

BARBARIANS IN DARK-AGE GREECE: SLAVS OR AVARS?

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The *Chronicle of Monemvasia* was first used as a primary source for the history of the Slavs in Greece by Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer, the German journalist who claimed that the modern Greeks were not the descendants of ancient Greeks, but Slavs and Albanians, whose ancestors had settled in Greece during the Middle Ages and had learned to speak Greek from the Byzantine authorities (Fallmerayer 1836, p. iii–v).¹ Until recently, to compare one's work with that of Fallmerayer was a serious charge. In Greece, Fallmerayer had been demonized to the point that, although actually an enemy of Russia, he came to be considered a Pan Slavist and an agent of the tsar (Vryonis 1981b, p. 407; Bornträger 1989, p. 9).² Long before its first translation into Greek, Fallmerayer's work was stigmatized as "anti-Greek" (Zakythinos 1945, p. 101).³ During and after the Civil War, the "Slavs" became the national enemy. By 1950, those embracing the ideology of the right saw their political rivals as the embodiment of all that was anti-national, Communist, and Slavic. A strong link was established between national identity and political orientation, as the Civil War and the subsequent defeat of the left-wing movement turned Slav Macedonians into the Sudetens of Greece (Augustinos 1989, p. 23; Danforth 1995, pp. 74 and 76; Koliopoulos 1999, p. 283).⁴ To hold Fallmerayeran views was in many

¹ Fallmerayer's ideas were not entirely original. The first to speak about the "Slavonization of Greece" was Leake 1814, p. 61–63, 254–255, and 378–380. For Leake's influence on Fallmerayer, see Leeb 1996, p. 54.

² By 1840, Fallmerayer had already been branded a Slavophile in Germany, in spite of his harsh criticism of Šafářik's and Herder's theories of Slavic history. For Fallmerayer's critique of Šafářik's theories about the presence of the Slavs in Germany, see Lauer 1996, p. 31–38. For the relationship between the "Slavic thesis" and Fallmerayer's political views of Russia, see Lauer 1993, p. 145. For his anti-Russian attitude, see also Thurnher 1995, p. 42–47; Skopetea 1997, p. 99–132. For the Fallmerayerian debate in Greece in the 1960s, see Vryonis 1978.

³ See Veloudis 1970. The first Greek translation of Fallmerayer's work is that of Konstantinos P. Romanos published in Athens in 1984 (*Peri tes katagoges ten semerimon Hellenon*).

⁴ Following Comintern directives, Greek Communists repeatedly promised Slav Macedonians an independent state of their own, which led to the idea that all Slavs (i.e., Slav Macedonians) were Communists, because both propaganda for an independent Macedonia and Communism

ways a *crimen laesae maiestatis*, and many historians jumped into the bandwagon. Dionysios A. Zakythinos, the author of the first monograph on medieval Slavs in Greece, wrote of the Dark Ages separating Antiquity from the Middle Ages as an era of decline and ruin brought by Slavic invaders (Zakythinos 1945, p. 72 and 1966, p. 300, 302, and 316).⁵ Some insisted on the beneficial Byzantine influence that forced the Slavs to abandon their nomadic life of bandits (Yannopoulos 1980, p. 353; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1993, p. 23; Avramea 1997, p. 161).⁶ Others rejected the *Chronicle of Monemvasia* as an absolutely unreliable source (Karayannopoulos 1971, p. 460).⁷ Even two American historians, Kenneth Setton and Peter Charanis, engaged in debate with a clear sense of taking sides. According to Setton, Stilpon Kyriakides had deflated Charanis' arguments in favor of treating the *Chronicle of Monemvasia* as trustworthy, an attack to which Charanis supposedly returned only "an inadequate answer" (Setton 1952, p. 352). Charanis criticized Zakythinos for belittling the historical value of the *Chronicle* and maintaining "the old views generally held by Greek scholars," that the Slavs only settled in Greece during the second half of the eighth century (Charanis 1949, p. 94–95).⁸

At the heart of the Setton-Charanis controversy was the "Slavic problem." While Charanis took at face value the account of the *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, with its 218 years of Avar (and Slavic) rule in Peloponnesus, Setton shifted the emphasis from Slavs (and Avars) to Onogurs, in an attempt to emphasize the temporary occupation of Corinth until the reign of Emperor Constans II (Charanis 1950 and 1952; Setton 1950 and 1952). At a closer look, the "Slavic problem" consists, however, of two related, yet different

came to be regarded as a threat to Greek territorial integrity. Even after the Greek Communist Party dropped its recognition of the Slav-Macedonian minority in Greece (1935), the perception remained that Slav Macedonians turned against Greece siding with Bulgarian occupation during World War II and Yugoslav Communism during the Civil War. See Karakasidou 1993, p. 459–461 and Kotsakis 1998, p. 69.

⁵ Echoes of Zakythinos' theory can still be found in recent publications, e.g., Avramea 1997, p. 49. For Zakythinos' political activities during the Civil War, see Koliopoulos 1999, p. 285.

⁶ For "nomadic Slavs" as a favorite cliché of Greek historiography, see Malingoudis 1985 and 1988, p. 15–18; Litavrin 1999. For "nomadic" transhumance in Greece as a much later reaction to Byzantine encroachments, see Weithmann 1996, p. 21.

⁷ A renewed interest in the *Chronicle of Monemvasia* may be viewed as a reaction to Max Vasmer's contribution to the "Slavic problem" (Vasmer 1941). See Turlej 2001, p. 25.

⁸ The idea of a late, eighth-century settlement of the Slavs in Greece goes back to Paparrigopoulos 1843, p. 77–89 and 1858, p. 105–112. For Paparrigopoulos' concept of "Hellenikon ethnos" as an immutable and timeless social organism, see Kitromilides 1998, p. 29. In addition to the evidence published in various journals, Charanis' archive includes letters from both Zakythinos and Setton, pointing to Charanis' involvement in the intellectual debate surrounding the "Slavic problem." See D. J. Constantelos, "Peter Charanis: a pioneer in Byzantine Studies in the United States," paper presented at the 22nd annual Byzantine Studies Conference (Chapel Hill, 1996).

issues. First, ever since Fallmerayer, the chronology of the Slavic occupation of, or settlement in, Greece became a crucial issue separating Fallmerayerians from their opponents.⁹ Second, when referring to the “Slavic problem,” different authors employed at different times a wide range of ethnic names, Avars, Slavs, Onogurs, etc., mirroring the lack of consistency to be found in contemporary sources. In this paper, I intend to examine the historical sources regarding barbarians in Greece in the light of a strictly chronological concern. My purpose is not a full narrative of events, for which there are better and more informative guides at hand (Vasil’ev 1898; Ensslin 1929; Waldmüller 1976; Ditten 1978; Weithmann 1978; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1986). This contribution has a different scope. I devote particular attention to the broader picture in which Slavic raiding activity took place, as well as to the situation in the Balkans during the “Dark Ages.” Discussion of interaction between Slavs and Avars in the 580s as well as of the creation of the theme of Hellas occupies a large amount of space for similar reasons. This section’s emphasis is on Greece, but the emphasis shifts at various points to the central and western Balkans.

Menander the Guardsman is the first author to speak of Slavic raids into Greece (*Hellas*). Menander wrote under Emperor Maurice and his now lost *History* continued Agathias’ to the loss of Sirmium in 582. His work survives only in fragments incorporated into *De Legationibus* and *De Sententiis*, two collections compiled under Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus in the mid-tenth century. The core of the work was built around the careers of the two men who are in the center of the narration, Tiberius and Maurice. The outlook is Constantinopolitan and the city’s concerns are paramount. Menander relied heavily, if not exclusively, on written sources, especially on material from the archives, such as minutes of proceedings, supporting documents and correspondence, reports from envoys, embassies and meetings. It is probably from such sources that Menander learned that in 578 100,000 Slavene warriors “devastated Thrace and many areas,” and were still plundering Greece (*Hellas*), when the qagan of the Avars organized an expedition against the Slavenes north of the Danube river (Menander the Guardsman, fr. 21).¹⁰ The expedition does not seem to have fulfilled the expectations of Emperor Tiberius II, who intended to force the return of those Slavenes raiding the Balkans as far south as Greece. According to John of Ephesus (VI 6.25), two years later, “the accursed people of

⁹ Johann Wilhelm Zinkeisen, one of the first to attack Fallmerayer’s ideas, typically insisted that no Slavs settled in Greece during the sixth century. See Zinkeisen 1832, p. xv–xvi, 682–708, 721, 740–755, and 837–859. See also Leeb 1996, p. 62.

¹⁰ For the interpretation of *Hellas* by Greek historians, see Charanis 1970, p. 2 and Yannopoulos 1980, p. 332. Despite the vagueness of the term, it is clear that Menander’s intention was to point to the southern regions of the Balkans, as an indicator for the magnitude of the Slavic raid. See also Waldmüller 1976, p. 106; Weithmann 1978, p. 78; Popović 1980, p. 231; Pohl 1988, p. 68; Levinskaia and Tokhtas’ev 1991, p. 343. For a different date for this attack, see Yannopoulos 1990–1993, p. 32 (early 579).

the Slavs” set out and plundered all of Greece, the regions surrounding Thessalonica, and Thrace, taking many towns and castles, laying waste, burning, pillaging, and seizing the whole country.¹¹ Unlike Menander, John of Ephesus may have personally witnessed the panic caused by Avar and Slav attacks during Tiberius’ and Maurice’s reigns. His *Ecclesiastical History* contained three parts, the last of which had six books. Book VI was compiled in Constantinople over a period of several years, as indicated by chronological references in the text. Besides ecclesial history, John was interested in military and diplomatic issues, with an emphasis on the relations between the empire and its Persian and Avar neighbors. This particular interest derived from John’s belief that “wars, battles, destruction, and carnage” proclaimed the return of Christ. The first twenty-five chapters of Book VI deal with the Persian war and the situation on the Balkan front until

¹¹ For John’s notion of *Hellas*, see Weithmann 1978, p. 88. For John’s approach to military history, see Ginkel 1995, p. 71, 76, 78, and 84. On the double assumption that the first Slavene attack on Thessalonica occurred in 586 and that John died shortly after 585, Theresa Olajos (1985, p. 514-515) proposed an emendation of the text, replacing Thessalonica with Thessaly. However, John did not die shortly after 585, for the last event recorded by his *Ecclesiastical History* is the acquittal of Patriarch Gregory of Antioch in 588. As a consequence, John could well have had knowledge of a Slavene raid reaching the environs of Thessalonica (see Allen 1979). Moreover, Archbishop John of Thessalonica mentions an attack on the city by 5,000 Slavene warriors, but the currently accepted date for that event (604) is based on Paul Lemerle’s dubious interpretation of the text and his questionable chronology of the events narrated in chapters 12 through 15 of Book I of the *Miracles of St Demetrius*. According to Lemerle (1981, p. 40, 69, and 72), the attack of the 5,000 warriors narrated in the twelfth homily must have taken place after the siege of Thessalonica narrated in homilies 13 to 15, which he dated to 586. His conclusion is based on a passage of the thirteenth homily, in which Archbishop John claimed that it was for the first time that the citizens of Thessalonica, particularly those who had not served in the army, were seeing a barbarian army so close to them that they could examine it in great detail. By contrast, as the 5,000 Slavene warriors attacked the city by surprise, the citizens of Thessalonica could hear from a distance “certain signs of that barbarian cry to which ears were accustomed” (I 12.112) This, Lemerle argued, was an indication that the attack of the 5,000 Slavene warriors occurred some time after the siege of 586, for the inhabitants of the city could by now recognize the Slavene battle cry. But the ears accustomed to the barbarian cry are not necessarily those of the inhabitants of the city attacked by the 5,000 warriors. John may have referred to members of his audience, some of whom had indeed witnessed this event, as well as other, subsequent attacks. For John’s audience, see *Miracles of St Demetrius* I 12.101; Lemerle 1953, p. 353 and 1981, p. 36; Lemerle 1981, p. 36; Ivanova 1995a, p. 182; Skedros 1996, p. 141. Moreover, what John says is not that the citizens of Thessalonica were able to recognize the battle cry because they had already heard it many times before, but simply that they were able to distinguish the cry from the general noise of the battle. In addition, what John says about the citizens of Thessalonica seeing for the first time a barbarian army refers to the whole army of 586, including Slavenes under the orders of the qagan, as well as other barbarians, all organized in companies of soldiers and in order of battle. In other words, what is new to the eyes of the inhabitants of the city is not the Slavenes, but the spectacle of the Avar army. See also Whitby 1988, p. 119–120; Speck 1993, p. 423.

