάνος) regularly with respect to rulers of three *ethnika*: the *Turkoi* (a rather ambiguous term), the Khazars and the Avars.²¹ A first group of authors comprises Menander Protector, Theophylaktos Simokates and the compiler of the "Chronicon Paschale", all of them active in the later 6th and / or earlier 7th centuries²² and thus not yet acquainted with the Khazars. A second group consists of the "Short History" written by the patriarch Nikephoros and the "Chronography" attributed to Theophanes the Confessor, both of them were composed at the turn from the 8th to the 9th centuries.²³ Most occurrences of the qaghan in later sources derive more or less directly from these texts.

19 Golden, Peter: The Question of the Rus' Qaghanate. *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 2, 1982, pp. 77–97, repr. in: Id.: *Nomads and their Neighbours in the Russian Steppe: Turks, Khazars and Qipchaqs*. Ashgate: Aldershot 2003, nr. VI, here pp. 84–86; see also Stepanov, Tsvetelin: "Rulers, Doctrines and Title Practices in Eastern Europe, 6th-9th Centuries". *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 14, 2005, pp. 263–279, here pp. 267–268. See also Golden, *Introduction* (as n. 9), pp. 146–149; Id., "Türk Imperial Tradition" (as n. 10), pp. 75–79.

20 For the political structure of these two polities see Golden, *Introduction* (as n. 9), pp. 264–281.

21 Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica II* (as n. 3), pp. 332–334; cf. Savvides, "Some Notes" (as n. 4), p. 275.

22 For this period of Byzantine historiography, see now Treadgold, Warren: *The Early Byzantine Historians*. Palgrave: Basingstoke 2007, pp. 293–349; cf. Hunger, Herbert: *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, vol. 1. (Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft XII.5, 1). Beck: Munich 1978, pp. 309–319 and 328–329.

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 334–339, pp. 344–347. The various discussions concerning the authorship and the sources of the "Chronography" are now concisely summarized by Conterno, Maria: *La "descrizione dei tempi" all'alba dell'espansione islam-*

The historical work of Menander Protector, which covers the years from 558 to 582, has only fragmentarily been preserved. Its author²⁴ mainly uses the unspecific term *hēgemōn* when referring to a barbarian ruler such as Sandilchos, chief of the Utigurs,²⁵ the ruler of the Hephthalites,²⁶ but also the Merovingian king Sigibert.²⁷ The same terminology can occasionally be found for the rulers of the Türk²⁸ and the Avars,²⁹ but Menander gives their titles more precisely. The Avar leader Baian is more often than not called *Chaganos* (*Χαγάνος*) (not necessarily specified by an ethnic attribute).³⁰ As a major protagonist of diplomatic contacts and military confrontation with the Romans, he is often just called by his name: *ὁ Βαϊανός*. This implies, however, that the name of this qaghan was well-known in Constantinople, which stands in striking contrast to the fact that none of the subsequent Avar qaghans is mentioned by name in any historiographical record.³¹

ica. Un'indagine sulla storiografia greca, siriana e araba fra VII e VIII secolo. (Millennium Studien 47). De Gruyter: Berlin / Boston 2014, pp. 4–21. See also the detailed introduction by Rochow, Ilse: *Byzanz im 8. Jahrhundert in der Sicht des Theophanes. Quellenkritisch-historischer Kommentar zu den Jahren 715–813.* (Berliner byzantinistische Arbeiten 57). Akademie Verlag: Berlin 1991, pp. 37–74.

- 24 On his personality and the character of his work see Baldwin, Barry: “Menander Protector”. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 32, 1978, pp. 99–125.
- 25 Blockley, Roger C. (ed.): *The History of Menander the Guardsman.* (ARCA Classical and Medieval Texts, Papers and Monographs 17). Cairns: Liverpool 1985, frg. 2, p. 42: *τῷ Σανδιλχῶ τῷ τῶν Οὐτιγούρων ἡγεμόνι.*
- 26 Menander, frg. 4,3, p. 46: *ὁ Κάτουλφος κολύων τὸν τῶν Εφθαλιπῶν ἡγεμόνα.*
- 27 Id., frg. 11, p. 126: *ἐσήμηνεν ὁ Βαιανὸς Σιγισβέρτῳ τῷ τῶν Φράγγων ἡγεμόνι.*
- 28 Cf. Id., frg. 4,2, p. 44: *ὁ Σιλζιβουλὸς ὁ τῶν Τούρκων ἡγεμόν.*
- 29 Id., frg. 8, p. 94: the Avar envoys sent to Constantinople refer to their qaghan as *τὸν καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἡγεμόνα*; frg. 12,6, p. 138: *ὁ Βαϊανὸς ὁ τῶν Ἀβάρων ἡγεμόν*; frg. 21, p. 192: the emperor Tiberius sends an embassy to *Βαϊανὸν τὸν ἡγεμόνα τῶν Ἀβάρων.*
- 30 Cf. Id., frg. 5,3, p. 50; frg. 27,3, p. 240; frg. 12,5, p. 136: Bonus, the commander of Sirmium (perhaps *magister militum per Illyricum*) sends a message to Baian, addressing him *ὦ Χαγάνε.*
- 31 Pohl, *Die Awaren* (as n. 15), p. 176; cf. Id.: “A non-Roman Empire in Central Europe: the Avars”. In: Goetz, Hans-Werner / Jarnut, Jörg / Pohl, Walter (eds.): *Regna and gentes. The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World.* (The Transformation of the Roman World 13). Brill: Leiden / Boston 2003,

In a fragment concerning the Roman-Avar confrontations of 579, Menander nearly exclusively uses the term *ὁ Χαγάνος* to designate Baian, who is nevertheless characterized very negatively and accused of having broken the treaty with the Romans in a shameless, most barbarian way (*βαρβαρότατα*).³² While the confrontation with the Avars usually plays on a local scene involving only generals or governors, in this passage the emperor (Tiberius II) is mentioned several times (as *basileus* or *autokrator*) and thus figures as the qaghan's main antagonist. The relationship between the two monarchs is explicitly referred to in a previous fragment concerning the mission of the Avar envoy Targites to Constantinople. He declared to the emperor Justin II: "I am here, o basileus, sent by your son. For you are truly the father of our lord Baianos."³³ The idea of fictitious parental relationships between rulers is a common feature of 'international' relations in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, specifically associated with Byzantium.³⁴ According to Menander, however, it is not the Byzantine side that proposed such a concept, but the Avar ruler who pursues an obvious goal: that the emperor should show his "paternal love" (*στοργή*) and give to his "son" what the son is entitled to: *τὰ τοῦ παιδός*.³⁵ Besides this utilitarian logic,

pp. 571–595, here p. 586, assuming that "the ideology of Avar rulership obliterated the individuality of the khagan; it was inconceivable that there was another khagan."

32 Menander, frg. 25, pp. 216–226, here especially p. 218, l. 8. For the rather typical patterns of Menander's perception of barbarians see Baldwin, "Menander" (as n. 24), p. 115.

33 Menander, frg. 12,6, p. 138: *ὁ βασιλεῦ, πάρεμι σταλεις ὑπὸ τοῦ σοῦ παιδός· πατήρ γάρ αὐτὸς ἀληθῶς Βαϊανοῦ τοῦ καθ' ἡμᾶς δεσπότου.*

34 This has been (over)emphasized by Dölger, Franz: "Die 'Familie der Könige' im Mittelalter". In: Id.: *Byzanz und die europäische Staatenwelt. Ausgewählte Vorträge und Aufsätze*. Buch-Kunstverlag: Ettal 1953, pp. 34–69, who tries to trace the structures of a coherently ordered Byzantine "monarchical world system" out of an address-list given in the treatise "De Cerimoniis"; Dölger's view has been thoroughly criticized by Brandes, Wolfram: "Die 'Familie der Könige' im Mittelalter. Ein Diskussionsbeitrag zur Kritik eines vermeintlichen Erkenntnismodells". *Rechtsgeschichte – Legal History* 21, 2013, pp. 262–284.

35 Menander, frg. 12,6, p. 138, ll. 17–19: *πέποιθα δὴ οὖν ὡς ἐπιδείξασθαι προθυμηθείης τὴν περὶ τὸν παῖδα στοργὴν τῷ δίδόναι τὰ τοῦ παιδός*. For the implications of the Avar's demand see also Claude, Dietrich: "Zur Begründung

Menander's report seems to reveal that the Avar qaghan did not insist on his own hierarchical superiority with respect to the basileus, nor did he raise claims to universal rule.

The case of the Türk Empire is clearly different. Apart from two short fragments, Menander above all includes extensive accounts of two ambassadorial exchanges with them, which took place under changing political circumstances. The first exchange was initiated by İstāmi, the *yabghu qaghan* of the Western Türk called Sizabul in the Greek source, in about 567 in order to establish an alliance between the Türk and the Romans against Persia.³⁶ The account on Valentinus' mission around 576, however, shows clear signs of alienation since the Türk ruler had been informed about treaties between Byzantium and the Avars, whom he considered disobedient subjects who should be punished.³⁷

In the account of the first Roman mission, led by Zemarchos,³⁸ Menander refers to Sizabul usually only by his name, but he once states that Zemarchos arrived at his destination, the "White Mountain" (*Ektag / Aqdagħ*)³⁹, which was the place "where the qaghan personally was".⁴⁰ The reception

familiärer Beziehungen zwischen dem Kaiser und barbarischen Herrschern". In: Chrysos, Evangelos K. / Schwarcz, Andreas (eds.): *Das Reich und die Barbaren*. (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung 29). Böhlau: Vienna / Cologne 1989, pp. 25–56, here p. 31.

36 Menander, frg. 10, 1–5 pp. 110–126. Cf. also Haussig, Hans Wilhelm: "Byzantinische Quellen über Mittelasien in ihrer historischen Aussage". In: Harmatta, János (ed.): *Prolegomena to the Sources on the History of Pre-Islamic Central Asia*. Akadémiai Kiadó: Budapest 1979, pp. 41–60, here p. 47.

37 Cf. Menander, frg. 19, pp. 170–178.

38 For Zemarchos, his mission and its sources (besides Menander also in the "Ecclesiastical History" of John of Ephesos) see Dobrovits, Mihály: "The Altaic World through Byzantine Eyes: Some Remarks on the Historical Circumstances of Zemarchus' Journey to the Turks (AD 569–570)". *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 64, 2011, pp. 373–409; see also Carile, "I nomadi" (as n. 8), pp. 58–61.

39 Dobrovits, "The Altaic World" (as n. 38), pp. 386–387 shows that the term can refer to any snowy mountain.

40 Menander, frg. 10,3, p. 118, ll. 21–23: *Τούτων δὲ ταύτη γεγενημένων ἔπειτα ἐπορεύοντο ζῆν τοῖς ἐς τὸ τοιόνδε τεταγμένοις, ἵνα ὁ Χαγάνος αὐτὸς ἦν, ἐν ὄρει τινὶ λεγομένῳ Ἐκτάγ, ὡς ἂν εἴποι χρυσὸν ὄρος Ἕλλην ἀνήρ.*

is described in detail.⁴¹ Sizabul was sitting on a golden wheeled “kathedra” in a tent when the ambassador officially greeted him and expressed the Romans’ desire of friendship with the “tribes of the Turks” (τῶν Τούρκων τὰ φύλα). The qaghan was addressed as “ruler of so many peoples” (ὁ τοσούτων ἔθνῶν ἡγεμών) instead of any specific title, but the fact that Zemarchos calls the Byzantine emperor “our Great emperor” [emphasis S.K.] (ὁ καθ’ ἡμᾶς βασιλεὺς ὁ μέγας) underlines the imperial connotation of this address.⁴² It is thus perhaps not accidental that at the onset of this chapter, Menander states that the growing fortunes of the Turks determined their Sogdian subjects⁴³ to advise their (i.e. the Türk) *basileus* to send an embassy to Persia.⁴⁴ The title *basileus* is usually strictly reserved for the two rulers of Rome and Persia in Menander’s work. Therefore, this passage clearly alludes to the imperial quality of the Türk *qaghan* or, more precisely, the *yabghu qaghan*, since Menander seems not to be aware of the existence of a supreme qaghan of even higher rank in the East. Instead, he certainly depended on the information given by Ištämi’s Sogdian envoy Maniach in Constantinople when being asked for the structure of rulership among the Türk and their territories (περὶ τῆς τῶν Τούρκων ἡγεμονίας τε καὶ χώρας). Maniach explained that there were four parts (ἡγεμονίαι) among them, but the supreme rule over the whole people (κράτος τοῦ ζύμπαντος ἔθνους) lay in the hands of Sizabul alone. If this was not a bold lie, should we perhaps assume that the supreme rank among the Ashina clan had indeed (temporarily) devolved to Ištämi as senior ruler at some unknown date?⁴⁵

41 For prestigious objects and riches available at the qaghan’s court see Stark, Sören: *Die Alttürkenzeit in Mittel- und Zentralasien. Archäologische und historische Studien*. Reichert: Wiesbaden 2008, pp. 189–195.