Tiberius II's third regnal year (581). Most of Book VI was in fact written in prison. The concluding chapters were lost, but can be reconstructed on the basis of later works, such as the eighth-century chronicle attributed to Dionysius of Tell-Mahre, that of Elias Bar Shinaya (tenth to eleventh century), the twelfth-century chronicle of Michael the Syrian and the thirteenth-century chronicle of Gregory Barhebraeus (D'iakonov 1946, p. 20 and 25; Serikov 1991, p. 276, 281, and 283).¹²

The raid of the Slavs into Greece to which John of Ephesus referred may have coincided with the attack of the 5,000 Slavic warriors on Thessalonica mentioned in Book I of the *Miracles of St Demetrius* (I 12.107-113) and wrongly dated to 604 by Paul Lemerle (Lemerle 1981, p. 40, 69, and 72).¹³ Archbishop John, the author of Book I, wrote during Heraclius' early regnal years (*Miracles of St Demetrius* I 10.82),¹⁴ but he described himself rubbing shoulders with the defenders of the city during the attack. He leaves the impression of a raid organized by "professional" warriors coming from afar, not by marauders living in the vicinity (*Miracles of St Demetrius* I 12.107-108; Lemerle 1981, p. 71).¹⁵ The reaction of the inhabitants of Thessalonica is also instructive. There is no mention of any army within the city's walls. However, we are told that when an official of the prefecture gave the alarm, nobody panicked. Instead, everybody rushed home to bring his weapons and then took his assigned position on the walls. To judge from Archbishop John's evidence, the inhabitants of Thessalonica were already prepared for the attack, which they seem to have expected at any moment (*Miracles of St Demetrius*

¹² Despite Michael the Syrian's claim to the contrary, he borrowed much of his chapter X 21 from John's *History*. He might have used John through an intermediary, possibly the chronicle attributed to Dionysius of Tell Mahre, who might have misled him over the precise conclusion of John's work. Certainly borrowed from John is the account of widespread Slav ravaging, including the sack of churches in Corinth.

¹³ For an earlier date, see Barišić 1953, p. 49–55; Ivanova 1995, p. 182; Curta 2001, p. 92–94.

¹⁴ For the date of Book I, see Lemerle 1981, p. 44 and 80; Whitby 1988, p. 116; Macrides 1990, p. 189. Paul Speck (1993, p. 275, 512, and 528) has argued that Archbishop John was not the author of Book I, which was a much later collection of the ninth century. Speck's arguments are not very convincing, especially his idea that that John mentioned by the author of Book II as responsible for the collection in Book I was not a bishop, but an abbot. In fact, John is specifically mentioned as bishop (II 2.201).

¹⁵ For the date of the siege, see Barišić 1953, p. 49–55; Ivanova 1995, p. 182. The only chronological indication for the date of this episode is its association with the episode of the destroyed *ciborium* of St. Demetrius' church, which John attributes to the time of Bishop Eusebius (I 6.55). Eusebius is known from letters written by Pope Gregory the Great between 597 and 603. The date of his appointment is not known. It must have been a long episcopate, for he is mentioned as bishop in 586, as the army of the qagan besieged Thessalonica (I 14.131). On the other hand, although Archbishop John would like his audience to believe that he had witnessed the attack of the 5,000 Sclavenes, he dates that episode to the same night the *ciborium* of the basilica was destroyed by fire. However, he tells us that he learned the *ciborium* story from his predecessor, Bishop Eusebius (I 6.55).

I 12.107). This seems to indicate a serious and continuous threat on the city, of a kind that may be associated with the invasion referred to by John of Ephesus. The attack of the 5,000 Slavene warriors must have taken place at a time of intense raiding, when the citizens of Thessalonica had become accustomed to barbarian onslaughts. Indeed, John of Ephesus, to whom the “accursed Slavs” were the instrument of God for punishing the persecutors of the Monophysites, claims that they were still occupying Roman territory in 584, “as if it belonged to them.” The Slavs had “become rich and possessed gold and silver, herds of horses and a lot of weapons, and learned to make war better than the Romans.” It is quite possible, therefore, that the attack of the 5,000 Slavene warriors on Thessalonica was an episode of the invasion mentioned by John of Ephesus.¹⁶

However, there are still unanswered questions. Both Archbishop John and John of Ephesus seem to describe an independent raid of the Slavenes reaching Thessalonica and also, according to John of Ephesus, Greece. In distant Spain, John of Biclar knew that in 581, Avars had occupied *partes Graeciae* (*Chronicle*, p. 216).¹⁷ It is known, on the other hand, that at that time the major Avar forces were concentrated at Sirmium, which in fact fell in 582. Is it possible that John muddled Avars with Slavs? Taking into consideration the considerable distance at which he wrote, it is not altogether impossible. But there is additional evidence to prove the contrary. Writing at the end of the sixth century, Evagrius recorded some information on Balkan events of the 580s, which he may have obtained in Constantinople, during his visit of 588. Unlike John of Ephesus, Evagrius did not believe that God always rewarded good emperors. To Evagrius, Maurice was an excellent ruler, for he had managed to combine faith with prosperity. Still, he reports that, under Maurice’s reign, the Avars conquered and plundered cities and strongholds in Greece (*Ecclesiastical History* VI 10). The date of this raid is not given, but there is no reason to accuse Evagrius of muddling Avars and Slavs.¹⁸ In addition, Michael the Syrian (X 21), in a passage most likely taken from John of Ephesus, records an attack

¹⁶ For the “accursed Slavs,” see John of Ephesus VI 6.25. This particular passage is viewed by many as indicating the beginning of Slavic settlement in the Balkans: Nestor 1963, p. 50–51; Ferjančić 1984, p. 95; Pohl 1988, p. 82; Soustal 1991, p. 72. All that John says, however, is that the Slavenes were still on Roman territory, after four years of raiding. Whether they had established themselves temporarily or on a longer term remains unclear.

¹⁷ For Avars in Greece, see also Weithmann 1978, p. 88; Yannopoulos 1980, p. 333; Marin 1991–1992, p. 219–220; Avramea 1997, p. 68–69. Between 576/7 and 586/7, John was in Barcelona, where he may have received news from Constantinople, via Cartagena. The date of the attack is indicated by John of Biclar’s mention of both Tiberius II’s third regnal year and King Leuvigild’s eleventh year (see Kollautz 1983, p. 466). According to Walter Pohl (1988, p. 76 with n. 40), John of Biclar may have indeed referred to Avar forces when mentioning Pannonia along with Greece.

¹⁸ This may be the raid of 584, when Singidunum fell and the hinterland of Anchialos was ravaged. See Theophylact Simocatta I 4.1–4; Pohl 1988, p. 77–8 and 107; Whitby 1988, p. 110. Evagrius was in Constantinople in 588 to assist his employer, Gregory, patriarch of Antioch,

of the Sclavenes on Corinth, but refers to their leader as qagan. He then attributes the attack on Anchialos not to Avars, but to Sclavenes. The reference to Anchialos could be used for dating the attack on Corinth in or shortly before 584 (Yannopoulos 1980, p. 366).¹⁹ But it is very difficult to disentangle Michael's narrative and decide who exactly was raiding Greece in 584. Michael the Syrian is a later source. He might have used John not directly, but through an intermediary (possibly the eighth-century chronicle attributed to Dionysius of Tell Mahre). As a consequence, he might have muddled Avars and Slavs. But neither the evidence of John of Biclar, nor that of Evagrius can be dismissed on such grounds. There is good reason to suspect, therefore, that in the early 580s, informants in Constantinople knew that both Avars and Slavs had invaded Greece. It is possible that some of the Slavs were under the orders of the Avars, while others, such as the 5,000 warriors storming Thessalonica, may have operated on their own.

While Avars continued to ravage Thrace, an army of 100,000 Sclavenes and other barbarians obeying the orders of the qagan appeared under the walls of Thessalonica. The number of soldiers in the army besieging Thessalonica is evidently exaggerated. The attack, however, may well have been associated with the war in Thrace. Its precise date could be established on the basis of Archbishop John's reference to a Sunday, September 22, when the alarm was first given in Thessalonica. We are also told that the attack occurred at the time of Emperor Maurice. September 22 in the reign of Maurice could have fallen on a Sunday in either 586 or 597. A strong argument in favor of the latter date is the fact that Eusebius, the bishop of Thessalonica at the time of the attack, is mentioned by Pope Gregory the Great in three letters, the earliest of which is from 597. This is no indication, however, that Eusebius was appointed bishop in the 590s. He could have been bishop of Thessalonica since the 580s.²⁰ Barišić and Lemerle supported a date of

to defend himself against accusations of incest. On this occasion, he recorded information about the Avar attacks on Singidunum, Anchialos, and "the whole of Greece," which could not be prevented because of the empire's eastern commitments. For Evagrius' notion of Hellas, see Charanis 1953, pp. 94–95. For his selective use of chronological markers and his reaction to the theories of Meliton of Sardis, see Krivushin 1998, p. 213 and 215–217. Despite explicitly using Evagrius for the history of the Avars, the author of the *Chronicle of Monemvasia* did not use the passage mentioning Avar attacks on Greece. See Turlej 2001, p. 35–36.

¹⁹ There is no serious reason for accepting Zakythinos' emendation of Corinth into Perinthus (Zakythinos 1945, p. 37; Karayannopoulos 1990). The first to use this passage as evidence for the Slavic presence in Peloponnesus was Lubor Niederle (1906, see also Zášterová 1966). The association between Anchialos and Greece also appears in Evagrius.

²⁰ Speros Vryonis (1981a, p. 378–390) argued that 597 should be preferred, because the poliorcetic technology and the siege machines employed during the one-week attack on Thessalonica could not have been acquired before 587. In that year, the qagan's army besieged and conquered Appiaria in Moesia Inferior, after being instructed by a certain Roman soldier named Busas as to how to build a siege engine. See now Korres 1998, p. 172 and 176–177. Theophylact Simocatta's story, however, is no more than a cliché, designed to emphasize that barbarians could have had access to high-tech siegecraft only through traitors. More important, the story

586 on the basis of a better fit of this event into the general picture of Avar-Byzantine relations in the 580s. In 586, as well as in 597, the bulk of the Avar forces led by the qagan were far from Thessalonica. But in the 590s, most, if not all, of the operations of the Avar-Byzantine war took place in the northern part of the Balkans. The 580s are the only period in which the Avars are known to have reached the southern regions of the Balkans.²¹

Attacks on these regions resumed only during Heraclius' early regnal years. In distant Spain, Isidore of Seville knew that at the beginning of the reign, the Persians had conquered Syria and Egypt, and the Slavs had taken Greece from the Romans. It is difficult to visualize Isidore's source for this brief notice, but his association of the Slavic occupation of Greece with the loss of Syria and Egypt to the Persians, indicates that he was informed about the situation in the entire Mediterranean basin. The use of *Sclavi* instead of *Sclavini* suggests an official, arguably Constantinopolitan, source (Isidore of Seville, *Chronicle*, p. 479; Charanis 1971; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1986, p. 53–54; Marín 1991–1992, p. 225 and 228; Ivanova 1995b, p. 356–57).²² Peter Charanis insisted that Isidore's notion of *Graecia* was very vague and might have referred to what used to be known as Illyricum, rather than to Greece proper. This might indeed be the case for Isidore, but certainly does not apply to the unknown author of Book II of the *Miracles of St Demetrius*. He knew that before attacking Thessalonica, the Slavs had devastated Thessaly and its islands, the islands of Greece, the Cyclades, Achaia, Epirus, and the most part of Illyricum, as well as parts of Asia. The reference to both Illyricum and Greece makes it clear that there is no confusion (*Miracles of St Demetrius* II 1.179).²³

clearly refers only to Avars, while Archbishop John describes an attack by an army of Sclavenes and other barbarians, which, though obeying the orders of the qagan, was not led by the qagan himself and apparently did not include any Avar troops.

²¹ In addition, Archbishop John explains that the attack was ordered by the qagan, because he wanted to take revenge on Emperor Maurice, after his embassy's requests had been denied. No such dealings are known to have taken place before the campaign of 597. We do know, however, that shortly after the Avar shaman Bookolabra defected to the Romans, an Avar envoy to Constantinople, who was coming for the 100,000 solidi paid as annual subsidies to the qagan, was arrested and sent to jail by the order of the enraged emperor Maurice. This event took place just before the Avar campaign along the Danube, in 585. It would make sense to identify this incident with the failed negotiations referred to by Archbishop John as causing the attack on Thessalonica. See Barišić 1953, p. 57–67; Lemerle 1981, p. 49–69. See also Waldmüller 1976, p. 123; Weithmann 1978, p. 87; Popović 1975, p. 450–451, 1978, p. 622, and 1981, p. 132; Yannopoulos 1980, p. 339; Whitby 1988, p. 117–118; Ivanova 1995a, p. 186–187. For the arrest of the Avar envoy, see Theophylact Simocatta I 8.7–10.

²² In the *Continuatio hispana*, written in 754, the raid is dated to Heraclius' fourth regnal year, but the source for this entry is not Isidore (Szádeczky-Kardoss 1986, p. 54; Ivanova 1995b, p. 355). For *Sclavi* as an ethnic name originating in Constantinople, see Curta 2001, p. 45–46.

²³ For Book II of the *Miracles of St Demetrius*, see Koder 1986, p. 530–531. For an unconvincing

To the author of Book II, the Slavs were nothing else but savage, brutish, and, more important, heathen barbarians. On the other hand, one gets the impression that the Slavs were a familiar presence. They are repeatedly called “our Slavic neighbors.” They lived so close to the city, that after the imperial troops chased them from the coastal region, the inhabitants of Thessalonica – men, women, and children – walked to their abandoned villages and carried home all provisions left behind. In contrast to Archbishop John’s account in Book I, Book II provides a more detailed image of the Slavs. Its author knew, for instance, that the army of the Slavs besieging Thessalonica comprised units of archers, warriors armed with slings, lancers, soldiers carrying shields, and warriors with swords. He also provided the names of no less than seven Slavic tribes living in the vicinity of Thessalonica (*Miracles of St Demetrius* II 3.219; II 3.222; II 4.231; II 4. 262; II 4.279–280; II 4.254; II 5.289. For a list of five tribes, see II 1.179; for other tribes, see II 4.232). Book II is based primarily on oral sources, especially those of refugees from Balkan cities abandoned in the early 600s, such as Naissus or Serdica. However, there is also evidence that the author used written sources, such as the annals or a chronicle of the city. Indeed, Book II has fewer miracles and miraculous deeds than Book I and seems to have relied more heavily on documentary material. Its author wrote shortly after the events narrated (*Miracles of St Demetrius* II 2.200; see Lemerle 1979, p. 174 with n. 19).²⁴ Unlike Archbishop John, the author of Book II was more concerned with facts supporting his arguments and often referred to contemporary events, known from other sources. His mention of “July 25 of the fifth indiction” and of the emperor’s war with the Saracens makes it possible to date the siege of Thessalonica precisely to July 25, 677. Book II must have been written, therefore, at some point during the last two decades of the seventh century (*Miracles of St Demetrius* II 4.255; Lemerle 1979, p. 34 and 1981, p. 172; Ivanova 1995a, p. 200 and 203).²⁵

Unfortunately, the first attack on Thessalonica by Slavs previously raiding Greece is impossible to date with any precision. We are only told that it occurred under the episcopate of John, the author of Book I. The description of the territories ravaged by Sclavenes before they turned against Thessalonica is viewed by many as fitting into the picture of Heraclius’ early regnal years, snapshots of which are given by George the Pisidian or Isidore of Seville. In particular, the fact that the author of Book II specifically refers to maritime raids on canoes reminds one of what George of Pisidia

attempt to show that the Slavs could not have possibly reached the Cyclades on their canoes, see Moniaros 1995–1996, p. 285–302.

²⁴ For the use of city annals or chronicle, see Lemerle 1981, p. 84. For the use of administrative sources, see Beshevliev 1970, p. 287–288. The author of Book II specifically refers to iconographic sources (II 1.194).

²⁵ According to Ivanova, since the author of Book II refers to a numerous Slavic population living near Bizye, at a short distance from Constantinople (II 4. 238), he must have finished his work only after Emperor Justinian II’s campaign of 688.

has to say about the "Sclavene wolves" (*Miracles of St Demetrius* II 1.179; see also II 4.253 and 254; George of Pisidia, *Bellum Avaricum* 197–201; Ivanov 1995a, p. 66–67).²⁶ Historians agree, therefore, in dating this attack to the first decade of Heraclius' reign. For the first time, we are told that the Sclavenes brought with them their families, for "they had promised to establish them in the city after its conquest" (*Miracles of St Demetrius* II 1.180). This suggests that they were coming from the surrounding countryside, for the author of Book II used "Sclavenes" as an umbrella-term for a multitude of tribes, some of which he knew by name: Drugubites, Sagudates, Belegezites, Baiunetes, and Berzetes.²⁷ There are several cross-references to most of these tribes in Book II. It is hard to believe, however, that those tribes were responsible for the devastation of the islands of Thessaly, the Cyclades, of most of Illyricum, and of parts of Asia.²⁸ There are two other "lists of provinces" in Book II of the *Miracles of St Demetrius*, one of which betrays an administrative source.²⁹ It is therefore likely that, in describing a local event – the attack of the Drugubites, Sagudates, Belegezites, Baiunetes, and Berzetes on Thessalonica – of relatively minor significance, the author of Book II framed it against a broader historical and administrative background, in order to make it appear as of greater importance. When all the other provinces and cities were falling, Thessalonica alone, under the protection of St. Demetrius, was capable of resistance. As in 586, the siege itself did not last more than a week. Unlike the siege of 586, however, the Sclavenes did not give up their idea of establishing themselves in Thessalonica after its conquest. More important, they now called upon the qagan for assistance. They offered rich presents and promised him much more provided that he would help them capture the city. These Sclavenes were certainly not subjects of the qagan. They were negotiating an alliance with the Avars as equals. That other Sclavenes, however, were still obeying the orders of the qagan is shown by the composition of the army the qagan eventually sent to Thessalonica (*Miracles of St*

²⁶ Barišić 1953, p. 86–95 dated the siege to 616, Lemerle 1981, p. 91–94 to 615. See also Ivanova 1995a, p. 191.

²⁷ For the multitude of tribes, see II 1.179. For the location of the various tribes, see Lemerle 1981, p. 89–90.

²⁸ However, there is independent evidence that the Sclavenes raided the islands in the Aegean. The evidence is a brief entry in the Syrian *Chronicon Miscellaneum* (also known as *Liber Chalifarum*), a compilation of various sources with different authors, which was preserved in an eighth-century manuscript. According to this entry probably written in the 600s, the Slavs raided Crete and other islands in the year 934 of the Seleucid era (A.D. 623). See Krivov 1995, p. 517. No evidence exists, however, to substantiate Antoine Bon's suggestion (1950, p. 13) that the Slavs raiding Crete came from Peloponnesus. The tendency among Greek historians is to regard the Slavic seaborne raids with exaggerated suspicion. See, for instance, Moniaros 1995–1996.

²⁹ For lists of provinces, see II 2.197 and II 5.284.

Demetrius II 2.197–198).³⁰ The siege of Thessalonica was definitely not an event of major importance. Even the author of Book II was aware that nobody knew about it, not even the emperor (*Miracles of St Demetrius* II 2.210). We are not told who that emperor was, but he must have been Heraclius, for the siege occurred not long after the one described in the first homily of Book II. Indeed, two years after being offered the alliance of the Slavene tribes who had failed in capturing Thessalonica, the qagan marched against the city. The siege must have taken place in 617 or 618, at the latest (*Miracles of St Demetrius* II 2.198; see Lemerle 1981, p. 99–100; Pohl 1988, p. 242–243).

Almost nothing is known about seventh-century developments in southern Greece. Theophanes mentions Emperor Constans II's campaign of 656/7 against *Sklavinia*, and his account is confirmed by independent, though much later, Syrian sources.³¹ Despite Setton's claims to the contrary (Setton 1950, p. 523), the Slavic polity was most likely located in the hinterland of Constantinople, not in central Greece. Six or seven years later, however, on his way to Italy the emperor stopped in Athens, perhaps for the winter months.³² By contrast, the situation in northern Greece is well documented in Book II of the *Miracles of St Demetrius*. The fourth miracle is an extremely valuable source for the seventh-century Balkan Slavs and without this text there would be very little to say. The unknown author of Book II describes what might have been, in Theophanes' words, a powerful *Sklavinia*, that

³⁰ The Slavenes attacked on the fourth day (II 1.185) and the decisive confrontation took place on that same day.