42 Cf. Menander, frg. 10,3, p. 118, ll. 27–42.

43 For the position of the Sogdian merchants as economic elite of the Türk qaghanate see de la Vaissière, Étienne: *Sogdian Traders. A History*. (Handbook of Oriental Studies 8, 10). Brill: Leiden / Boston 2005, pp. 199–216.

44 Menander, frg. 10,1, p. 110, ll. 2–5: ὡς γὰρ τὰ Τούρκων ἐπὶ μέγα ἦρθη, οἱ Σογδαῖται οἱ πρὸ τοῦ μὲν Εφθαλιτῶν, τῆνικαῦτα δὲ Τούρκων κατήκοοι, τοῦ σφῶν βασιλέως ἐδέοντο πρεσβεῖαν στείλαι ὡς Πέρσας.

45 Id., frg. 10,1, p. 114, ll. 68–73. Golden, *Introduction* (as n. 9), p. 128, interprets Maniach’s statement in another way: “the Byzantines learned that Σιλζιβουλος was the supreme ruler of the Western branch of the Türk Empire which appears to have been broken up into four administrative units.” The text, however, does

In the fragment concerning Valentinus' mission, the image of Türk rulership is much more polycentric: Menander repeatedly refers to the leaders (*hēgemonēs* or *proestōtas*) of the Turks in plural, not using the term *chaganos* or any other title. Instead of a plurality of Turkic tribes or peoples, the Türk are now referred to as one Scythian tribe that has subdivided its land into eight parts (instead of four).⁴⁶ The Roman envoy is received in audience by Silzibil's (Sizabul's) son Turxanthos,⁴⁷ who later sends him to his brother Tardu⁴⁸ residing at mount Ektal. Furthermore, a most ancient monarch Arsilas is mentioned.⁴⁹ The imperial character of Türk rulership in Byzantine eyes is also confirmed by the content of the negotiations: Valentinus tries to convince the Türk to keep friendship with the Romans (implying equal standing),⁵⁰ but Turxanthos invokes the "invincible might" of the Türk and purposefully declares that he knows where the rivers Danube and Dnepr are. The qaghan thus delineates potential territorial claims, especially if the Romans collaborated with the Uarhonitai who call themselves Avars, but were considered "slaves" of the Türk.⁵¹

This deep antagonism between the Türk and the Avars – accused of having usurped the Avar name because of its prestige – is even more clearly

not refer to a distinction between Eastern and Western Türk, and Golden also underlines (p. 131) that in the time of İstāmi the Western Türk Empire did not represent "an independent political entity".

46 Menander, frg. 19,1, p. 170, ll. 15–16: *Σκύθαας ἀνδρας ἐκ τοῦ φύλου τῶν ἐπιλεγομένων Τοῦρκων*, and p. 172, ll. 32–33: *ἐν ὅκτῳ γὰρ μοίραις διεδάσαντο τὰ ἐκείνη ἅπαντα, οἷς γε τοῦ φύλου τῶν Τοῦρκων ἔλαχε προεστάναι*.

47 Beckwith, Christopher: "The Frankish Name of the King of the Turks". *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 15, 2006/7, pp. 5–12, here pp. 7–8, has argued that this name in fact stands for the title **türkwač* (ruler of the Türk) instead of a meaningless **türkšad*. The title has also left traces in the so-called Fredegarchronicle.

48 Menander frg. 19,1, p. 178, ll. 133–135. For Tardu, son of İstāmi, ruler of the Western Türk empire (575–603) and finally even qaghan in the East (600–603), see Golden, *Introduction* (as n. 9), pp. 131–133; Scharlipp, *Die frühen Türken* (as n. 13), pp. 27–28.

49 Menander frg. 19,1, p. 172, l. 34: *Ἀρσίλας δὲ ὄνομα τῷ παλαιτέρῳ μονάρχῳ Τοῦρκων*. Arsilas has been identified with the dynastic name Ashina by Christopher Beckwith, see Golden, *Introduction* (as n. 9), p. 121.

50 Menander frg. 19,1, p. 172, ll. 35–49.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 172, l. 50–p. 174, l. 74.

outlined by Theophylaktos Simokates, who continued Menander's work in his "Oikumenikē Historia". His famous excursus on the Scythian peoples has often been commented on and nevertheless remains partially cryptic.⁵² It is introduced by a letter sent "in this summer"⁵³ to the emperor Maurikios by "the one who in the East is praised as *Chaganos* by the Türk".⁵⁴ The title "qaghan" is thus not explained to the reader, but it becomes clear that its holder is highly venerated. Theophylaktos furthermore cites the letter's *inscriptio* (*epigraphē*) literally: "to the basileus of the Romans from the *Chaganos*, the great lord of the seven generations and ruler of the seven

52 The most detailed discussion is Haussig, Hans Wilhelm: "Theophylakts Exkurs über die skythischen Völker". *Byzantion* 23, 1953, pp. 275–457. See also the comments by Peter Schreiner in: Id. (transl.): *Theophylaktos Simokates, Geschichte*. (Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur 20). Hiersemann: Stuttgart 1985, pp. 340–347.

53 The letter's date is controversial, although it is generally agreed upon that the events mentioned by Theophylaktos in the surrounding chapters belong to 595. Therefore Schreiner, *Theophylaktos* (as n. 52), p. 341, n. 951, pleads for 595, but Whitby, Michael: *The Emperor Maurice and his Historian. Theophylakt Simocatta on Persian and Balkan Warfare*. Clarendon Press: Oxford 1988, pp. 315–316 prefers a much earlier date shortly after 580 for the letter, as did Haussig, "Theophylakts Exkurs" (as n. 52), pp. 383–384 with regard to the oral victory reports, but not to the actual letter, which he dates to 600. Against such a rather unconvincing split Harmatta, János: "The Letter Sent by the Turk Qaghan to the Emperor Mauricius". *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 41, 2001, pp. 109–118, tries to show that all events mentioned in the letter can be dated to the years between 580 and 599, this last one serving as *terminus post quem* for the letter's redaction (p. 118).

54 De Boor, Carolus (ed.) / Wirth, Peter (rec.): *Theophylacti Simocattae Historiae*. (Bibliotheca Teubneriana). Teubner: Stuttgart 1972, VII 7, 7, p. 257, ll. 1–3: *κατὰ τοῦτον δὴ τὸν ἐνιαυτὸν ὁ πρὸς τῇ ἔφ ὑπὸ τῶν Τούρκων Χαγάνος ὑμνούμεος πρέσβεις ἐξέπεμψε Μαυρικίῳ τῷ αὐτοκράτορι*. The sender of this letter has usually been identified with Tardu qaghan, who thus announced his ascent to supreme power in 600, cf. Haussig, "Theophylakts Exkurs" (as n. 52), pp. 378–379; Harmatta, "The Letter" (as n. 53), pp. 114–115. Recently, however, de la Vaissière, Etienne: "Maurice et le qaghan: à propos de la digression de Théophylacte Simocatta sur les Turcs". *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 68, 2010, pp. 219–224, has proposed to identify him with Nili qaghan, pretender to the Eastern qaghanate from a secondary Ashina-branch, and has dated the letter to 595.

climates of the Oikumene”⁵⁵. This *intitulatio* does not correspond to the usual style of Türk rulers – in contrast to the Orkhon inscriptions from the Second Eastern qaghanate, references to heaven as the source of legitimate rule are curiously absent – but it seems to reflect the Persian royal title.⁵⁶ But with regard to the Byzantine perception it seems interesting that Theophylaktos quotes this part of the letter extensively,⁵⁷ while he only gives a paraphrase of its main content, a message of various victories obtained by the qaghan over the Hephthalites, the (Eastern) Avar and Oghur peoples and finally against the “rebel” Turum.⁵⁸ This last victory, the actual cause of the qaghan’s message to the emperor,⁵⁹ now allows the qaghan to rule felicitously and conclude treaties with the Tabghast (i.e. Sui-China). The ideal state of perfect peace (*βαθειαν γαλήνην*) and unshakeable rule (*ἀστασίαστον ἀρχήν*) is invoked.⁶⁰ All these characteristics seem to imply that

55 Theophylacti Historiae VII 7,8, p. 257, ll. 5–6: *τῷ βασιλεῖ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ὁ Χαγάνος ὁ μέγας δεσπότης ἐπὶ γενεῶν καὶ κύριος κλιμάτων τῆς οἰκουμένης ἐπὶ τὰ.*

56 This has extensively been discussed by Haussig, “Theophylaktos Exkurs” (as n. 52), pp. 317–325.

57 It should be noted that the name of the destinatary precedes the qaghan’s long *intitulatio*.

58 Theophylacti Historiae VII 7,8–9 (Hephthalites and Avars), VII 7,13 (Oghur) and VII 8–11 (civil war). For historical interpretations of the external victories see Haussig, “Theophylaktos Exkurs” (as n. 52), pp. 325–338, 344–345. Turum is identified with qaghan Dulan (588–599) of the Eastern Türk by both Harmatta, “The Letter” (as n. 53), p. 115 and de la Vaissière, “Maurice” (as n. 54), p. 223, independently.

59 Haussig, “Theophylaktos Exkurs” (as n. 52), pp. 372–373, has made an important distinction between the external victories as representatives of the conquest of the four parts of the world (thus reflecting not necessarily personal victories of this qaghan, but of the Türk in general) and the recent defeat of the rebel as actual cause. Cf. Harmatta, “The Letter” (as n. 53), p. 111, who furthermore reckons the letter among the “literary genre” of triumphal reports familiar in the Near Eastern world. For the historical background of Nili’s victory see de la Vaissière, “Maurice” (as n. 54), pp. 222–224, for Tardu’s battles see Haussig, “Theophylaktos Exkurs” (as n. 52), pp. 372–386; Harmatta, “The Letter”, pp. 115–118.

60 Cf. Theophylacti Historiae VII 9,1, p. 260, ll. 25–29: *ὁ μὲν οὖν τῶν Τούρκων Χαγάνος τὸν ἐμφύλιον καταλυσάμενος πόλεμον εὐδαιμόνως ἐχειραγῶγει τὰ πράγματα, ποιεῖται δὲ καὶ συνθήκας πρὸς τοὺς Ταυγάστ, ὅπως βαθειαν πάντοθεν τὴν γαλήνην ἐμπορευόμενος ἀστασίαστον τὴν ἀρχὴν καταστήσῃται.*

the sender of this letter exercised monarchical power over the Türk, but such a conclusion is immediately contradicted by the mention of three further Great Qaghans who had helped the sender to obtain his victory. Their names are given, but unfortunately, there is no hint to their hierarchical position or place of residence.⁶¹ Nevertheless, Theophylaktos displays – like Menander – a vivid interest in the political structures of the Türk Empire and a certain appreciation for its rulers who were located far away from the actual Byzantine zone of influence.