³¹ For Syrian sources, see Ditten 1993, p. 210–211. For the common source used by both Theophanes Confessor and Pseudo-Dionysios of Tell Mahre, see Pigulevskaia 1967, p. 56–57; Graebner 1978, p. 44. For *Sklaviniai*, see Litavrin 1984. Such polities seem to have represented a serious threat, judging from the fact that this successful campaign was accompanied by the transfer of large numbers of Slavene prisoners to Asia Minor. The Georgian continuation of John Moschus' *Leimonarion*, preserved in a ninth-century manuscript, mentions a number of Slavic villages on the western coast of Asia Minor. See Ivanov 1995b, p. 511–513. Furthermore, when in 663/4 the Muslim general Abd al-Rahman b. Khalid b. al Walid led a particularly successful raid against Byzantium, 5,000 Slavene soldiers deserted from the Byzantine army and later settled in the region of Apameia, in Syria. See Theophanes, p. 348; tr. C. Mango, p. 487; Graebner 1975, p. 41. The Syrian Slavs seem to have been a familiar presence by A.D. 700, as the Muslim poet al-Ahtal (d. 710) used the golden-haired Slavs as a metaphor for danger. See Kalinina 1995, p. 508–509.

³² *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. T. Mommsen, (Berlin, 1898), p. 186: "Huius temporibus venit Constantinus Augustus de regia urbe per litoraria in Athenas et exinde Taranto." Paul the Deacon's account of Constans II's campaign (*History of the Lombards* V 6) is based on the biography of Pope Vitalian in the *Liber Pontificalis*. As a consequence, he too claims that the emperor marched overland from Constantinople. Since communication by land between Constantinople and Thessalonica was re-established only under Constantine IV, it is unlikely that Constans crossed through southern Thrace and Macedonia to reach Athens. See Stratos 1975, p. 171; Yannopoulos 1980, p. 343; Hunger 1990, p. 49. Several Western sources indicate that Athens was still known as a center of learning. A letter of 748 from Pope Zacharias to St. Boniface

of the Rynchines led by “king” Perbundos. Other groups of Sclavenes existed in the vicinity of Thessalonica. There were also Sclavenes in the Strymon valley by the time the king of the Rynchines was arrested and executed, and the Sagudates allied themselves with the Rynchines against Thessalonica. A third tribe, the Drugubites, joined the alliance. The ensuing siege of the city is to be dated to July 25, 677, because of a clear reference to “July 25 of the fifth indiction.” The Sclavenes appear as better organized than in any of the preceding sieges, with an army of special units of archers and warriors armed with slings, spears, shields, and swords. In a long story most likely derived from an oral account, the author of Book II mentions a Slavene craftsman building a siege machine. He also mentions Slavene tribes living at a considerable distance and not taking part in the Slavene alliance against Thessalonica. The Belegezites, who lived near Thebes and Demetrias, even supplied the besieged city with grain (*Miracles of St Demetrius* II 3.219; 3.222; 4.231; 4.242; 4.255; 4.255; 4.262; 4.271–276).³³ The author of Book II also refers to Slavic pirates raiding as close to Constantinople as the island of Proconnesus. The emperor (whose name is not given) eventually decided to send an army to Thrace and to the “land on the opposite side,” against the Strymonian Slavs. Since the siege can be dated to 677, and we are specifically told that prior to the siege the emperor was preparing for war against the Arabs, this expedition against the *Sklaviniai* of southern Macedonia must have been ordered by Constantine IV. The successful campaign took place in 678, shortly after the failure of the Arab blockade of Constantinople (*Miracles of St Demetrius* II 4.277; 4.278; 4.232).³⁴ As a consequence, it was possible for the archbishop of Thessalonica to participate in the Sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople (680/1), together with the bishops of Athens, Argos, Lacedaemona, and Corinth (Riedinger 1979, p. 8 and 14).³⁵

(MGH *Epistulae* 3:357) calls Theodore of Tarsus, the archbishop of Canterbury (668–690), “Greco-Latinus ante philosophus et Athenis eruditus.” However, Bede (*Historia ecclesiastica* 4.1) only knew that Theodore had a thorough command of Greek. A. Savvides’ claim that Theodore was teaching in the School of Athens and was brought to Italy by Constans II in 651 or 652 has no basis in the existing evidence (see Savvides 1987–1989, p. 101). A tenth- or eleventh-century entry in the *Synaxarion of Constantinople* mentions a trip that St. Stephen of Sougdaia (Surozh) made in the mid-eighth century to Athens, where he conversed and discussed at length with “traditional philosophers and orators.” However, this information cannot be found in the saint’s *Life* preserved in a Russian version of the fifteenth century. See Vasil’evskii 1915, p. 73 and 77–78. According to the eleventh-century *Gesta episcoporum Cameracensium* (ed. by L. C. Bethmann, MGH SS 7:409), St. Ghislenuus, an Athenian by birth, had studied philosophy in Athens. See Herrin 1973, p. 77–78 and 121 with nn. 52 and 53; Browning 1984, p. 299–300. Despite claims to the contrary, it is very likely that mention of study in Athens was, in all three cases, a *topos*.

³³ For supplies of grain from the Belegezites, see II 4.254 and 268. The Drugubites too supplied food to Kuver and his people (II 5. 289).

³⁴ For the date of Constantine IV’s campaign, see Lemerle 1981, p. 131–133; Korres 1999, p. 163.

³⁵ The presence of the five bishops in Constantinople is often interpreted as indicating that Corinth,

With Book II of the *Miracles of St Demetrius* we come to the end of a long series of contemporary accounts on the early Slavs in the Balkans. None of the subsequent sources is based on autopsy and all could be referred to as “histories,” relying entirely on written, older sources. Ever since Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, modern approaches to the history of early medieval Greece have been considerably influenced by one particular text: *De Thematibus*, a work associated with the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus.³⁶ There is not much material relevant to the seventh or eighth centuries, but chapter 6 was long viewed, together with the *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, as a crucial piece of evidence for the Slavic presence in Greece. According to the Porphyrogenitus, during the reign of Constantine V (741–775), the entire country “was slavonicized and turned barbarian,” as an indirect consequence of the plague of 746 that wiped out the native population and made room for the newcomers (Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Thematibus*, 6, ed. A. Pertusi p. 91; see Maricq 1952, p. 338–340).³⁷ This has become the key source for advocates of a late Slavic settlement in Greece (Zakythinos 1945, p. 94; Karayannopoulos 1971, p. 460; Stratos 1975, p. 180; see also Setton 1950, p. 510). Scholars paid comparatively less attention to another chapter, in which Emperor Constantine VII refers to measures taken by Justinian II in 688 or 689. Following his

Argos, Athens, and Lacedaemona were, like Thessalonica, under Byzantine control (Popović 1986, p. 119). The bishop of Athens may well have been that Andrew, whose death in 693 is mentioned in a graffito on a Parthenon column (Laurent 1943, p. 63; Lilie 1999, p. 120). Two other bishops of Athens, Theocharistos (d. 702) and John (d. 713), are known from graffiti on the Parthenon column (Lilie 2001, p. 337, and 2000, p. 253). At the Council of 680/1, three bishops, Gaudentius, Aurelianus, and Cyriacus represented the Istrian sees of Tergeste, Parentium, and Pula, respectively (Bratož 1994, p. 68). The number of Balkan bishops who participated in the Quinisext Council of 692 is comparatively larger, but there are no bishops of Athens, Corinth, Argos, or Lacedaemona. According to Panayotis Yannopoulos (1993, p. 395), the Greek bishops did not attend, because neither the pope, nor the suffragan bishops of the Illyrian diocese participated in that council. However, at least one Illyrian see (Dyrrachium) was represented at the council, together with those of Thessalonica, Stobi, Edessa, Amphipolis, Philippi, and Ainos, some of which, at least in theory, were still under papal jurisdiction. See Popović 1986, p. 123; for the bishop of Stobi as an *episcopus in gentibus*, see Bratož 1998, p. 597–601. On the other hand, an unknown bishop of Corinth was one of the three churchmen whom Patriarch Paul III (688–694) sent to Rome for the trial of Gregory of Agrigente (Grumel 1972, no. 316; Dunn 1977, p. 73).

³⁶ *De Thematibus* is often dated after Emperor Constantine’s death, but recent studies suggest that its final redaction, if not composition, may well be associated with the reign of Leo VI. See Lounghis 1973, p. 304–305; Pratsch 1994, p. 130–131. For Paparrigopoulos’ use of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, see Veloudis 1970, p. 57.

³⁷ In 1941, this passage reminded Max Vasmer (1941, p. 15) of current Nazi concerns. According to him, the “Slavonization” of the country was to be understood “wie man heute jemand von einer deutschen Stadt behauptete, sie sei ‘ganz verjudet’ gewesen.” For a different, but unconvincing interpretation of this passage, see Amantos 1939–1943, p. 217; Tsaras 1971.

defeat by the Bulgars in a mountain pass near Philippopolis (present-day Plovdiv), Emperor Justinian II settled groups of “Scythians” around the gorges of the river Struma, thus laying the foundations of the Strymon kleisoura, later to become the theme by the same name (Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Thematibus*, 3, p. 89).³⁸ Many historians believed the “Scythians” to be either Slavs or Bulgars. To be sure, a tenth-century scholium on Strabo’s *Geographia* does indeed refer to “Scythian Slavs.”³⁹ However, Peter Charanis first showed that Constantine Porphyrogenitus used “Scythians” in reference not to Slavs, but to steppe nomads, such as Khazars or Magyars (Charanis 1961, p. 143–144 with n. 14).⁴⁰ Judging from the existing evidence, the creation of a Bulgar qaganate shortly before 700 drastically altered the balance of power in the northern Balkans, while driving *Sklaviniai* into the orbit of the new state. Garrisoned outposts in the valley of the Lower Struma were thus designed to protect against attacks from the north the major road across the Balkans from Constantinople to Thessalonica, the Via Egnatia. A similar system of defense existed at that time at the opposite end of the Balkans, in Istria. Long time under the authority of the exarch of Ravenna, Istria seems to have become in the

³⁸ The gorges of the river Struma around which Justinian settled his “Scythians” have been located between Roupel and Melenikon, two villages north of Sidirokastron and south of Melnik, near the modern Bulgarian-Greek border: Karayannopoulos 1989, p. 689–690; Stavridou-Zafraza 1995, p. 313–315; for a different location (straits of Kavala), see Oikonomides 1996a, p. 10 with n. 5. For the theme of Strymon, see Rajković 1958. Constantine may have projected into the past an institution of his own lifetime. However, his use of *kleisoura* to describe Justinian’s establishment of “Scythians” in the Struma valley may not be an anachronism. The first frontier districts organized into “passes,” each under a kleisourarch, appeared in Cilicia under Emperor Heraclius (Ditten 1993, p. 175; Haldon 1997, p. 220). Some believe that, in addition to “Scythians,” Justinian II also settled 12,000 Mardaites in Peloponnesus, Cephalonia, and Epirus: Sathas 1883, p. lxxviii–lxxii; Amantos 1932, p. 135–136; Ferluga 1984, p. 57; Treadgold 1992, p. 116–118. However, according to Theophanes (tr. C. Mango, p. 506), the 12,000 Mardaites were moved from Lebanon to Asia Minor, not to the Balkans. The earliest mention of the Mardaites in relation to Peloponnesus dates to the ninth century, when they were serving in the Byzantine fleets designed to ward off Arab attacks on Sicily: Theophanes Continuatus V 63 and 70, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1838), p. 303 and 311; Bury 1912, p. 378 with n. 4 and 5; Ditten 1993, p. 155–156. In his *De Ceremoniis* (II 45, PG 112:1233, 1237), Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus referred to the Mardaites in relation to Nicopolis, Cephalonia, and Peloponnesus. See Bon 1951, p. 75–76; Ahrweiler 1966, p. 399.