Instead, the person usually alluded to by the title “qaghan” in the “Histories” is the ruler of the Avars, but Theophylaktos follows the Türk interpretation about their unlawful, usurped claim to the qaghanal title and the arrogation of the Avar name by some tribes among the Uar and Chunni on their flight to the west.⁶² The Avars’ nearly permanent confrontation with the Roman Empire is outlined in a long series of episodes, among them the legation of the physician Theodoros to the Avars who warned the qaghan not to push his military luck, referring to the classical tale about pharaoh Sesostris and the wheel.⁶³ Theodoros thus manages to tame the ambitions of a ruler who is depicted as the prototype of a barbarian. In another situation, however, he is praised as an example of humanity when supplying the starving Roman army near Tomis with plenty of provisions for the Easter Days of 598.⁶⁴ Instead, it is the Roman emperor Maurikios whom the chronicler

61 Ibid., VII 8,9, p. 259, ll. 21–23: *πρεσβεύεται ὁ Χαγάνος πρὸς ἑτέρους τρεῖς μεγάλους Χαγάνους· ταῦτα δὲ τούτοις ὀνόματα, Σπαρζενγοῦν καὶ Κουναζολάν καὶ Τουλδίχ.* Tuldich is identified with the Eastern qaghan Duli (599–608) by de la Vaissière, “Maurice” (as n. 54), p. 223; for further proposals of identification see Haussig, “Theophylakts Exkurs” (as n. 52), pp. 376–378 and Harmatta, “The Letter”, pp. 115–116, proposing two great grandsons of Tardu’s as his allies which obviously causes chronological difficulties.

62 Theophylacti Historia VII 8,1–6, pp. 258–259: Theophylaktos states that the Avars should rightly be called Pseudavars: *οἱ Ψευδάβαροι (λέγειν γὰρ οὕτως αὐτοὺς οἰκειότερον).* For a critical analysis of this myth about the origin of the European Avars see Pohl, *Die Awaren* (as n. 15), pp. 28–37; Haussig, “Theophylakts Exkurs” (as n. 52), pp. 345–371.

63 Theophylacti Historia VI 11, pp. 242–244.

64 Ibid., VII 13, 3–5, pp. 267, leading to the conclusion: *διὰ τοῦτο μέχρι τῶν χρόνων τῶν καθ’ ἡμᾶς τῶν παραδοξολογουμένων τὰ τῆς βαρβαρικῆς φιλανθρωπίας ταύτης καθέστηκεν.* Cf. Pohl, *Die Awaren* (as n. 15), pp. 152–153.

Theophanes holds responsible for the horrible fate of Roman captives after the combats at Drizipera: they were massacred because the avaricious emperor did not pay the ransom demanded by the qaghan.⁶⁵ Such episodes have repeatedly been cited by later Byzantine authors: Ioannes Tzetzes refers to the Theodoros-story in his monumental, but rather eclectic “Historiai”⁶⁶ and Michael Psellos recounts the ransom-story in his “Short History” (*Historia Syntomos*).⁶⁷ For Tzetzes the barbarian ruler is just “the qaghan”, and Psellos seems to believe that this was a military leader. It is perhaps revealing that the “Suda Encyclopedia”, compiled in the 10th century, cites episodes from Theophylaktos involving *the chaganos* in several lemmata, but under the lemma “*chaganos*” itself, this opus magnum of Byzantine scholarship fails to give a definition, and we only read: “this one was ...”⁶⁸

In Theophylaktos’ account the term *chaganos* is frequently used thanks to the fact that the Avar ruler is never called by his personal name. This is likewise the case in the so-called “Easter Chronicle” compiled probably still during the reign of emperor Herakleios (610–641). This work does not contain information on the Türk of Central Asia, but the Avar qaghan appears prominently, especially in the account on the siege laid to Constantinople in 626 by the allied Persian and Avar forces.⁶⁹ Portrayed as archenemy of

65 De Boor, Carolus (ed.): *Theophanis Chronographia*, vol. 1. Teubner: Leipzig 1883, AM 6092, pp. 279–280; see also Schreiner, Peter (ed.): *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken*, vol. 1: *Einleitung und Text*. (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 12/1). Verlag der ÖAW: Vienna 1975, Chronicle 1, nr. 13, pp. 43–44. The qaghan is characterized as enraged, but not as a cruel barbarian in this context.

66 Leone, Petrus Aloysius (ed.): *Ioannis Tzetzae Historiae*. Libr. Scientifica Ed.: Naples 1968, ch. III 240, p. 93 and IV 573, p. 149 – both verses also contain the word *Chaganos*.

67 Aerts, Willem J. (ed.): *Michael Psellos, Historia syntomos*. (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 30). De Gruyter: Berlin / New York 1990, ch. 74, p. 60: τῷ ἀρχηγῷ τοῦ βαρβαρικοῦ στρατοπέδου (Χαγάνος δὲ ὁ γενναιότατος ἦν).

68 Adler, Ada (ed.): *Suidae Lexicon*, vol. 4. Reprint Teubner: Stuttgart 1971, lemma X. 2/3, p. 779: Χαγάνος· οὗτος ἦν ... A second entry simply quotes a passage on the Avar qaghan from Theophylaktos I 3,13–4,1, p. 46, without any attempt to define the title: ὁ δὲ Χαγάνος τοὺς ὄρκους ταῖς αὔραις φέρειν ἐδίδο ἀθρόον τε τὴν πολέμῳ φίλην ἀράμενος σάλπιγγα τὰς δυνάμεις ἤθροϊζε.

69 For the history of the siege see Pohl, *Die Awaren* (as n. 15), pp. 248–255; Stratos, Andreas N.: *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, vol. 1: 602–634. Hakkert: Amsterdam 1968, pp. 173–196; Howard-Johnston, James D.: “The Siege of

the Romans, the Avar ruler is often endowed with insulting attributes, such as goddess (*ἄθεος*) or accursed (*ἐπικατάρατος*),⁷⁰ but he finally bears witness to the divine protection of the city, since he himself sees a woman – the Theotokos – appearing on the walls.⁷¹ With this crucial event the Avar qaghans practically disappear from the Byzantine sources. There is a last reference to them in the report on the year 677 (AM 6169) in Theophanes’ “Chronographia”: after the conclusion of a peace treaty with the Arabs, the *basileus* received a number of ambassadors from other rulers, who requested the confirmation of peace and friendship. These legates came from the various inhabitants of the West, from the kings, exarchs and *gastaldi*. But at the head of the enumeration we find the Avar qaghan,⁷² who is thus

Constantinople in 626”. In: Mango, Cyril / Dagron, Gilbert (eds.): *Constantinople and its Hinterland*. Ashgate: Aldershot 1995, pp. 131–142; Kaegi, Walter: *Heraclius – Emperor of Byzantium*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2003, pp. 132–141; Szádeczky-Kardoss, Samu: “Persisch-awarische Beziehungen und Zusammenwirken vor und während der Belagerung von Byzanz im Jahre 626”. In: Bálint, Csanád (ed.): *Kontakte zwischen Iran, Byzanz und der Steppe im 6.-7. Jahrhundert*. Academia Sc. Hung.: Budapest 2000, pp. 313–322; Hurbanič, Martin: *Posledná vojna antiky. Avarský útok na Konštantínopol roku 626 v historických súvislostiach*. Vydateľstvo Michala Vaška: Prešov 2009.

- 70 Cf. Dindorf, Ludwig A. (ed.): *Chronicon Paschale*. (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae), vol. 1. Weber: Bonn 1832, p. 724, ll. 1, 17 etc. The qaghan is even more drastically stylised as a cruel barbarian tyrant in a homily on the siege: Makk, Ferenc: *Traduction et commentaire de l’homélie écrite probablement par Théodore le Syncelle sur le siège de Constantinople en 626*. Universitas Attila József: Szeged 1975, ch. 8, p. 13 (transl.) and p. 76 (text from the Edition by L. Sternbach, *Analecta Avarica*): Ὁ δὲ δυτικὸς ἐχθρὸς, τὸ μωσαρώτατον ἔκτρομα, ὃν Χαγάνον ἐπιχωρίως ὀνομάζουσι βάρβαροι.
- 71 *Chronicon Paschale*, p. 725, ll. 9–11: Καὶ τοῦτο δὲ ἔλεγεν ὁ ἄθεος Χαγάνος τῷ καιρῷ τοῦ πολέμου ὅτι ἐγὼ θεωρῶ γυναῖκα σεμινοφοροῦσαν περιτρέχουσαν εἰς τὸ τεῖχος μόνην οὔσαν. The intervention of the virgin is also the leading motif in Theodoros’ homily, who indirectly evokes the qaghan as a witness of the virgin’s deeds, see Makk, *Traduction* (as n. 70), ch. 34, p. 88 (text) and p. 32 (transl.). On liturgical repercussions of the virgin’s ‘intervention’ during the siege see Peltomaa, Leena Mari: “Role of the Virgin Mary at the Siege of Constantinople in 626”. *Scrinium. Revue de Patrologie* 5, 2009, pp. 294–309.
- 72 *Theophanis Chronographia* (as n. 65), AM 6169, p. 356: ταῦτα μαθόντες οἱ τὰ ἐσπέρια οἰκοῦντες μέρη, ὃ τε Χαγάνος τῶν Ἀβάρων καὶ οἱ ἐπέκεινα ῥήγες, ἔξαρχοι τε καὶ κάσταλδοι καὶ οἱ ἐξοχώτατοι τῶν πρὸς τὴν δύσιν ἐθνῶν, διὰ πρεσβευτῶν δῶρα τῷ βασιλεῖ στείλαντες εἰρηνικὴν πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἀγάπην κυρωθῆναι ἤτησαντο. Pohl, *Die*

perceived as the most eminent among the Western barbarians, but not as a truly imperial ruler.

Emperor Herakleios did not only inherit the confrontation with the Avars in the West from his predecessors, he also renewed the ‘alliance’ between the Romans and the Türk in the East.⁷³ Their mutual military cooperation during the emperor’s long campaign against the Persians is first mentioned under the year 625 (AM 6117)⁷⁴ when Theophanes states that the “Turks from the east called *Chazareis*”⁷⁵ invaded the Persian lands from the North through the Caspian Gates. Their leader Ziebel is char-

Awaren (as n. 15), p. 278, interprets this as an evidence for changing political conditions in the Danube-Adriatic area and the emergence of new political players there, but it is perhaps more probable that the whole ‘West’ of Europe, including Italy and beyond, is meant.

- 73 The famous passage of the so-called Fredegar on the opening of the Caspian Gates by Herakleios, though linked to the emergence of Arab power, is certainly a repercussion of this alliance: Esders, Stefan: “Herakleios, Dagobert und die “beschnittenen Völker”. Die Umwälzungen des Mittelmeerraums im 7. Jahrhundert in der Chronik des sog. Fredegar”. In: Goltz, Andreas / Leppin, Hartmut / Schlange-Schöningen, Heinrich (eds.): *Jenseits der Grenzen. Beiträge zur spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Geschichtsschreibung*. (Millennium-Studien 25). De Gruyter: Berlin / New York 2009, pp. 239–311, here pp. 285–287. Haussig, “Byzantinische Quellen” (as n. 36), pp. 58–59 argues that the Türks’ fear of an Avar empire in the steppe was the driving force behind the alliance.
- 74 Theophanes’ chronology for Herakleios’ campaign, which lasted from 624 to 628 (death of Chosrau II), is notoriously misleading, see Zuckerman, Constantine: “Heraclius in 625”. *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 60, 2002, pp. 189–197. Zuckerman establishes a revised chronology, showing that the events mentioned under AM 6115 and 6116 in fact both belong to the spring of 625, while most of those under AM 6117 should be placed in 626, among them also the first contact between Herakleios and the Türk, but not their concerted campaign.
- 75 *Theophanis Chronographia* (as n. 65), AM 6117, p. 315, ll. 15–16: τὸς Τούρκους ἐκ τῆς ἑσῆας, οὗς Χάζαρεις ὀνομάζουσιν, εἰς συμμαχίαν προσεκαλέεσται. The “Turks from the East”, however, need not be “eastern Turks” as rendered in Mango, Cyril / Scott, Roger (transl.): *Theophanes Confessor, The Chronicle*. Clarendon Press: Oxford 1997, p. 446. The anachronistic identification of the Türk with the Khazars has widely been accepted in earlier research, see Zuckerman, Constantine: “The Khazars and Byzantium – The First Encounter”. In: *The World of the Khazars* (as n. 17), pp. 399–432, here p. 403. Inversely, some later entries of the “Chronographia” use the term *Τούρκοι* obviously for the Khazars, see Balogh, László: “Notes on the Western Turks in the Work of Theophanes Confessor”.

acterized as second in dignity after the qaghan.⁷⁶ He has now convincingly been identified with Sipi, the “*xiao kehan*” (little qaghan), who later in 628 killed the *yabghu qaghan* Tong (in 628) and was himself ousted in 629 and killed in 630.⁷⁷ Theophanes gives a rather detailed report on Ziebel’s meeting with the *basileus*: while the Türk leader did obeisance to Herakleios, his whole army stretched on the ground to honour the emperor,⁷⁸ Ziebel presented his son to him and enjoyed the conversation.⁷⁹ The patriarch Nikephoros basically refers to the same events in his “Short History”, but he does not identify these Turks with the Khazars nor does he give the name of their lord (τὸν *Τούρκων κύριον*).⁸⁰ Nevertheless, his independent report on the meeting is more detailed than that of Theophanes. Nikephoros tells us that the emperor, having received the extremely great honour (τὸ *ὑπερβάλλον τῆς τιμῆς*) of the prostration of the entire Türk army,⁸¹ responded by similar gestures: he called Ziebel his son, crowned him with his own crown (*στέφανος*), presented him with rich gifts after a banquet, among them an imperial garment (*στολῆ βασιλικῆ*),⁸² and finally

Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae 58, 2005, pp. 187–195, here pp. 190–193.

76 Theophanis Chronographia, p. 316, ll. 2–3: *σὺν τῷ ἑαυτῶν στρατηγῷ Ζιέβηλ, δευτέρῳ ὄντι τοῦ Χαγάνου τῆ ἀξία.*

77 De la Vaissière, Étienne: “Ziebel qaghan identified”. In: Zuckerman, Constantine (ed.): *Constructing the Seventh Century*. (Travaux et mémoires 17). Association des Amis du Centre d’Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance: Paris 2013, pp. 761–768.

78 Theophanis Chronographia, AM 6117, p. 316, ll. 5–11, esp. ll. 8–10: *πᾶς δὲ ὁ λαὸς τῶν Τούρκων εἰς γῆν πεσόντες πρηνεῖς, ἐκταθέντες ἐπὶ στόμα τὸν βασιλέα ἐτίμων τιμὴν τὴν παρ’ ἔθνεισι ξένων.*

79 *Ibid.*, p. 316, ll. 11–13: *προσήνεγκε δὲ ὁ Ζιέβηλ καὶ τὸν ἑαυτοῦ υἱὸν ἀρχιγένειον τῷ βασιλεῖ, ἠδυνόμενος τοῖς τούτου λόγοις καὶ ἐκπλητόμενος τὴν τε θέαν καὶ τὴν φρόνησιν αὐτοῦ.*

80 Cf. Mango, Cyril (ed.): *Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople, Short History*. (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 13). Dumbarton Oaks Library: Washington 1990, ch. 12, p. 54, l. 17.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 54, ll. 20–24.

82 *Ibid.*, p. 54, l. 25–p. 55, l. 32. The crowning of the Türk commander with the *basileus*’ own crown is a rather singular gesture in Byzantium. The close parallels between this encounter and the meeting between Bolesław Chrobry and Otto III at Gniezno in 1000 according to the description given by the Gallus Anonymus in the early 12th century have already been recognized by Wasilews-

even promised his daughter Eudokia in marriage to him.⁸³ It is significant that Herakleios calls his daughter “Augusta of the Romans” (*Ρωμαίων Αβγούστα*), since Eudokia indeed bore this official title. She appeared on Byzantine coins together with her father and the co-emperor Herakleios the Younger, and her bust was only removed from the coins in 629 when Eudokia received her father’s order to depart from Constantinople and join her husband. The marriage project was, however, never actually put into effect due to Ziebel’s assassination.⁸⁴ Theophanes perhaps deliberately omitted all these features of Roman-barbarian relations from his report on the events – the difference between his version, which shows the

ki, Tadeusz: “Bizantyńska symbolika zjazdu gnieźnieńskiego i jego prawno-polityczna wymowa”. *Przegląd Historyczny* 57, 1966, pp. 1–14. Influenced by Dölger’s theory, however, Wasilewski interpreted Nikephoros’ account as the official incorporation of a barbarian ruler into the Byzantine “family of kings” as “son of the emperor” (pp. 7–8). In his view, the similarities thus result from a deliberate imitation of Byzantine ceremonial (by the semi-Byzantine Otto III) in a Middle-European context (p. 11), and the Gniezno events should be seen as Bolesław’s reception into the Ottonian “family of kings” on the highest rank as the emperor’s brother (“do godności braterskiej”, p. 12), but not as an actual coronation. Wasilewski’s interpretation has found a positive echo from numerous scholars, cf. Labuda, Gerard: “Der “Akt von Gnesen” vom Jahre 1000. Bericht über die Forschungsvorhaben und -ergebnisse”. *Quaestiones Mediaevi Novae* 5, 2000, pp. 145–188, here pp. 151–152 and (though slightly distorted) Wyrozumski, Jerzy: “Der Akt von Gnesen und seine Bedeutung für die polnische Geschichte”. In: Borgolte, Michael (ed.): *Polen und Deutschland vor 1000 Jahren. Die Berliner Tagung über den “Akt von Gnesen”*. (Europa im Mittelalter 5). Akademie Verlag: Berlin 2002, pp. 281–291, here pp. 288–289. As far as I see, however, this idea has not been developed further in the intensive debate about the meaning of Bolesław’s “coronation”, see Strzelczyk, Jerzy: *Zjazd gnieźnieński*. Wydawnictwo WBP: Poznań 2000, esp. pp. 47–61. Nevertheless, the theory should be reviewed because it is based on problematic assumptions about the “reality” of a construction like the “family of kings”, which certainly has nothing to do with what happened in the Caucasus in 627. For very helpful advice on this scholarly debate, I wish to thank Sven Jaros, Leipzig.

83 Nikephoros, *Short History* (as n. 80), ch. 12, p. 56, ll. 32–40, cf. Claude, “Begründung familiärer Beziehungen” (as n. 35), pp. 26–27.

84 See Zuckerman, Constantin: “La petite Augusta et le turc. Epiphania-Eudocie sur les monnaies d’Héraclius”. *Revue Numismatique* 150, 1995, pp. 113–126; Id.: “Au sujet de la petite Augusta sur les monnaies d’Héraclius”. *Revue Numismatique* 152, 1997, pp. 473–478.

Türk humbly obedient towards the emperor, and that of Nikephoros, who emphasizes symbolic elements of reciprocity in Byzantine-Türk relations, is too significant to be merely accidental.

The identification of the Turkic forces with the Khazars, though undoubtedly anachronistic, is not only found in Theophanes' "Chronography", but also in the "History of the Caucasian Albanians", compiled some centuries later by the Armenian chronicler Movsēs Dasxuranc'i.⁸⁵ Dasxuranc'i based these parts of his account on two sources. One of them is a rather contemporary report on the deeds of the Albanian *katholikos* Viroy, which denigrates the invaders and their atrocities, but actually does not call them Khazars.⁸⁶ This account also mentions the genesis of the Roman-Turkic alliance in the war against the Persians via a Roman embassy sent to Ĵebu Xak'an (i.e. the *yabghu qaghan*),⁸⁷ which established a treaty. This finally led to the campaign of the Türk army under the command of the *šat'*, the nephew of the "king of the north",⁸⁸ who is characterized as an imperial ruler of universal ambition.⁸⁹ Dasxuranc'i's

85 Dowsett, Charles J. F. (transl.): *The History of the Caucasian Albanians by Movsēs Dasxuranci*. Oxford University Press: London et al. 1961.

86 For the structure of the report see Zuckerman, "The Khazars and Byzantium" (as n. 75), pp. 404–410: the chapters II 12–16 belong to the report on Viroy; most notably his leading role in a large Albanian delegation to the Türk *šat'* that obtained the restoration of peace from this ruler, cf. Dasxuranci, *The History* (as n. 85), ch. II 14, pp. 92–102 (all this happens after the death of Chosrau). Zuckerman, pp. 410–412, shows that the invaders are not identified as Khazars, but as "Turks" in this source.

87 Dasxuranci, *The History* (as n. 85), ch. II 12, p. 87. The *yabghu* is characterized as "viceroy of the king of the north who was second to him in kingship". The "king of the north" is therefore identified with the Qaghan of the Eastern Türks, who does not actually enter the scene. The Roman embassy is dated to 625 by Zuckerman, "The Khazars and Byzantium" (as n. 75), pp. 412–414.

88 Dasxuranci, *The History* (as n. 85), ch. II 12, pp. 87–88. Although this campaign is dated to the "beginning of the thirty-seventh year [of Xosrov]", i.e. summer 626, it obviously belongs to 627 as an immediate prelude to the fall of Chosrau: see Zuckerman, "The Khazars and Byzantium" (as n. 75), p. 415.

89 Dasxuranci, *The History* (as n. 85), p. 88, in a message of this "king of the north" to Chosrau: "the king of the north, the lord of the whole world, your king and the king of kings, says to you: [...]". Chosrau directs his answer to "my brother Xak'an" whom he reminds of the long tradition of mutual respect and

second source only shortly mentions this first Northern invasion (“in great hordes the Khazars”)⁹⁰ and dates the second one, led by Ĵebu Xak’an himself, to the year of Chosrau’s end. During this campaign the Roman and the Türk rulers met outside the walls of the besieged town of Tiflis, but did not succeed to conquer the city and were instead mocked by its inhabitants.⁹¹ The Türk took their revenge in the following year,⁹² but their invasion likewise came to an end: after another victory over a Persian army in 629, terrible news arrived from Ĵebu Xak’an himself who had overdrawn his fortune.⁹³ This apparently caused the invaders to withdraw from the Caucasian region.

The direct cooperation between Herakleios and the *yabghu qaghan* thus remained an episode, but since this episode concerned a relationship between the *basileus* and a nomadic ruler of imperial position, it could later easily be projected onto the Khazars as the new imperial factor in the Western steppe.

alliances sealed by intermarriage: “for we were allied with each other through our sons and daughters”.

- 90 According to Zuckerman, “The Khazars and Byzantium” (as n. 75), pp. 407–410, this source comprises the chapters II 9–11 and can be identified as the initial part of the Eulogy of prince Juanšer of Albania continued from ch. II 18 onwards. The first Khazar attack is mentioned at the beginning of ch. II 11, pp. 81–82.
- 91 See Dasxuranci, *The History* (as n. 85), ch. II 11, pp. 83–86. The report ends with their withdrawal from Tiflis. The scene of mockery conveys some physical features of Ĵebu Xak’an: his typical facial features, accentuated by the pumpkin caricature, were missing eyelashes and beard and a paltry moustache – perhaps a striking contrast to Herakleios with his impressive beard emphasized on the coins.
- 92 In contrast to Zuckerman’s reconstruction, two sieges of Tiflis should clearly be distinguished, as has correctly been seen by Ludwig, Dieter: *Struktur und Gesellschaft des Chazaren-Reiches im Licht der schriftlichen Quellen*. University of Münster, thesis 1982, pp. 121–122: one in 627 that failed after the mockery and caused a temporary retreat of the Turks while Herakleios proceeded to Mesopotamia alone (all this is described in II 11, pp. 85–86), and another in 628 (or 629), which led to the fall of the city on the hands of the Turks (described in II 14, pp. 94–95, after the end of Chosrau). Theophanes is thus perfectly justified in likewise mentioning the Türks’ retreat before the actual Persian campaign in winter 627/8 (contra Zuckerman, p. 416). There is no reason to believe that the Türk army accompanied Herakleios to Persia in the decisive months.
- 93 On the last battle between Türk (“Khazar”) and Persian troops see Dasxuranci, *The History* (as n. 85), ch. II 16, p. 105; the news from the *yabghu* are mentioned *ibid.*, p. 106.