³⁹ *Geographi Graeci minores*, ed. K. Müller, vol. 2 (Paris, 1861), p. 574. It has been suggested that the author of the scholium was either Photius or Arethas of Caesarea: Diller 1954, p. 43–44 and 48; Lemerle 1971, p. 218 and 233.

⁴⁰ For Scythians as Slavs, see Lemerle 1945, p. 125; Ferluga 1976, p. 45. For Scythians as Bulgars, see Pliakov 1989, p. 105; see also Ditten 1993, p. 172–173. For Scythians as nomads, see Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Thematibus*, 1, p. 85; *De Administrando Imperio* 13.24–28, 53.126 and 129, ed. Gy. Moravcsik (Washington, 1949), p. 66 and 264. According to Theophanes, Justinian had directed his campaign against both Bulgaria and the *Sklaviniai*. This may indicate that the *Sklaviniai* of 688/9 were clients of the Bulgar qagan.

late seventh century a separate administrative unit, much like a *kleisoura*, with its own troops under the command of a local *magister militum* (Ferluga 1992, p. 180; Torcellan 1986, p. 22; Marušić 1995, p. 9; see also Margetić 1992).⁴¹ Like the mountain outposts on the Struma valley, the network of *castella* in northern Istria was designed to control access from Lombard or Avar-held territory to the north (Marušić 1995, p. 9).⁴² The functioning of a similar *kleisoura* is described in chapter 29 of Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus' *De Administrando Imperio* that deals with Dalmatia. "For near the sea, beneath that same city [i.e., Spalato], lies a city called Salona, which is half large as Constantinople, and here all the Romani would muster and be equipped and thence start out and come to the frontier pass (*kleisoura*), which is four miles from this very city, and is called Kleisa to this day, from its closing in those who pass that way." (Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio* 29, p. 123)⁴³ The *kleisoura* thus closed access from across an unknown river, most probably the neighboring Cetina. Like the *kleisourai* of Istria and the Struma valley, Kleisa was designed to prevent attacks on the coastal cities and roads by "Slavs on the far side of the river, who were also called Avars." Unlike the Istrian and Strymonian *kleisourai*, if we are to believe Emperor Constantine's (or his source's) story, Kleisa did not prevent the "Slavs and Avars" from sacking Salona in the disguise of Romani (Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio* 29, p. 124–125).⁴⁴

The late seventh century also witnessed the first major administrative re-arrange-

⁴¹ Besides *militēs alii per Histriam* mentioned by Paul the Deacon (*History of the Lombards* V 12, p. 152), the *magister militum* had a small number of soldiers (about 60) under his direct command, all of whom were local recruits (Margetić 1994, p. 22; Cunja 1996, p. 17). By the late sixth or early seventh century, Trieste (modern Rijeka) had become a separate administrative and military border unit, the *numerus tergestinus* (Ferluga 1987, p. 168). Similar defensive zones are known from frontier areas of Italy. A system of *kastra* stretched across the Apennines northeast of Luni to the Byzantine possessions in southern Emilia. Another developed along the Via Amerina and, much like Justinian II's *kleisoura* in the Struma valley, was designed to protect the main road from Rome to Ravenna: Brown 1984, p. 43; Zanini 1998, p. 209–290; Stranieri 2000, p. 351 with n. 134.

⁴² Istria remained under Byzantine control until the Lombard conquest of the Exarchate of Ravenna. Under King Desiderius, the entire peninsula was under Lombard control. A letter of the patriarch John of Grado to Pope Stephen III (MGH Epistulae 3:172) describes the hostility of the Istrians towards Lombards and their loyalty to Byzantium. Shortly after Charlemagne's conquest of the Lombard kingdom, Istria reverted to Byzantine control before the implementation of Frankish control at some point between 780 and 787. See Vergottini 1977, p. 1291–1292; Ferluga 1987, p. 165.

⁴³ The mountain pass in question is Klis, near the present-day city by the same name. The accurate information about the hinterland of Salona points to a local account later incorporated into chapter 29 (Katičić 1982, p. 41–42; Jakšić 1984, p. 320).

⁴⁴ For *castella* in the vicinity of the Klis *kleisoura*, see Jakšić 1984, p. 324. Note that to Constantine Porphyrogenitus, Salona itself was a *kastron*, not a *polis*.

ments in the southern Balkans. Shortly following the creation of the theme of Thrace in the 680s, a second theme must have already been in place when, in 695, Leontius, a former general of the Anatolian theme (Anatolikon) was appointed *strategos* of Hellas (Theophanes, p. 368; tr. C. Mango, p. 514; Ostrogorski 1952, p. 65; Stratos 1980, p. 70).⁴⁵ George Ostrogorski placed the theme in Peloponnesus, but Peter Charanis demonstrated that Hellas consisted of eastern-central Greece (including Attica), with a northern extension into Thessaly (Ostrogorski 1952, p. 65; Zakythinos 1965, p. 55; Yannopoulos 1993, p. 393; Avramea 1997, p. 37; Kalaitzakis 1996, p. 622–623; see also Charanis 1970, p. 4; Koder and Hild 1976, p. 57).⁴⁶ The evidence of seals shows that the theme was an administrative unit, not just an army, despite considerable naval forces concentrated in Hellas shortly after Leontius' appointment (Theophanes, p. 405, tr. C. Mango, p. 560; Oikonomides 1994, p. 111).⁴⁷ According to Theophanes, in 725, “the inhabitants of Hellas and the Cyclades” rose against Leo III and proclaimed a new emperor, Cosmas. The rebels sent a large fleet to Constantinople under the command of the turmarch of the theme, Agallianos.⁴⁸ Following the defeat of the rebels and the reorganization of the

⁴⁵ For the creation of the theme of Thrace, see Lilie 1977, p. 27. Thrace had been the basis for Justinian II's operations against Bulgars and Slavs, while interruption of communications between the theme and the city of Thessalonica prompted the emperor to create the military outpost in the Struma valley.

⁴⁶ The signature of the bishop of Corinth who attended as papal legate the Sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople (681) suggests he represented the “province” of Hellas (*Hellenon chora*), perhaps an early indication of the thematic organization in Greece (Avramea 1997, p. 38, 172 and 185; Ohme 1989, p. 199–201; for later date between 693 and 695, see Živković 1999, p. 143). Though nothing is known about the extent of the theme, it is possible that it included northeastern Peloponnesus as well. Much controversy surrounds the location of the theme's headquarters, in either Athens (Zakythinos), Thebes (Koder and Hild), or Corinth (Avramea).

⁴⁷ For the sphragistic evidence, see F. Curta, “L'administration byzantine dans les Balkans pendant la ‘grande brèche’: le témoignage des sceaux,” *Revue des études byzantines* (forthcoming). Judging from the existing evidence, the theme of Hellas was substantially different from those of Sardinia and Sicily that appeared just a few years later, under Emperor Tiberius III Apsimaros (698–705). The theme of Sardinia was first and foremost a military unit collecting the remnants of the Exarchate of Africa, after the conquest of Carthage by Hassan ibn al-Nu'man (697), while the theme of Sicily comprised those parts of the Exarchate of Italy that were most exposed to sea raids from Arab-held Africa (Oikonomides 1964).

⁴⁸ Turmarchs were subordinates of the *strategos* and commanders of subdivisions of the theme's army. A turmarchissa of Hellas is mentioned in a letter of Theodore the Studite (PG 99:1453–1457). Greek historians interpreted the revolt as a political crisis that created a vacuum of power, later filled by “infiltrating Slavs” (e.g., Vogiatzidis 1949, p. 256). For Agallianos, see Lilie 1999, p. 35–36. ⁴⁵ For the creation of the theme of Thrace, see Lilie 1977, p. 27. Thrace had been the basis for Justinian II's operations against Bulgars and Slavs, while interruption of communications between the theme and the city of Thessalonica prompted the emperor to create the military outpost in the Struma valley.

maritime themes, Hellas may have received land troops for the first time since its creation (Koder and Hild 1976, p. 57).⁴⁹ It is not clear what was the reason for this transfer of land troops to what has hitherto been an essentially maritime theme, but there is indirect evidence that in the early 700s the regions in the interior may have posed more serious problems than Arab sea raids.⁵⁰

Much has been made of the mention of Monemvasia, at the southernmost tip of Peloponnesus, in the story of the pilgrimage of Bishop Willibald of Eichstätt to the Holy Land. The author of this story was a nun, Hugeburc of Heidenheim (*Vita Willibaldi*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, MGH SS 15: 80–117; see Vasmer 1941, p. 15; Kalligas 1990, p. 40).⁵¹ The author claims that, being “an unworthy Saxon woman, [...] stained by the frailty and weakness” of her sex and “supported by neither pretense to wisdom nor exalted aspiration to great power,” she wrote only what she was told by Willibald himself “in dictation from his own mouth” on a certain Tuesday, June 23, “the day before the summer solstice” (*Vita Willibaldi*, p. 86; for the English translation, see Noble and Head 1995, p. 143–144). Since Willibald died in 786 and Hugeburc’s *Hodoeporicon* must have been written not long before that, the year in which June 23 fell on a Tuesday, one day before the summer solstice, must be 778. Although Hugeburc insists that, “being an unlearned woman,” she did not “undertake to examine in a literary form” Willibald’s story, this seems to be the worn topos of “*mea parvitas*,” so typical for the hagiographic genre. Recent studies have shown that her intervention was significantly more substantial than just stenography of Willibald’s account (Noble and Head, p. 142).⁵² Accompa-

⁴⁹ Similar changes were taking place in the 740s in the theme of Thrace, as Emperor Constantine V began moving tagmatic troops into Thrace. These were the troops that sustained the emperor’s successful campaigns against the Bulgars in the 760s and 770s.

⁵⁰ Mu’waiya began to build a fleet in the late 640s and the first attacks on the Aegean islands date back to the 650s: Cyprus (653/4), Rhodes (653/4), Kos (653/4), and Crete (653/4). No such raids are known in the western Aegean and on the Peloponnesian coasts (Stratos 1975, p. 44–46; Huxley 1988, p. 9–10; Moniaros 1998, p. 137). In the early eighth century, some islands, at least, seem to have been in Byzantine hands. In 653, Pope Martin I was kept prisoner on the island of Naxos on his way to Constantinople, after being arrested by the exarch of Ravenna. See Jaffé 1885, p. 232–233. In 710, summoned to Constantinople to discuss controversial decisions of the Quinisext Council, Pope Constantine I met the *strategos* of the Carabisian theme on the island of Keos. See *Liber Pontificalis*, p. 223: “Unde egressi, partes Graeciae coniungentes, in insula quae dicitur Cea, occurrit Theophilus patricius et stratigos Caravisianorum, cum summo honore suscepit”. See also Frazee 1993; Hendy 1985, p. 660; Avramea 1997, p. 100.

⁵¹ For Hugeburc’s life and work, see Bischoff 1931, p. 387–388; Gottschaler 1973; Leonardi 1989, p. 23–26. For Willibald’s pilgrimage, see Guth 1982 and McCormick 2001, p. 129–134.

⁵² For Hugeburc’s *Hodoeporicon* as stenography of Willibald’s own account, see Ronin 1995, p. 440. However, it has been demonstrated that Hugeburc’s interventions can be relatively easily distinguished stylistically from Willibald’s own account (Gottschaler 1973, p. 89).

nied by his father and brother, Willibald set out on his pilgrimage in 722. One year later, they all sailed from Syracuse and “reached the city of Monemvasia, in the land of Slavina.”⁵³ That Willibald traveled directly from Sicily to Monemvasia is a clear indication that in the early eighth century, communication lines between Constantinople and the theme of Sicily were established along the coastal areas of southern Peloponnesus.⁵⁴ The sojourn in Monemvasia does not seem to have been long, but the fact that Hugeburc reports the place as being “in the land of Slavina” is often interpreted as an indication of a Slavic presence in the hinterland (Huxley 1988, p. 9; McCormick 2001, p. 131 and 508). The Latin word *Slawinia* is a clear, though by no means unique, calque of the Greek form *Sklavinia*, which Theophanes used for the polities attacked by Constans II in 656 and by Justinian II in 688. As such, the word betrays a Constantinopolitan, not Peloponnesian, source for Willibald’s account (Ronin 1995, p. 440).⁵⁵ Whatever or whoever must have been in the hinterland of Monemvasia, it is significant that Hugeburc (or Willibald) employed the official terminology in use in Constantinople. As a consequence, the mention of Slavina betrays a distant perspective, not an eyewitness account.

By contrast, the apocryphal *Life of St. Pancratius*, the first bishop of Taormina, may have indeed employed several eyewitness accounts. Ever since the publication of Vasil’ev’s influential article, this hagiographic source has been associated with the first phase of the Iconoclastic Crisis (718–787). Recent studies, however, have persuasively argued that its author, Evagrius, was writing shortly after the introduction of the thematic organization in Sicily (709/10), possibly before 695 (Usener 1902, p. 353; see Vasil’ev 1898, p. 438; Capaldo 1983, p. 5–6; Olajos 1994, p. 107–108; Litavrin 1995, p. 334; for an earlier date, see Stallman 1986, p. 156 and 247).⁵⁶ Evagrius placed the life of Pancratius, a disciple of St. Peter who lived in the first century A.D., in the context of his

⁵³ *Vita Willibaldi*, MGH SS 15:93: “Et inde navigantes, venerunt ultra mare Adria ad urbem Manafasiam in Slawinia terrae.” From Monemvasia, Willibald, his father and his brother went to Chios, “leaving Corinth on the port side.” Although they did not stop in Corinth, the city seems to have been an important port on the way to Constantinople. In 722, however, the three pilgrims did not go to the capital city. Instead, they visited several cities on the western coast of Asia Minor (Ephesus, Hierapolis, and Miletus), before reaching Cyprus. Five years later, the pilgrims returned from the Holy Land via Constantinople, where they remained for two years, before sailing back to Syracuse “with the envoys of the pope and the emperor.”

⁵⁴ For the early medieval use of this sea-lane linking Rome and Constantinople via Sicily and around Greece, see now McCormick 2001, p. 502–508.

⁵⁵ However, the term *Sclavinia* also appears in contemporary Carolingian sources (Antoljak 1964, p. 11–12; Bertels 1987, p. 160–161).

⁵⁶ Evagrius’s portrait of Bonifatius, the prefect (*hypatos*) of Taormina, as a duke reminds one of Theodore, the duke of Naples, or of the eighth-century duke of Sardinia, Theodotus. On the other hand, Evagrius provides interesting details about the mustering of troops in Taormina by means of an *adnoumion*, a term that “makes sense only in the context of the thematic system with soldiers distributed and settled in the provinces,” since the word is not found

own lifetime. Pancratius' mission of conversion is thus set against the background of the first Arab attacks on Sicily, in the late seventh or early eighth century. One of Pancratius' converts was a local *hegemon* named Bonifatius. Portrayed as the *strategos* of the Sicilian theme residing in the *praetorium* in Taormina, Bonifatius was the supreme commander of the army, which he led in successful campaigns against "tyrants" in Sicily or barbarians abroad. One of them took the Sicilian soldiers across the sea into the regions of Dyrrachium and Athens. Upon returning to Sicily, Bonifatius is confronted by St. Pancratius, who claims that his prisoners look like Christians. Bonifatius assures him they were Avars, who are to be distributed among the soldiers to be baptized, and are to be taught Greek and Latin, the languages in use at that time in Taormina (Stallman 1986, p. 271).⁵⁷ Through the intermediary of a translator, the prisoners declared that they worshipped fire, water, and their own swords (Stallman 1986, p. 271).⁵⁸ It is hard to visualize the source Evagrius may have used for this story, but there can be no doubt about its authenticity.⁵⁹ Though the translator employed to interrogate the Avar prison-

before the introduction of the first themes (Stallman 1986, p. 240). The *Life of St. Pancratius* was known to Vasmer (1941, p. 15), but not to Charanis (1970, p. 13 with n. 49 and 22 with n. 73).

⁵⁷ Stallman observes that the Avar episode contains elements that betray Evagrius' narrative strategies. When Bonifatius presents his prisoners, the Taorminians declare that they will make the captives speak Greek and Latin and become Christians, as they have done before with Persians and Macedonians, a detail Stallman places within the "realm of the aetiological excursus," an example of Evagrius' "intention of advancing the historical importance of Taormina." According to Stallman (1986, p. 276 with n. 15), the reference to Athens in the Avar episode is a commonplace, representing an unspecific notion of a location across the Adriatic. Indeed, elsewhere in the *Life of St. Pancratius* (p. 344) "Athenians" is used as a general term. Within the Avar episode, however, Athens does not stand alone, but in association with Dyrrachium, which does not support the idea of an "unspecific location across the Adriatic." This idea also contradicts Stallman's suggestion (p. 284) that the *Life* preserves some genuine evidence of a raid by Emperor Constans II from Sicily to Greece. Stallman (p. 287) also suggests that Evagrius got a version of Theophanes' notice of Constans' campaign against *Sklavinia* (Theophanes Confessor, p. 347; tr. C. Mango, p. 484) from some unknown source, re-worked and adapted it to his own goals, while attributing it to Bonifatius. However, there is no reference to *Sklavinia* in Evagrius, while Bonifatius' captives are Avars, not Slavs. For a much later reference to Avars around Budva, north of Dyrrachium, see Kovačević 1966, p. 73.

⁵⁸ The Avar episode appears in two eleventh-century manuscripts, one from Vienna, the other from Moscow. According to both, the Avar prisoners had been captured in the provinces (*eparchiai*) of Dyrrachium and Athens. See Vasil'ev 1898, p. 416; Capaldo 1983, p. 13; Olajos 1994, p. 107–108.

⁵⁹ Nor is it possible to link this episode to the memories of Greek refugees from Peloponnesus, whom Evagrius allegedly met in Sicily (Stallman 1986, p. 273; Falkenhausen 1995, p. 361). The fact that the Avar prisoners worshipped the fire, the water, and their own swords reminds one of what Menander the Guardsman has to say about Bayan, the qagan of the Avars, who took an oath on his own sword, on the heavenly fire, and on water, that he had no plans to

ers may well have been a member of a Slavic community from Syracuse mentioned in another passage, the author of the *Life of St. Pancratius* clearly and carefully distinguished Avars from Slavs.⁶⁰

That communications between Sicily and Peloponnesus have not been disturbed by Arab raids in the early eighth century is confirmed by other, independent sources. According to Theophanes, the plague of 745/6 “traveled like a spreading fire” from Sicily and Calabria to Monemvasia, Hellas, “and the adjoining islands,” before reaching Constantinople. But the capital city seems to have been hit harder than any other region. Ten years later, Emperor Constantine V brought families from the islands, Hellas, and “the southern parts” to Constantinople, in an attempt to repopulate a city devastated by the plague (Theophanes, p. 422 and 429, tr. C. Mango, pp. 585 and 593; see Kalligas 1990, p. 43; Yannopoulos 1993, p. 391).⁶¹ In 766, he “collected artisans from different places,” and brought five hundred clay-workers from Hellas and the islands (Theophanes, p. 440; tr. C. Mango, p. 608).

Apparently, by that time, a relatively large number of Slavs lived beyond, if not inside, the borders of the theme of Hellas, as well as in the vicinity of Thessalonica. In 783, an army led by the logothete of the Swift Course, Staurakios, moved from Constantinople to Thessalonica and Hellas, “against the Sklavinian tribes,” and forced them to pay tribute to the Empire. According to Theophanes, Staurakios’ army moved into Peloponnesus and “brought back many captives and much booty to the Roman Empire” (Theophanes, pp. 456–457; tr. C. Mango, p. 630).⁶² At that time, at least three

attack the Romans (Menander the Guardsman, fr. 63; Olajos 1994, p. 110). No evidence exists, however, that Evagrius read Menander’s work. On the other hand, by casting the Avar episode as a parallel to Pancratius’ later confrontation to Aculinus and to St. Marcian’s challenge to the pagans, Evagrius may have been encouraged to complete the *synkrisis* by attributing temples and idols to the Avars (Stallman 1986, p. 271).

⁶⁰ For the Slavic settlement near Syracuse, see Stallman 1986, p. 355. Evagrius attributes the information about the Slavic settlement to a written source, the *historiographoi*, but as Stallman notes, this may well be just one of Evagrius’ authenticating techniques. For Evagrius’ distinction between Slavs and Avars, see Capaldo 1983, pp. 8 and 13; *contra*: Szádeczky-Kardoss 1980, p. 309–310; Olajos 1994, p. 100.

⁶¹ Yannopoulos (1993, p. 391) regards the transfer of population from Hellas to Constantinople as indicating a considerable demographic growth in Greece. However, in the mid-eighth century, those settled in restored or newly built forts in the theme of Thrace were not inhabitants of the neighboring theme of Hellas, but Christians deported from Germanicea, Sozopetra, Melitene, and other cities in Asia Minor taken by Constantine V from the Arabs. For the plague spreading along trade routes, see Rochow 1991, p. 162; Kisliger 1992, p. 105–106.