Their polity actually took shape only in the second half of the 7th century⁹⁴ at the expense of Kuvrat's extensive but shortlived "Great Bulgaria"⁹⁵ in the Ponto-Caucasian area and after the collapse of the Western Türk qaghanate, which had succumbed to the imperial Tang in 659.⁹⁶ From that time onwards both Khazars and Bulgars became the principal political protagonists among the Northern peoples in contact with Byzantium for several centuries.

In contrast to the Avar rulers of the 6th and early 7th centuries, Khazar qaghans are rarely mentioned in Byzantine chronicles, but they also usually remain unnamed.⁹⁷ The two most prominent situations concern the adven-

94 Zuckerman, "The Khazars and Byzantium" (as n. 75), pp. 417–431. The first Khazar expedition to Caucasia is dated to 685. In fact, the (ethnic as well as political) origins of the Khazar polity have been the subject of long debates, cf. Golden, "Khazar Studies" (as n. 17), pp. 52–55; see also Ludwig, *Struktur und Gesellschaft* (as n. 92), pp. 24–68 and 134–142; Romašov, Sergej A.: "Ot tjurkov k chazarom: Severnyj Kavkaz v VI–VII vv.". In: *Tjurkskie narody v drevnosti i srednevekove*. (Tjurkologičeskij Sbornik 2003/4). Izdat. RAN: Moskva 2005, pp. 185–202, here pp. 195–198.

95 For Kuvrat's Bulgar polity see Beševliev, Veselin: *Die protobulgarische Periode der bulgarischen Geschichte*. Hakkert: Amsterdam 1981, pp. 145–155; Ziemann, Daniel: *Vom Wandervolk zur Großmacht. Die Entstehung Bulgariens im frühen Mittelalter (7.-9. Jahrhundert)*. Böhlau: Cologne / Weimar / Vienna 2007, pp. 142–160; András Róna-Tas: "Where was Khuvrat's Bulgharia?". *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 53, 2000, pp. 1–22. The main sources are Nikephoros, *Short History* (as n. 80), ch. 35, pp. 86–88 and *Theophanis Chronographia* (as n. 65), AM 6171, pp. 356–359. Kuvrat is called κύριος [...] τῶν φύλων τούτων (Nikephoros, p. 88, l. 7) or τοῦ κυροῦ τῆς λεχθείσης Βουλγαρίας (Theophanes, p. 357, ll. 12–13) respectively.

96 Cf. Chavannes, Edouard: *Documents sur les Tou-Kiue (Turcs) Occidentaux*. Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient: Paris 1900, pp. 63–67, 267–268; Scharlipp, *Die frühen Türken* (as n. 13), p. 29, Golden, *Introduction* (as n. 9), p. 136.

97 The *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit. 1. Abteilung (641–867)*. De Gruyter: Berlin 2000/1 contains six qaghans of the Khazars. There are four *anonymi* among them: see vol. 5, #11103, p. 428 (the qaghan of the "Life of John of Gotthia"), #11187, p. 452 (a qaghan mentioned in "De administrando imperio"), #11573, p. 547 (the qaghan ruling in the 830s, demanding Byzantine help to build the fortress of Sarkel) and #12023, p. 658 (the qaghan of the "Vita Constantini"). The names of the two others depend on quite uncertain, non-historiographical sources: Theodoros or Virchor for the father-in-law of Emperor Constantine V (vol. 4, #7524, pp. 411–412) and Ibuzēros Gliabanos for that of Justinian II (vol. 2, #2654, p. 162).

tures of Justinian II after his deposition in 695, when he fled to the Khazar territory and was married to a daughter of the qaghan,⁹⁸ and the marriage of Constantine V to another Khazar bride.⁹⁹ Referring to these events, the patriarch Nikephoros uses a changing terminology with respect to the Khazar ruler, who is called *hēgemōn*, *archōn* or *kyrios*, but the author explains that the Khazars call their ruler *chaganos*.¹⁰⁰ Theophanes instead regularly employs the title *chaganos*, sometimes with an ethnic denomination (*tōn Chazarōn*).¹⁰¹ He furthermore uses the territorial denomination *Chazaria* rather frequently in the context of events belonging to the 8th century.¹⁰²

98 See Dunlop, Douglas M.: *The History of the Jewish Khazars*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ 1954, pp. 171–173; Artamonov, Michail I.: *Istoriija Chazar*. Izdatel'stvo G. Ermitaža: Leningrad 1962, pp. 196–197; Noonan, Thomas S.: “Byzantium and the Khazars: A Special Relationship?”. In: Shepard, Jonathan / Franklin, Simon (eds.): *Byzantine Diplomacy*. Ashgate: Aldershot 1992, pp. 109–132, here pp. 111–112; Howard-Johnston, James: “Byzantine Sources for Khazar History”. In: *The World of the Khazars* (as n. 17), pp. 163–193, here p. 168.

99 This second Byzantine-Khazar marriage has received little attention in Byzantine sources, perhaps due to their bias against the so-called iconoclast emperors. See Dunlop, *The History* (as n. 98), p. 177; Artamonov, *Istoriija* (as n. 98), p. 233; Noonan, “Byzantium and the Khazars” (as n. 98), p. 113.

100 Nikephoros, *Short History* (as n. 80), ch. 42, p. 100, ll. 8–9: αἰτεῖ δὲ τὸν τῶν Χαζάρων ἡγεμόνα (χαγάνους δὲ τούτους αὐτοὶ καλοῦσιν); *ibid.*, l. 14: τὸν τῶν Χαζάρων ἄρχοντα; ch. 45, p. 110, l. 48: τῷ χαγάνῳ; *ibid.*, l. 62: ὡς τὸν κύριον τῶν Χαζάρων; ch. 63, p. 130, ll. 1–2: ἐκπέμπει ὁ βασιλεὺς πρὸς τὸν τοῦ ἔθνους τῶν Χαζάρων ἡγούμενον (with reference to the marriage negotiations for Constantine V). In one case (ch. 45, p. 110, l. 67) the qaghan is simply called “the Khazar” (πρὸς τὸν Χάζαρον).

101 The title is repeatedly used in the long account of Justinian II's comeback and final downfall, see *Theophanis Chronographia* (as n. 65), AM 6196-AM 6203, pp. 372–380, and furthermore p. 407, l. 5; p. 426, l. 16 (both discussed in the following note). As far as I see, Theophanes does not substitute the title with other designations for rulers (as Nikephoros does), but when introducing the marriage of Constantine V he calls the qaghan “lord of the Scythians”, thus perhaps reflecting official terminology: AM 6224, p. 409, ll. 30–31: Τούτῳ τῷ ἔτει Λέων ὁ βασιλεὺς τὴν θυγατέρα Χαγάνου, τοῦ τῶν Σκυθῶν δυνάστου, τῷ νιῷ Κωνσταντίνῳ ἐννυμφεύσατο.

102 Cf. *Theophanis Chronographia*, p. 373, l. 14; 375, l. 21; p. 378, ll. 22–23 (ἀπέστειλαν πρὸς τὸν Χαγάνον εἰς Χαζαρίαν); p. 434, l. 16 (as a geographical area around the frozen Pontus). The perception of the qaghan as a territorial

It should be noted that the Latin equivalent of this term – together with the first Latin occurrence of “Bulgaria” – is already found in the “Life of Pope John VII” (705/707) in the “Liber Pontificalis” with regard to the exile of Justinian II.¹⁰³ Although this slight shift in terminology should not be overestimated, we might conclude that Khazar rulership was perceived with relation to a specific territorial circumscription (above all referring to the lands beyond the Pontos and close to Crimea) in Latin and Greek imagination, at least more so than other steppe empires before.¹⁰⁴ Due to the basically positive relations between Constantinople and the Khazars prevailing between the second half of the 7th and the middle of the 9th centuries (at least), the Khazar qaghans are not portrayed as prototypes of barbarian rulers in our sources as the Avar rulers were.¹⁰⁵ In contrast, they remain rather marginal and shadowy figures in the Byzantine texts.

ruler is especially clear when the son of the Khazar ruler, waging an expedition against the Arabs, is introduced as *ὁ υἱὸς Χαγάνου τοῦ δυνάστου Χαζαρίας* in the entry of AM 6220, p. 407, ll. 5–6. Under AM 6241, p. 426, l. 16, the bride of Constantine V is mentioned as *τῆς τοῦ Χαγάνου τῆς Χαζαρίας θυγατρὸς*. The territorial terminology is only once employed by Nikephoros, *Short History* (as n. 80), ch. 42, p. 104, l. 75.

- 103 Duchesne, Louis (ed.): *Le Liber Pontificalis*, vol. 1. Boccard: Paris 1886, p. 220: *Huius temporibus Iustinianus imperator a partibus Chazariae per loca Vulgariae cum Terveli usque ad regiam urbem veniens*.
- 104 The difference is most notable with respect to the Avars, whose polity is only twice called *Ἀβαρία*, namely in *Theophanis Chronographia* (as n. 65), p. 357, l. 24 and 359, l. 16 (in his digression on the early Bulgars), cf. Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica II* (as n. 3), p. 51. The frequency of *Τουρκία* for the territory of either the Turks or the Khazars in Byzantine sources is likewise minimal, see *ibid.*, p. 320. For the more common use of *Βουλγαρία* see also Gjuzelev, Vassil: “Les appellations de la Bulgarie médiévale dans les sources historiques (VII^e-XV^e s.)”. In: *Id.: Medieval Bulgaria – Byzantine Empire – Black Sea – Venice – Genoa*, Baier: Villach 1988, pp. 5–9, here pp. 5–6.
- 105 A certain exception is the negative depiction of the *Chaganos* in the “Life of bishop John of Gothia”; significantly, however, the author cannot portray him stereotypically as a persecutor of the Christian faith. In fact, the qaghan only punishes those who are unwilling to accept his rule, among them the bishop (§ 4). Nevertheless the qaghan is accused of putting innocent people to death (§ 4) and John calls him “my persecutor” (*τοῦ διώκτου μου*, § 5), see Auzépy, Marie-France: “La vie de Jean de Gothie (BHG 891)”. In: Zuckerman, Constantin (ed.): *La Crimée entre Byzance et le Khaganat khazar*. Association des

Another episode relating to a Khazar ruler mentioned in Byzantine historiography once again reinforces the impression of a positive relationship between the two powers: the so-called “Theophanes continuatus” reports¹⁰⁶ that in 839¹⁰⁷ the qaghan of the Khazars and the Pech sent an embassy to the emperor Theophilus.¹⁰⁸ They asked for Byzantine help in the construction of the fortress Sarkel on the river Don in order to secure the Khazar territories against the Pechenegs. The emperor granted the request and sent the *spatharokandidatos* Petronas Kamateros to the Khazars who duly put the work into effect and later (in 841) became *strategos* of the newly established *thema* of Cherson.¹⁰⁹ This same contact is also mentioned in Constantine VII’s famous treatise misnamed “De administrando imperio”¹¹⁰ and in the chronicle of John Skylitzes from the second half of the 11th century, who attributes the legation uniquely to the *chaganos Chazarias*.¹¹¹ Skylitzes thus fails to transmit the most interesting point, namely that a second

Amis du Centre d’Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance: Paris 2006, pp. 69–85, here pp. 81–83.