⁶² The campaign is also mentioned by Michael the Syrian (XII 4, p. 13) and the thirteenth-century chronicle of Gregory Barhebraeus, who adds that Staurakios left a garrison in “the country of Peloponnesus.” According to Barhebraeus, those conquered by Staurakios were “Arabs” (perhaps “Avars”), not Slavs. See Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography*, ed. and transl. E. A. Wallis Budge, vol. 1 (London, 1932), p. 120. Staurakios celebrated his victory in January 784, during

important Peloponnesian centers were already under imperial authority, as suggested by the participation of the bishops of Corinth, Monemvasia, and Patras in the Council of Nicaea that restored the cult of the icons (787).⁶³ Staurakios' campaign, however, had no impact on the *Sklaviniai* of northern Greece. In 799, prompted by conspirators from the theme of Hellas, Akameros, the *archon* of the Slavs of Velzetia (eastern Thessaly) attempted to release Constantine V's sons from their exile in Athens (to which they have been confined by Empress Irene), and proclaim one of them emperor. The rebels were defeated and blinded and nothing else is known about the Slavic *archon* (Theophanes, pp. 473–474, tr. C. Mango, p. 651; see Vasmer 1941, p. 16; Yannopoulos 1993, p. 350; Ditten 1993, p. 240; Ferluga 1976, p. 45; Oikonomides 1994, p. 117; for the title of *archon*, see Ferluga 1982; Ditten 1983, p. 110–111; Seibt 1999, p. 35–36).⁶⁴

Six years later, the Slavs “who were in the province of Peloponnesus, decided to revolt, and first proceeded to sack the dwellings of their neighbors, the Greeks, and gave

the hippodrome games, an indication that his campaign in the Peloponnese may have lasted until November 783, most likely in order to force the Slavs out of the mountains (Oikonomides 1999–2000, p. 61–66). Following this campaign, the emphasis in Byzantine sources shifted from Thracian and Macedonian Slavs to those of Greece (Vasmer 1945, p. 15; Ditten 1993, p. 239; Huxley 1988, p. 9).

⁶³ Six other Greek sees (Athens, Monemvasia, Oreos, Skopelos, Zakynthos, and Nikopolis) were represented at Nicaea, along with the sees of Salona, Dyrrachium, and Kotor. In 787, Athens and Corinth were both metropolitan sees. See Laurent 1943, p. 69–70; Yannopoulos 1993, p. 395 and 398–399; Browning 1984, p. 301; Avramea 1997, p. 188. The presence of three bishops from the western Balkans may indicate that the transfer in 754 of the diocese of Illyricum from papal authority to that of the patriarch of Constantinople was followed by large-scale measures of reorganization of ecclesiastical life on the Dalmatian coast (Ferluga 1976, p. 45; Dragojlović 1989, p. 214). The earliest inscriptions from this region post-date the Council of Nicaea by a few decades. The date of the ciborium inscription of the St. Triphon church in Kotor falls within the reign of Nicephorus I (802–811), while the inscription of Guzma from the church in Ulcinj mentions Leo V (813–820) and his son Constantine. A similar date was advanced for several other churches in the area: St. Peter in Bijela (Boka Kotorska), St. Thomas in Prčanj, St. Stephen in Grbalj, St. George in Janjina, St. John in Lopud, and St. Mary in Budva: Kovačević 1963, p. 148–150; Kovačević 1965, p. 67 and 69; Dragojlović 1990, p. 202. The reorganization of the church life on the Dalmatian coast coincides with the creation of the themes of Cephalaria and Dyrrachium (Wasilewski 1980, p. 36; Rajković 1997, p. 221–232).

⁶⁴ Judging from the existing evidence, around year 800, the most dangerous Slavs were those of Greece, not those of Thrace. In 784, Empress Irene toured Thrace in the company of her tagmatic troops. She re-built Beroe (modern Stara Zagora), rebaptized Irenopolis, and reached as far west as Philippopolis (modern Plovdiv), without encountering any opposition. Shortly following this visit, at some point after 790 and before 802, the theme of Macedonia was created in western Thrace, centered in Adrianople. See Christophilopoulou 1983, p. 48. For Constantine Serantapechos, who is perhaps the strategos of Hellas who crushed the 799 revolt, see Lilie 2000, p. 547–548.

and servants of all kinds for the table; and the metropolis interferes in none of these matters, for the Slavens themselves collect the necessary fund by apportionment and subscription among their unit” (Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio* 49, p. 230–231; for the revolt of 840 and the subsequent events, see ch. 50, p. 232–233).⁷⁰

The events of 805–806 are also at the center of one of the most controversial sources for the history of the Slavs in Greece, the *Chronicle of Monemvasia*.⁷¹ But instead of the heroic resistance put up by the inhabitants of Patras assisted by St. Andrew, the *Chronicle* mentions an expedition against the Peloponnesian Slavs ordered by Emperor Nicephorus I and led by an un-named general of the Armeniakon theme, a member of the Skleros family. Unlike Constantine Porphyrogenitus, the author of the *Chronicle* believed that the events of the 805 were just an episode in a much longer history of confrontation between the “noble Hellenic race” and the barbarians. The chronicle survives in three late manuscripts. Only one of them, which is preserved at the Iberon monastery at Mount Athos and is dated to the sixteenth century, deals exclusively with the Avar invasion of Peloponnesus, the settlement of the Slavs, and the campaign ordered by Nicephorus I. The *communis opinio* is that the manuscript should be treated as the earliest version of the text, particularly because it gives the impression of a more elaborate treatment that has led to a more “scholarly” style (Charanis 1950, p. 142–143; Setton 1950, p. 516). But recent studies have shown that the Iberon manuscript uses the Byzantine system of dating, whereas the other two manuscripts use the older Alexandrine system. As a consequence, the Iberon cannot be the earliest of all three, for the Byzantine system of dating was introduced only after the Alexandrine one (Kalligas 1990, p. 13; see also Turlej 1997, p. 410 and 2001, p. 85).⁷² The *Chronicle of Monemvasia* is not a chronicle properly speaking, but a compilation of sources concerning the Slavs and referring to the foundation of the metropolitan see of Patras. Patras, and not

⁷⁰ The campaign of Theoctistus Breynnius, who came with a great number of troops from the themes of Thrace, Macedonia, and “the rest of the western provinces,” subdued all Slavs “and other insubordinates of the province of Peloponnesus,” except the Ezeritai and the Milingoi who lived in Lacedaemonia and Helos. They were only forced to pay tribute. For Theoctistus’ campaign, see Ditten (1993, p. 250–252), who believes that the Slavs who participated in 880, together with troops from the “western provinces” to the conquest of Tarento were recruited from among the Ezeritai and Milingoi. For the latter, see Malingoudis 1981, p. 18–19; Birnbaum 1986. For the relation between the subjugation of the Peloponnesian Slavs and the process of Hellenization and conversion to Christianity, see Dunn 1977, p. 81–82; Turlej 2001, p. 56–57.

⁷¹ *Contra*: Belke 1996, p. 81–96, who believes that the *Chronicle* and the scholion of Arethas, on one hand, and the account of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, on the other, refer to two different, chronologically distinct events.

⁷² The different systems of dating suggest the existence of at least two different redactions of the *Chronicle*, one represented by ms. Iberon 329, the other by mss. Kutlumus 220 and Taurinensis 329. See Kisliger 1995, p. 76–79.

them up to rapine, and next they moved against the inhabitants of the city of Patras and ravaged the plains before its walls and laid siege to itself, having with them African Saracens also” (Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio* 49, pp. 228–229).⁶⁵ With the miraculous assistance of St. Andrew, the inhabitants of Patras were able to repel the attack, even if they lacked the support of the local *strategos*, who at the time was “at the extremity of the province, in the city of Corinth.” Upon learning about the victory from the *strategos*, Emperor Nicephorus I “ordained that the foemen themselves, with all their families and relations and all who belonged to them, and all their property as well,” should be transferred in property to the church of St. Andrew in Patras.⁶⁶ According to Constantine Porphyrogenitus, who most probably had in mind the more recent revolt of the Peloponnesian Slavs of 921, the source of this account were “the older and more ancient” who handed the information down “in unwritten tradition” to those who lived after them. However, Constantine also mentions the bull (*sigillion*) of Nicephorus I, in which the emperor spelled out his order concerning the Slavs of Patras (Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio* 49, p. 230–231; see Vasmer 1941, p. 16; Ditten 1993, p. 243).⁶⁷ Judging from his account, by the time of the Slavic revolt of 805, there was already a theme of Peloponnesus, with a governor residing in Corinth.⁶⁸ The revolt itself seems to have been caused by recent events threatening the independence of the local Slavs.⁶⁹ In order to explain later revolts of the Peloponnesian Slavs and how, beginning with the mid-ninth century, the Ezeritai and the Milingoi preserved their independence, Constantine Porphyrogenitus explains that following the revolt of 805, the Slavs “maintained like hostages the military governors and the imperial agent and all the envoys from foreign nations, and they have their own waiters and cooks

⁶⁵ For Muslims (pirates?) from Ifrikiyah, see Savvides 1990, p. 48–49, and 1993, p. 371–372 with n. 8. There is no evidence to support Karl Hopf’s identification (Hopf 1867, p. 32) of these Saracens with the fleet of Humaid b. Ma’yuf, who attacked Rhodos in 807. See Charanis 1946, p. 84; Treadgold 1988, p. 148 and 408 with n. 193; see also Belke 1996, p. 90.

⁶⁶ The phrase “the Slavenes who were set apart in the metropolis” is an unfelicitous translation of *hoi aphoristhentes Sklabenoi en te metropolei*. Kresten (1977, p. 61 with n. 141a) observed that the obligations of the Slavs towards the Patras metropolitanate were most likely set by Nicephorus I’s charter, which Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus supposedly followed literally. But the source of Constantine VII’s knowledge of the Slavs during Nicephorus’ reign is the privilege of Leo VI, not Nicephorus’ *sigillion*.

⁶⁷ For Nicephorus’ *sigillion* and its authenticity, see Kresten 1977. For the Slavic revolt of 921, crushed by Krinites Arotas, the *strategos* of Peloponnesus, see *De Administrando Imperio* 50, p. 234; Jenkins 1955; Ditten 1993, p. 253. For the 805 revolt of the Slavs against Patras, see also Oikonomides 1996b, p. 71–78.

⁶⁸ The theme may have been created not long after Staurakios’ campaign of 783, as a response to the Frankish involvement in Italian affairs (Živković 1999, p. 148–154).

⁶⁹ A possible cause may be the transfer of population from Sicily into Peloponnesus and the allotment of lands at the expense of the local Slavs (Turlej 2001, p. 153).

Monemvasia, is at the center of the narrative. It has been argued, therefore, that this text may have been written in order to be used in negotiations with the metropolitan of Corinth over the status of the metropolitan of Patras.⁷³ Since the emperor Nicephorus I is referred to as “the Old, who had Staurakios as son,” the text must have been written after the reign of Nicephorus II Phocas (963–969). The author of the *Chronicle* explicitly refers to the death of Tarasius, the patriarch of Constantinople (784–806). He also calls Sirmium *Striamos*, and locates the city in Bulgaria, an indication that he wrote the *Chronicle* before the conquest of that city by Basil II, in 1018. The composition of the *Chronicle* must therefore fall within the second half of the tenth century or in the early decades of the eleventh.⁷⁴ The author drew his information from Evagrius, Theophylact Simocatta, and Theophanes.