- 106 Theophanes Continuatus III 28. In: Bekker, Immanuel (ed.): *Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister, Georgius Monachus*. (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae). Weber: Bonn 1838, pp. 122–123.
- 107 The date of this mission is not explicitly given in any source; but see the excellent discussion by Zuckerman, Constantine: “Two Notes on the Early History of the *thema* of Cherson”. *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 21, 1997, pp. 210–222. For the event see also Artamonov, *Istoriija* (as n. 98), p. 298 within a chapter dedicated to the archaeological site of Sarkel (pp. 288–323); Dunlop, *The History* (as n. 98), pp. 186–187; Howard-Johnston, “Byzantine Sources” (as n. 98), pp. 169, 174–175.
- 108 *Theophanes Continuatus* (as n. 106), p. 122, ll. 19–20: ὁ τε χαγάνος Χαζαρίας καὶ ὁ Πέχ πρὸς τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Θεόφιλον ἐπεμπον πρεσβευτάς.
- 109 Cf. Zuckerman, “Two Notes” (as n. 107), pp. 214–215.
- 110 Gyula Moravcsik / Jenkins, Romilly J. (eds.): *Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De administrando imperio*. Revised edition. (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 1). Dumbarton Oaks Library: Washington 1967, ch. 42, p. 182, ll. 27–29: Ὁ γὰρ χαγάνος ἐκεῖνος καὶ ὁ πέχ Χαζαρίας εἰς τὸν αὐτὸν βασιλέα Θεόφιλον πρέσβεις ἐναποστείλαντες, κτισθῆναι αὐτοῖς τὸ κάστρον τὸ Σάρκελ ἤτησαντο. The attribution of *Chazararia* to the *beg* might indicate that Constantine VII was aware of the change of actual rulership among the Khazars.
- 111 Thurn, Johannes (ed.): *Ioannes Skylitzes, Synopsis Historiarum*. (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 5). De Gruyter: Berlin / New York 1973, emperor Theophilus, ch. 22, p. 73, ll. 78–79: ὑποστρέψας δὲ ὁ Θεόφιλος πρεσβεΐαν

ruler, called *beg*, acted together with the qaghan. The Sarkel-story indirectly reflects a fundamental but still somewhat obscure “constitutional change” in the Khazar polity, i.e. the establishment of a dual monarchy comprising the *beg* as actual political and military leader, whom Arab sources of the 10th century identify as king (*malik*), and the qaghan who retained his supreme sacral¹¹² authority, but ultimately lost his political role and seems to have been strictly secluded in his palace.¹¹³ It seems that this was not yet the case in the late 830s, when the qaghan still played a role in political affairs: the Sarkel-story thus probably gives a *terminus post quem*. Nevertheless, there is no explicit repercussion of the political transformation in the Byzantine sources at all. Instead, they suggest a long-term continuity of traditional political structures among the Khazars: it is in the qaghan’s presence that Konstantinos the philosopher took part in the debate with representatives of the Jewish and Muslim faiths in 861, which is broadly described in his *Vita*.¹¹⁴ According to “De administrando imperio”, the

ἐδέξατο τοῦ χαγάνου Χαζαρίας ἐξαιτουμένον κτισθῆναι τὸ Σάρκελ ὀνομαζόμενον προύριον.

- 112 However, the process should not be understood as a secondary sacralization of the qaghanal position compensating the loss of effective power. The characteristics of qaghanal sacrality, as described above all in Muslim sources, were clearly inherited from the Türk qaghans of the Ashina clan and the adherence to Judaism could hardly be reconciled with the sacralization of a human, see Golden, Peter B.: “The Khazar Sacral Kingship”. In: Reyerson, Kathryn L. et al. (eds.): *Pre-Modern Russia and its World. Essays in Honor of Thomas S. Noonan*. Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden 2006, pp. 79–102 with further literature; Petrukhin, Vladimir Ya.: “A Note on the Sacral Status of the Khazarian Khagan: Tradition and Reality”. In: al-Azmeh, Aziz / Bak, János M. (eds.): *Monotheistic Kingship. The Medieval Variants*. CEUP: Budapest 2004, pp. 269–275.
- 113 For an overview of the Muslim sources of the 10th century describing this powerless, but still venerated position of the qaghan in contrast to the king (*malik*, *beg* or *īša*) as actual ruler, see Dunlop, *The History* (as n. 98), pp. 89–115 and 204–214.
- 114 Cf. inter alia Dvornik, Francis: *Byzantine Missions among the Slavs. SS. Constantine-Cyril and Methodius*. Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, NJ 1970, pp. 65–70 and Ziffer, Giorgio: “Konstantin und die Chazaren”. *Welt der Slaven* 34, 1989, pp. 354–361, who also discusses the difficulties caused by the late manuscript tradition of this Slavic source. Pritsak, Omeljan: “Turkological Remarks on Constantine’s Khazarian Mission in the *Vita Con-*

Khazar qaghan intervened repeatedly in the affairs of the Magyars in the later 9th century.¹¹⁵ And Chapter II 48 of the famous “Book of Ceremonies”, likewise attributed to Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos and compiled in the middle of the 10th century,¹¹⁶ only names the *chaganos Chazarias* (but no king or *beg*) among the foreign rulers who receive imperial letters. He is honourably addressed, though with a markedly Christian invocation, and the letter should be sealed with a golden trisoldia bull.¹¹⁷ The qaghan is thus

stantini”. In: Farrugia, Edward G. et al. (eds.): *Christianity among the Slavs – The Heritage of Saints Cyril and Methodius*. (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 231). Pontif. Inst. Studiorum Orientalium: Rome 1988, pp. 295–298 plainly dismissed the historical reliability of the *Vita* concerning *Khazaria* as the work of an uninformed author – this is probably a too simple way to cope with the contradictions between the *Vita* and other sources.

- 115 See *De administrando imperio* (as n. 110), ch. 38, pp. 170–174. There are several references to *Khazaria* and the Khazars within this account on the “genealogy” of the *ethnos* of the *Τούρκοι*, i.e. the Magyars. The Khazar ruler is termed *ὁ χαγάνος ἄρχων Χαζαρίας* (p. 170, l. 15; p. 172, l. 32, reduced to *chaganos (Chazarias)* only *ibid.*, ll. 34, 36, 39, 46). This combination of *chaganos* and *archōn* might imply some uncertainty about the existence of still another ruler with the Khazars. But the qaghan is shown as the authority whose decision initiates the “making” of an *archōn* (of the Turks), following the custom (*zakanon*) of the Khazars, see *ibid.*, p. 172, ll. 46–53. For Magyar-Khazar relations see inter alia Dunlop, *The History* (as n. 98), pp. 199–204; Róna-Tas, András: “The Khazars and the Magyars”. In: *The World of the Khazars* (as n. 17), pp. 269–278.
- 116 The history of the work and its manuscripts has recently become the object of intensive research, cf. inter alia Kresten, Otto: “*Staatsempfänge*” im *Kaiserpalast von Konstantinopel um die Mitte des 10. Jahrhunderts*. *Beobachtungen zu Kapitel II 15 des sogenannten “Zeremonienbuches”*. Verlag der ÖAW: Vienna 2000; Featherstone, Michael J.: “Preliminary Remarks on the Leipzig Manuscript of *De Cerimoniis*”. *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 95, 2002, pp. 457–480; Id. / Grusková, Jana / Kresten, Otto: “Studien zu den Palimpsestfragmenten des sogenannten “Zeremonienbuches” 1: Prolegomena”. *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 98, 2005, pp. 423–430.
- 117 Reiske, Johann Jacob (ed.): *Constantini Porphyrogeniti De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae libri II*. (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae). Weber: Bonn 1829, ch. II 48, p. 690: *εἰς τὸν χαγάνον Χαζαρίας βούλλα χρυσοῦ τρισολδία*. “*ἐν ὀνόματι τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, τοῦ ἐνὸς καὶ μόνου ἀληθινοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν. Κωνσταντῖνος καὶ Ῥωμανὸς, πιστοὶ ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ Θεῷ βασιλεῖς Ῥωμαίων πρὸς τὸν ὁ δεῖνα εὐγενέστατον, περιφανέστατον χαγάνον Χαζαρίας*”.

ranked at the same level as the king of Armenia, slightly below the caliph,¹¹⁸ but quite above the subsequently mentioned *archontes* of Rhosia and of the Pechenegs. The title *basileus* is only accorded to the Bulgarian ruler.¹¹⁹

Byzantine sources also fail to reflect the second major transformation in Khazar history: the conversion of the Khazars, or at least their political elite, to Judaism. The reconstruction and dating of this process is a particularly difficult problem in Khazar studies due to the either allusive or legendary character of the sources available,¹²⁰ but it seems fairly established that the religious transformation was actively promoted by the emerging dynasty of the *begs* and thus intimately linked to the constitutional change that ousted the qaghan from power.¹²¹ While earlier studies on the question had

118 The Abbasid caliph (ἄμερμουμνης) is entitled to a golden bull of four soldia, see *ibid.*, p. 686; for the king (ἄρχων τῶν ἀρχόντων) of Great Armenia see *ibid.* It is remarkable that the letters to Muslim rulers seemingly do not contain the Christian *invocatio* mentioned for the Khazar qaghan nor the formula proclaiming that the Holy Trinity is the only true God. These elements are, e.g., also mentioned in letters sent to Carolingian and post-Carolingian kings (*ibid.*, p. 689), but in the Khazar context their use is quite provocative. For the addresses to Muslim rulers see Beihammer, Alexander: “Reiner christlicher König – ΠΙΣΤΟΣ ΕΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΩ ΤΩΙ ΘΕΩΙ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ. Eine Studie zur Transformation kanzleimäßigen Schriftguts in narrativen Texten am Beispiel kaiserlicher Auslandsbriefe des 10. Jahrhunderts an muslimische Destinatäre”. *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 95, 2002, pp. 1–34, here esp. pp. 21–22.

119 The *archontes* of the Rus’ (Ρωσίας), of the Magyars (τῶν Τούρκων) and of the Pechenegs (τῶν Πατζινακίτων) are only entitled to bulls of two soldia, and the letters do not begin with an *invocatio* or *intitulatio*, but with the formula “letter (γράμματα) of [the emperors] to [the *archontes*]”, see *De cerimoniis* (as n. 117), pp. 690–691. For the Bulgarian ruler, whose address is given (*ibid.*, p. 690) in an old fashion (as ἐκ Θεοῦ ἄρχοντα τοῦ χριστιανικοῦτάτου ἔθνους τῶν Βουλγάρων) with the said *invocatio* and a new form (as *basileus* without *invocatio*), see Dölger, Fanz: “Der Bulgarenherrscher als geistlicher Sohn des byzantinischen Kaisers”. In: *Id.*, *Byzanz und die europäische Staatenwelt* (as n. 34), pp. 183–196.

120 A very comprehensive overview of the Arabic as well as Hebrew accounts and their respective problems of authenticity and dating has already been furnished by Dunlop, *The History* (as n. 98), pp. 89–170.

121 This axiom is generally accepted but rests on shaky ground as it is not explicitly stated in any source. It can only implicitly be inferred from the Hebrew sources: the letter of king Joseph to Ḥasday b. Šaprūt credits king Bulan with the introduction of Judaism. He is presented as a direct ancestor

suggested that change took place before or around 800,¹²² two important recent contributions have come to different, mutually exclusive results. They fix the date of the conversion either to around 838 (based on numismatical evidence),¹²³ or to around 861 (based on a new combination of the Hebrew sources, the “Vita Constantini” and a remark by Christian of Stavelot¹²⁴ from around 864).¹²⁵ Both arguments are indeed impressive, but neither

of king Joseph. The ascent of the dynasty of kings and the introduction of Judaism were thus seemingly linked, cf. the German translation of the letter in: Pletnjowa, Svetlana A.: *Die Chasaren: Mittelalterliches Reich an Don und Wolga*. Koehler & Amelang: Leipzig 1978, pp. 151–158, here pp. 153–155. The person of the qaghan is only incidentally mentioned in this account (not by the title) as he initially had to give his consent (p. 153). The Cambridge document, instead, seems to reflect a tradition according to which the office of qaghan as a supreme judge had only been introduced together with Judaism; see Dunlop, *The History* (as n. 98), pp. 158–159. The interpretation of the qaghan as judge is clearly an assimilation to the biblical tradition and thus serves to keep the legitimacy of a non-Jewish institution in the new religious context, see Shapira, Dan: “Two Names of the first Khazar Jewish Beg”. *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 10, 1998/99, pp. 231–241, here p. 236.

- 122 For example Dunlop, *The History* (as n. 98), pp. 169–170; Pritsak, Omeljan: “The Khazar Kingdom’s Conversion to Judaism”. *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 2, 1978, pp. 261–281, here pp. 271–280. The debate is outlined by Golden, Peter B.: “The Conversion of the Khazars to Judaism”. In: *The World of the Khazars* (as n. 17), pp. 123–162, here pp. 151–157. The conversion is often understood as a process comprising several steps, a first around 740 (based on a rather approximative date given by Juda ha-Levi), a second around 800 (identified with the ‘reform’ of Obadiyah) and a third step in the 830s.
- 123 Kovalev, Roman K.: “Creating Khazar Identity through Coins: The Special Issue Dirhams of 837/8”. In: *East Central and Eastern Europe* (as n. 10), pp. 220–253.
- 124 Huygens, R.B.C. (ed.): *Christianus dictus Stabulensis, Expositio super Librum Generationis*. (Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 224). Brepols: Turnhout 2008, p. 436, ll. 124–130: *Nescimus iam gentem sub caelo, in qua Christiani non habeantur. Nam et Goc et Magoc, quae sunt gentes Hunorum quae ab eis Gazari uocantur, iam una gens, quae fortior erat ex his quas Alexander conduxerat, circumcisa est et omne Iudaismum obseruat, Bulgarii quoque [...] cotidie baptizantur.*
- 125 Zuckerman, Constantin: “On the Date of the Khazar’s Conversion to Judaism and the Chronology of the Kings of the Rus Oleg and Igor”. *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 53, 1995, pp. 237–270; here pp. 237–254; followed by Shepard, Jonathan: “The Khazar’s Formal Adoption of Judaism and By-

of them seems to be strictly conclusive.¹²⁶ In any case, the nearly complete silence of Byzantine sources about the new religious situation in *Khazaria* and their continuing fixation on the qaghan as ruler instead of the king is indeed remarkable, and it certainly requires caution not to overestimate the consequences of the conversion for Khazar-Byzantine relations. Even if the Khazar king reacted sharply on anti-Jewish measures taken by Romanos I Lakapenos in Byzantium around 931,¹²⁷ it is nevertheless out of question that Christian communities were tolerated in the Khazar state. Two letters by the patriarch Nikolaos Mystikos from the early 10th century seem to imply that the patriarchate was able to reorganize clerical structures and regular spiritual life in *Chazaria* by nominating a new archbishop to Cherson.¹²⁸ In this case the geographical term might, however, refer to the

zantium's Northern Policy". *Oxford Slavonic Papers* 31, 1998, pp. 11–34, here pp. 11–23.

- 126 Kovalev, "Creating" (as n. 123) bases his argument entirely on a coin emission dated exclusively to 837/38, which obviously propagates the Mosaic religion (pp. 226–230). The growing external threats of these years (Sarkel) form the background for the rise of the *beg* Bulan, who was able to oust the qaghan from power before 843 (Abbasid letter to *Ṭarḥān malik al-ḥazar*). However, the open problem – why the new coins were no more struck afterwards – remains; this seems quite strange if a permanent religious change was implied and not only an unsuccessful (first) attempt. Zuckerman, "On the Date" (as n. 125), pp. 242–245, is perhaps too hasty in equating the religious debate mentioned in the Khazar tradition about the people's conversion with that of the "Vita Constantini". He conclusively confutes the dating of the conversion to the 8th century and the historicity of king Obadiyah (pp. 245–250), but he slightly overloads the passage by Christian of Stavelot (p. 245), which cannot serve as evidence for a recent (!) conversion of the Khazars. Instead, according to Christian's phrase the conversion could likewise have happened some decades earlier.
- 127 See Zuckerman, "On the Date" (as n. 125), p. 255; Shepard, "The Khazar's Formal Adoption" (as n. 125), pp. 30–31.
- 128 Jenkins, Romilly J. (ed.): *Nicholas I Patriarch of Constantinople, Letters*. (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 6). Dumbarton Oaks Library: Washington 1973, nr. 68, p. 314; nr. 106, pp. 388–390. For the role of Christianity in the Khazar polity see also Ludwig, *Struktur und Gesellschaft* (as n. 92), pp. 318–325; Noonan, Thomas S.: "The Khazar-Byzantine World of the Crimea in the Early Middle Ages: The Religious Dimension". *Archivum*

land of the Khotzirs in Eastern Crimea instead of the qaghanate.¹²⁹ Khazar-Byzantine relations did probably deteriorate considerably in the later 9th and 10th centuries, but the reasons for this development should primarily be sought in the circumstances of changing political contexts¹³⁰ due to the emergence of new powerful players in or at the margins of the steppe zone during the 9th century: the Pechenegs and the Oghuz (Torki), the Magyars and the Rus', not to forget the key role of Bulgaria in the Balkans.¹³¹ Notwithstanding this new plurality, the supreme head of the Khazars remained the only *chaganos* in the horizon of Byzantine sources¹³² from the late 7th century onwards.

For Carolingian authors, in contrast, the prototypical qaghan was still that of the Avars whose state had been defeated by Charlemagne in 796, but seemingly continued to exist in a rudimentary way well into the 9th century, as several mentions of leading Avar representatives in the Frankish Annals suggest.¹³³ The Khazars occur only incidentally in the Frankish

Eurasiae Medii Aevi 10, 1998/99, pp. 207–230 (who also discusses Mystikos' initiative, pp. 226–228).

- 129 Zuckerman, Constantin: "Byzantium's Pontic Policy in the Notitiae Episcopatumum". In: *La Crimée* (as n. 105), pp. 201–230, here pp. 221–226.
- 130 This line of interpretation has been followed by Thomas S. Noonan, "Byzantium and the Khazars" (as n. 98), esp. pp. 115–117 and 128–132. Noonan attempts to explain, "how Khazaria and Byzantium tried to use each other to serve their own interests in a constantly changing environment" (p. 128).
- 131 This is well reflected in the information on antagonistic attitudes between peoples of the steppe and other parts of the "north" in "De administrando imperio", cf. Howard-Johnston, "Byzantine Sources" (as n. 98), pp. 176–192; Huxley, George: "Steppe-Peoples in Konstantinos Porphyrogenetos". *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 34, 1984, pp. 77–89.
- 132 Neither the reemerging Eastern Türk Empire after the 680s nor the Türges qaghans succeeding to the former Western qaghanate nor the Uyghur Empire (744–840) have left any traces in Byzantine sources. This certainly reflects the shrinking Byzantine horizon towards Inner Asia. For these polities see Golden, *Introduction* (as n. 9), pp. 136–141, 155–163; Scharlipp, *Die frühen Türken* (as n. 13), pp. 30–44, 93–105; Kljaštornyj / Sultanov, *Staaten und Völker* (as n. 9), pp. 118–123; Stark, Sören: "On Oq Bodun. The Western Türk Qaghanate and the Ashina Clan". *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 15, 2006/7, pp. 159–171.
- 133 See Pohl, *Die Awaren* (as n. 15), pp. 320–323.

sources.¹³⁴ This difference of perception is reflected in a short passage of the famous letter to Basileios I written almost certainly by Anastasius Bibliothecarius in the name of the Carolingian Emperor Louis II in 871 after the Frankish conquest of Bari.¹³⁵ In order to refute the basileus' claim to be the unique legitimate holder of the *basileia*, i.e. the (Roman) imperial title, Anastasius had to prove that the 'correct' translation of *basileus* actually was "king" or *rex*. He found his arguments for this claim not only in the Scriptures, but also in more recent Greek books (*Graecos noviter editos codices*), where the rulers of the Persians, Epeirots, Indians, Goths and other nations were called *basileis*.¹³⁶ But Basileios had pointed to the existence of other proper titles for foreign rulers, such as *protosimbulus*

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- 134 See Aalto, Pentti / Pekkanen, Tuomo: *Latin Sources on North-Eastern Eurasia*. (Asiatische Forschungen 44). Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden 1975, vol. 1, pp. 5–6, s.v. Acatziri, Agazari, (A)gaziri, referring to passages in Cassiodorus, Iordanes and the Ravenna Cosmographer; see also *ibid.*, p. 149 s.v. Chazari, Chaziri and Chazaria in contrast to *ibid.*, pp. 79–98 s.v. Avar, Avares, Avari, Aba-. The Khazars are furthermore mentioned in a letter by Anastasius Bibliothecarius (nr. 15) to bishop Gauderic of Velletri, in: *Epistolae Karolini Aevi*, vol. 5 (MGH *Epistolae VII*). Weidmann: Berlin 1928, pp. 435–438, here p. 437, ll. 14–16, where he states that Constantine the philosopher had been sent by the emperor Michael III in *Gazaram pro divino praedicando verbo, directus eum Cersonem, quae Chazarorum terrae vicina est*. They are probably also listed as *Caziri* in the so-called Geographus Bavarus. For the information transmitted by Christian of Stavelot see above, note 124.
- 135 Henze, Walter (ed.): "Ludovici II Imperatoris Epistola ad Basilium I. imperatorem Constantinopolitanum missa". In: *MGH Epistolae VII* (as n. 134), pp. 385–394. Included in the "Chronicon Salernitanum", which was composed in the late 10th century, the authenticity of the letter had initially been questioned and was only established by Henze, Walter: "Ueber den Brief Kaiser Ludwigs II. an den Kaiser Basilius I.". *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere Geschichtskunde* 35, 1910, pp. 661–676. For the interpretation of this source see inter alia Grierson, Philip: "The Carolingian Empire in the Eyes of Byzantium". In: *Nascita dell'Europa ed Europa carolingia: un'equazione da verificare*. (Settimane di Studio 27). CISAM: Spoleto 1981, vol. 2, pp. 885–916, here esp. pp. 891–895; Peri, Vittorio: "'Universalità' culturale cristiana dei due sacri imperi Romani". In: Arnaldi, Girolamo / Cavallo, Guglielmo (eds.): *Europa medievale e mondo bizantino*. (Nuovi Studi Storici 40). ISIME: Rome 1997, pp. 125–162, here esp. pp. 134–151.
- 136 "Ludovici II Epistola" (as n. 135), p. 386, l. 36-p. 387, l. 11.

for the caliph of the Arabs, which induces Anastasius to discuss the “accuracy” of these designations.¹³⁷ It is at this point that the qaghan briefly appears. Anastasius declares that *chaganus* should be used for the ruler (*praelatum*) of the Avars, but not for the *Gazani* and *Nortmanni* nor the princeps *Vulgarum* who is rightly called *rex* or *dominus* of the Bulgarians.¹³⁸ This phrase is revealing as it seems to imply that the Byzantines used the term not only to designate the heads of the Khazars (*Gazani*), but also for Norman (i.e. Rus’) and Bulgarian rulers. Such an indirect evidence has to be used with great caution, the more so as the preceding letter of Basileios is lost, but it is not devoid of any fundament. There are indisputable traces that the title “qaghan” was used for princes of the Rus’ (although the clearest among them belong only to the 11th century).¹³⁹ The actual title of the Bulgar rulers, on the other hand, remains

137 Ibid., p. 388, ll. 11–15.

138 Ibid., p. 388, ll. 15–18: *Chaganum vero nos praelatum Avarum, non Gazanorum aut Nortmannorum nuncupari repperimus, neque principem Vulgarum, set regem vel dominum Vulgarum. Quae omnia idcirco dicimus, ut quam aliter se habeant, quae scripsisti, legens in Graecis voluminibus ipse cognoscas.* For the interpretation of *Nortmanni* see Liudprand, *Antapodosis* I 11, in: Becker, Joseph (ed.): *Die Werke Liudprands von Cremona.* (MGH SSrerGerm), 3rd edition. Hahnsche Buchhandlung: Hannover / Leipzig 1915, p. 9: *Habet [sc. Constantinopolis] quippe ab aquilone Hungarios, Pizenacos, Chazaros, Rusios quos alio nos nomine Nordmannos apellamus, atque Bulgarios nimium sibi vicinos.*

139 The interpretation of the phrase *rex illorum chaganus* in the eldest Latin source mentioning the Rus’, a passage in the “*Annales Bertiniani*” (for 839), is far from certain, see Garipzanov, Ildar: “The Annals of St. Bertin (839) and Chacanus of the Rhos”. *Ruthenica* 5, 2006, pp. 3–8, who raises doubts about the interpretation of *chaganus* as qaghan, but the spelling *cacanus* is also often used for the Avar qaghan by Paulus Diaconus, see Aalto / Pekkanen, *Latin Sources* (as n. 134), p. 139. References to “our kagan” in the sermon “On Law and Grace” by Ilarion of Kiev and in an 11th-century graffito from Saint Sophia in Kiev leave little space for doubts that the title qaghan was used at least occasionally for the Rurikid princes, see Szili, Sándor: “Kagan – A Ruler’s Title in Early Eleventh-Century Kievan Rus’? Ilarion’s “On Law and Grace” as a Historical Source”. *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 47, 2013, pp. 373–385. The existence of a Khāqān Rūs is furthermore attested by various Muslim authors, among them Ibn Rustah and Gardizī, see Golden, Peter B.: “The Question of the Rus’ Qaghanate”. *Archivum Eurasiae Medii*

quite unknown to us.¹⁴⁰ Greek sources often call them *kyrios* or *archōn*, and there are Latin authors who use the term *rex*.¹⁴¹ The title *chaganos* in combination with Bulgaria appears only in one Byzantine text, but it

Aevi 2, 1982, pp. 77–97, reprinted in: Id.: *Nomads and their Neighbours in the Russian Steppe: Turks, Khazars and Qipchaqs*. Ashgate: Aldershot 2003, nr. VI, here pp. 82–83. Basing his argument primarily on these last-mentioned sources, Golden seeks to reconstruct the Rus' qaghanate as a vassal polity of the Khazar Empire in pre-Ryurikid times. Noonan, Thomas S.: "The Khazar Qaghanate and its Impact on the Early Rus' State: The Translatio Imperii from Itil to Kiev". In: Khazanov, Anatoly / Wink, André (eds.): *Nomads in the Sedentary World*. Curzon: Richmond, Surrey 2001, pp. 76–102, here pp. 86–94, instead emphasizes the deliberate transfer of Khazar political ideology and prestige by the Ryurikids, especially after they had destroyed the Khazar Empire.

- 140 Although early Bulgarian rulers are usually called "khan" by modern historians, it should be stressed that there is no explicit source evidence to support this assumption, see Curta, Florin: "Qagan, Khan or King? Power in Early Medieval Bulgaria (Seventh to Ninth Century)". *Viator* 37, 2006, pp. 1–31; esp. pp. 1–3; see also the careful discussion of titles by Stepanov, Cvetelin: *Vlast i avtoritet v rannosrednovkovna Bălgarija (VII – sr. IX v.)*. Agat6: Sofija 1999, pp. 77–78 and 80–82. Instead, Bakalov, Georgi: *Sredno-vekovnijat bălgarski vladetel (titulatura i insignii)*. Nauka i izkustvo: Sofija 1985, p. 85 starts his discussion of the evidence with the affirmation that "it is known" that the early Bulgar rulers bore the Central Asiatic title *khan*, without giving any evidence for that; more cautiously Golden, *Introduction* (as n. 9), p. 249. Beševliev, *Die protobulgarische Periode* (as n. 95), pp. 333–334, assumes that all early Bulgar rulers held the title *kanasybigi*, and hence *khan* as first part of that. Though based on Bulgar tradition, the Bulgarian Prince List is of limited value for this question: written in Slavonic language, it calls the princes (explicitly only Asparuch and Kormisoš) *knjaz*, see Pritsak, Omeljan: *Die bulgarische Fürstenliste und die Sprache der Protobulgaren*. (Ural-altaische Bibliothek 1). Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden 1955, pp. 50, 76–77 and Tafel 1.
- 141 Cf. Bakalov, *Vladetel* (as n. 140), pp. 86–87; Curta, "Qagan" (as n. 140), pp. 2, n. 5; 10–19; Stepanov, *Vlast* (as n. 140), p. 79; Beševliev, *Die protobulgarische Periode* (as n. 95), pp. 334–336. Introducing the lemma *καβάς*, Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica II* (as n. 3), pp. 148–149, suggests that this term appears in Greek sources for the Bulgarian rulers, but nearly all references adduced there refer to *kanasybigi* in various ways (and thus to the Protobulgarian inscriptions of a very limited timespan).

is an obvious misattribution.¹⁴² The actual meaning of the title *kanasybigi* used by Omurtag (814–831) and his son Malamir (831–c.836) in official inscriptions remains a debated issue. It undoubtedly marks a substantial raise of prestige of the Bulgarian ruler in the early 9th century,¹⁴³ but it seems to be clearly distinct from the title “qaghan”.

The conversion to Christianity offered new reference frames to both Bulgarian and Rus’ princes for the expression of their potential imperial ambitions. While Symeon of Bulgaria did not hesitate to claim the title *basileus* for himself and ultimately achieved the Byzantine recognition of this title for his son and successor Peter,¹⁴⁴ the Rurikid princes did not

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- 142 In the third book of the “Patria Konstantinupoleos” with regard to the Kastellion of Galata, see: Preger, Theodor (ed.): *Scriptores Originum Constantinopolitanarum*, vol. 2. Teubner: Leipzig 1907, p. 265: *Τὸ δὲ Καστέλλιν ἔκτισεν Τιβέριος ὁ πενθερός Μαυρικίου διὰ τὸ ἐλθεῖν Χαράνον τὸν ἄρχοντα Βουλγαρίας καὶ ἐμπρῆσαι καὶ κατακαῦσαι ἅπαντα τὰ Θρακῶα μέρη*. The notice obviously alludes to the Avar qaghan, cf. Berger, Albrecht: *Untersuchungen zu den Patria Konstantinupoleos*. (Poikila byzantina 8). Habelt: Bonn 1988, pp. 689–691. Furthermore, there are some instances for the use of the qaghanal title for the Bulgarian rulers in texts originating from a Slavic background in the 11th century; these are discussed by Stepanov, Tsvetelin: “From ‘Steppe’ to Christian Empire, and back: Bulgaria between 800 and 1100”. In: *The Other Europe* (as n. 5), pp. 363–377.
- 143 The debate is linked to the introduction of the Byzantine clause *ἐκ θεοῦ* combined with the Greek title *ἄρχων* by Omurtag: cf. Bakalov, *Vladetel* (as n. 140), pp. 89–94; Stepanov, *Vlast* (as n. 140), pp. 80–83; Id.: “The Bulgar title ΚΑΝΑΣΥΒΙΓΙ: Reconstructing the Notions of Divine Kingship in Bulgaria, AD 822–836”. *Early Medieval Europe* 10, 2001, pp. 1–19; Curta, “Qagan” (as n. 140), pp. 22–29 (“imperial title”); Ziemann, *Vom Wandervolk* (as n. 95), pp. 306–309.
- 144 For Symeon’s conflicts with Byzantium, especially his “coronation” of 913 and the peace of 927, see inter alia: Karlin-Hayter, Patricia: “The Homily on the Peace with Bulgaria of 927 and the “Coronation” of 913”. *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinischen Gesellschaft* 17, 1968, pp. 29–39; Dujčev, Ivan: “On the Treaty of 927 with the Bulgarians”. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 32, 1978, pp. 217–295; Shepard, Jonathan: “Symeon of Bulgaria – Peacemaker”. In: Id., *Emergent Elites and Byzantium in the Balkans and East-Central Europe*. Ashgate: Farnham 2011, nr. III, pp. 1–53; Ziemann, Daniel: “Byzanz als Referenz- und Konfliktpunkt. Bulgarien zur Zeit Symeons des Großen”. In: Speer, Andreas / Steinkrüger, Philipp (eds.): *Knotenpunkt Byzanz. Wissensformen und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen*. (Miscellanea Mediaevalia

undertake any efforts to obtain such an advance in titular prestige within Christian schemes of royalty for many centuries. This circumstance might raise some doubts if the concept of qaghanate, which is well attested for the early Rus', but not for the Bulgars, did always imply imperial status.

Our concern here is, however, with the Byzantine perception of the qaghan.¹⁴⁵ In this respect a seemingly obvious aspect should not be ignored, namely that the *basileus* never adopted the qaghanal title for himself as the Tang emperor Taizong (626–649) did when he considered it appropriate.¹⁴⁶ The qaghan thus always remained a phenomenon belonging to the world outside of Byzantium, but chroniclers of the earlier Byzantine period generally were well familiar with this title used by the rulers of some, though not all of the “barbarian” *ethnika* living in the Eurasian steppe zone. The term *chaganos* appears rather frequently in their texts. However, the qaghanate has not been perceived as a specific concept of rulership such as the *basileia*. The usual image of Avar qaghans as prototypical barbarian rulers with mainly treacherous and avaricious traits differs significantly from the rather neutral but shadowy perception of the Khazar qaghans, while only Türk qaghans are sometimes delineated with truly imperial connotations (and once even called *basileus*¹⁴⁷). These divergences in perception are par-

36). De Gruyter: Berlin / Boston 2012, pp. 559–573. Todorov, Boris: “The Value of Empire: Tenth-Century Bulgaria between Magyars, Pechenegs and Byzantium”. *Journal of Medieval History* 36, 2010, pp. 312–326, has linked the Byzantine–Bulgarian conflict to the dynamics of the Northern steppe zone, which obliged Bulgaria to become a sedentary imperial power. I was not yet able to consult Leszka, Mirosław J.: *Symeon I Wielki a Bizancjum: Z dziejów stosunków bułgarsko-bizantyńskich w latach 893–927*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego: Łódź 2013.

145 It would certainly be useful to examine also the Chinese and Arabic sources in this respect. For the image of the qaghan in the Orkhon inscriptions from the Second Türk qaghanate see Kljaštornyj, *Die Geschichte Zentralasiens* (as n. 9), pp. 233–235.

146 Taizong started to use the title *Tian Kehan* (“The celestial qaghan”) after the conquest of the Eastern Türk Empire had been accomplished in 630 and the last qaghan Xieli had been sent to Chang’an as captive, see the short record from the Jiu Tangshu in: Liu Mau-tsai: *Die chinesischen Nachrichten zur Geschichte der Ost-Türken (T'u-küe)*. Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden 1958, vol. 1, pp. 240–241; Stepanov, “Rulers, doctrines” (as n. 19), p. 268.

147 Cf. above n. 44.

tially due to the different quality of political relationships the Byzantines upheld towards these peoples in certain phases. But at the same time the discrepancies might also reflect differences and developments in the actual notion of the qaghanate as royal, imperial or sacral rulership with the various steppe peoples. In this respect the 9th and 10th centuries offer the most blurry vision: qaghans are still referred to in Greek as well as Latin texts – also with regard to the rulers of Rus' and Bulgaria – but these appellations are far from clear and uncontroversial, as is the actual role of the qaghan among the Khazars at this time. These ambiguities are perhaps a sign of change and transition, since the period of qaghans now approached its end in those parts of the steppe that stood in closer contact with the Byzantine *oikoumenē*.