Descriptions of the attacks of the Avars in the *Chronicle* are modelled after the description of Hunnic attacks by Procopius (*Wars* II 4.4 and II 4.9).⁷⁵ However, the account of barbarian invasions into Peloponnesus refers exclusively and explicitly to Avars, not Slavs. The Slavs only appear in the second part of the Iberon version of the text, which describes how Emperor Nicephorus I (802–811) conquered Peloponnesus and established the metropolis of Patras (Charanis 1950, p. 145; Duichev 1976, p. xlii; Kalligas 1990, p. 25; Litavrin 1995, p. 338; Pohl 1988, p. 100–101; Turlej 2001, p. 49 with n. 80). This account comes very close to a scholium written by Arethas of Caesarea on the margin of a manuscript of Nicephorus’ *Historia Syntomos* written in 932

⁷³ For the style of the *Chronicle*, see Koder 1976, p. 76. For the ecclesiastical division in Peloponnesus, see Yannopoulos 1993, p. 388–400. For the *Chronicle of Monemvasia* as a forgery of ecclesiastical origin, perpetrated by or on behalf of the metropolitan of Patras, see Setton 1950, p. 517. For the *Chronicle* as an “exposé,” an elaborate report on the circumstances leading to the establishment of the metropolis of Patras, see Turlej 1998, p. 455 with n. 23 and 2001, p. 52 (“dissertation”). As Kresten (1977, p. 68) remarks, no evidence exists that the metropolitan of Patras ever needed such a text to justify his position within the church hierarchy. According to Kresten, the *Chronicle* was a historical exposé on the origins of the tensions between the metropolitan of Patras and his Slavic subjects (*enapographomenoi*) prepared on the occasion of Emperor Leo VI’s charter for Patras.

⁷⁴ For the date of the chronicle, see Kougeas 1912, p. 477–478; Barišić 1965; Duichev 1976, p. xliii and 1980, p. 51–59. For less convincing attempts to attribute the *Chronicle* to Arethas of Caesarea and to date it to ca. 900, see Koder 1976, p. 77; Kresten 1977, p. 70–72; Belke 1996, p. 91; Pohl 1988, p. 99; Avramea 1997, p. 69. For an even earlier, but equally unconvincing, date within the first third of the ninth century, see Turlej 2001, p. 77, 82, and 84. However, Turlej is certainly right when arguing about the *Chronicle* being most likely composed in a milieu associated with the patriarchal and synodal circles in Constantinople, not in Patras.

⁷⁵ For the use of Procopius for the description of Avar attacks in the *Chronicle*, see Chrysanthopoulos 1951, p. 245–246; Turlej 2001, p. 41 with n. 42. That the *Chronicle* contains material copied from Procopius often served as an argument in favor of its interpretation as a collection of myths and forgeries. See Charanis 1953, p. 95–96. For other sources used in the *Chronicle*, see Marín 1991–1992, p. 220.

(Westerink 1972).⁷⁶ The note is a comment made by Arethas, while reading Nicephorus' work and thus must be viewed as a text of private, not public nature. In some instances, the one repeats the other verbatim. But Arethas speaks only of Slavs. Though the *Chronicle of Monemvasia* was clearly composed much later, it is very unlikely that its author derived his information from Arethas. Peter Charanis argued, therefore, that both drew their information from an unknown source (Charanis 1950, p. 152–153),⁷⁷ but it is also possible that there was more than one hand at work in the earliest known version of the *Chronicle*. Indeed, some have argued that since Arethas only speaks of Slavs, the Avars must be a later addition to the *Chronicle* (Chrysanthopoulos 1957). Still others attempted to solve the quagmire by pointing to a now-lost privilege of Emperor Nicephorus I for Patras as the possible source for the story of the Avar rule in the Peloponnesus. This would have been a propaganda response to Charlemagne's claims to both the imperial title and victories over the Avars (Turlej 2001, p. 467). But there is no mention of Avars in relation to Patras in the *De administrando imperio* of Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, who undoubtedly had access to a copy of Nicephorus I's *sigillion* (see the analysis of Kresten 1977).⁷⁸ Moreover, the eighth-century *Life of St Pancratius*, as well as sixth-century sources, such as Evagrius, John of Ephesus, or John of Biclar, clearly refer to Avars, not Slavs.⁷⁹

If the source for the *Chronicle's* account of heavy destruction in Greece during Maurice's reign were oral traditions of Greek refugees in southern Italy and Sicily, then we must also admit that they remembered being expelled by Avars, not

⁷⁶ The date and authenticity of this scholium have been disputed, as it refers to both Thessalia Prima and Thessalia Secunda, an administrative distinction that took place only in the eleventh century. See Karayannopoulos 1971, p. 456–457; Turlej 2001, p. 59.

⁷⁷ See also Marín 1991–1992, p. 240, who believes this source to be the *Scriptor Incertus de Leone Armenio*, a fragment of which was published by Henri Grégoire in *Byzantion* 11 (1936), p. 417–427. By contrast, Stanisław Turlej (2001, p. 58) believes that Arethas drew on the *Chronicle* (which he dates to the reign of Michael I Rhangabe or the early years of Leo V) for his account of the Slavic invasion into Peloponnesus.

⁷⁸ The privilege of Nicephorus that assigned the Slavs to the Church of St. Andrew in Patras was known to the author of chapter 49 of the *De Administrando Imperio* only because of being mentioned in a much later document of Leo VI. However, Nicephorus' *sigillion* did not exist at that time in the form of a tangible document, but only in the oral tradition of the Church of Patras. Any conclusions regarding its contents must therefore be treated with extreme caution. See Turlej 1999, p. 383 and 387.

⁷⁹ 'Avars,' instead of 'Slavs,' in the first part of the *Chronicle* may of course be a consequence of its author's indiscriminate use of sources mentioning both Slavs and Avars (Lemerle 1950, p. 17 and 34). However, 'Avars' (instead of 'Slavs') in relation to Peloponnesus also appear in a synodal letter of Patriarch Nicholas III to Emperor Alexius I Comnenus, which is dated to 1084 and refers to the establishment of the metropolitan of Patras. The letter may have drawn on the same source as the *Chronicle*, but not on the *Chronicle* itself (Turlej 2001, p. 61–63).

by Slavs.⁸⁰ Arethas, who was born at Patras in or around 850 to a rich family, may have well applied this tradition to a contemporary situation and therefore changed Avars into Slavs.⁸¹ Family memories or stories may well have been the source for Arethas' knowledge about such things as the exact period (218 years) between the attacks of the Slavs and the settlement of Greeks in Peloponnesus by Emperor Nicephorus I, or the exact whereabouts in Italy of the population transferred to Greece by that emperor. It remains unclear, however, how the emperor himself learned that the successors of those expelled from Patras by the Slavs, more than two hundred years earlier, were still living in Reggio Calabria. In contrast to the richness of detail in his scholium, Arethas' text is very vague at this point: the emperor "has been informed" where the "ancient inhabitants" of Patras lived at that time. As a consequence, the evidence of Arethas' scholium must be treated with caution. As Stanisław Turlej has put it, any claim to the effect that either the *Chronicle* or Arethas' scholium tell us directly about a Slavic invasion or occupation of the Peloponnesus from the late sixth to the early ninth century has "to be seen as stretching the evidence provided by the source" (Turlej 1998, p. 448). Judging from the existing evidence, the reason behind the inclusion of an Avar *excursus* in the *Chronicle*, including such information as the exact duration of the Avar rule over Greece (218 years), was the deliberate attempt to depict a petty, highly localized conflict, namely that between the Church of Patras and the neighboring Slavs, as an event of much greater magnitude and historical importance. Projecting the conflict against the background of the sixth-century Avar invasions into the Empire thus amplified the significance of strictly local developments (Turlej 2001, p. 50 and 56). In other words, the Avars may have turned into Slavs only to accommodate the narrative strategies employed by the unknown author of the exposé known as the *Chronicle of Monemvasia*.

There are several conclusions to be drawn from this examination of the written sources pertaining to the history of the southern Balkans between the late sixth and the early ninth centuries. First, there is no pattern of a unique, continuous, and sudden invasion of either Slavs or Avars. Moreover, until the siege of Thessalonica during Heraclius' early regnal years, there is no evidence at all for outward migration, in the sense of a permanent change of residence. No raid recorded between 578 and 620 resulted in large-scale settlement. John of Ephesus claims that in 584, after four years of raiding, the Sclavenes were still on Roman territory, but this could hardly be interpreted as an indication of Slavic settlement. Michael the Syrian, in a passage most likely taken from John, describes a Sclavene leader who took with him the *ciborium* of

⁸⁰ For oral traditions of Greek refugees as a source for the *Chronicle*, see Setton 1950, p. 517; Pohl 1988, p. 101. Similarly, Arethas' knowledge of and interest in South Italy derived from memories of the Greek refugees returning to Patras under Emperor Nicephorus I. See Falkenhausen 1995, p. 364.

⁸¹ For Arethas' life, see G. G. Litavrin 1995b, p. 345.

a church in Corinth, not a chief establishing himself in the conquered city. The only evidence for such a decision is that of the Slavene tribes besieging Thessalonica in the early years of Heraclius' reign. They had brought with them their families, for they intended to establish themselves in the city following its conquest. This also indicates that they were not coming from afar, for the prisoners they had taken after the siege could return to Thessalonica carrying the booty taken by the Slavenes from the inhabitants of the city (*Miracles of St Demetrius* II 2.196). Moreover, some of the tribes mentioned in Book II of the *Miracles of St Demetrius* are described as living in the immediate vicinity of the city. When did they settle there? Paul Lemerle argued that in the 610s a Slavic settlement around Thessalonica must have been a relatively recent phenomenon. How recent, however, is impossible to tell. The evidence of the late seventh century suggests that the Slavs were by then also established in Thessaly, while Slavene pirates raided the Thracian coast and the Straits as far as the island of Proconnesus. Judging from the existing evidence, a true migration could have taken place only during a relatively short period of time, namely not long after Heraclius' accession to power.⁸² The evidence for a Slavic settlement in southern Greece, however, cannot be dated earlier than ca. 700. To the author of the *Life of St. Willibald*, Monemvasia was *in Slawinia terrae*, and in 783 Staurakios returned to Constantinople with a large number of Slavic prisoners captured along his route from Thessalonica, through Hellas, to Peloponnesus. We only learn about Slavs after the creation of the theme of Peloponnesus around year 800.

On the other hand, despite the general withdrawal of troops from the Balkans in 620, the Empire seems to have maintained control over several coastal areas.⁸³ In 662, Athens was large enough to accommodate for several months the emperor himself, together with his retinue and courtiers. Moreover, the city had a bishop, who participated in the Sixth Ecumenical Council as papal representative. Under Justinian II, the first attempts were made to secure the safety of the ancient road linking Constantinople to Thessalonica, as military outposts were established near mountain passes north of Via Egnatia. The newly created theme of Thrace served first as a buffer against the Bulgar qaganate to the north and only later as the basis for further expansion into the central region of the Balkans. Similarly, the creation of the theme of Hellas in the late seventh century did not result in gradual extension of the imperial authority inland from the outposts on the coast, for initially Hellas was little more than a naval basis. Despite Constans II's and Justinian II's brief campaigns, the *Sklaviniai* remained outside the area of Byzantine interest and control. This may explain the lack of contemporary concern

⁸² No evidence exists, however, that the Slavs established near Thessalonica or in Thessaly came from regions located north of the Danube river.

⁸³ For the Adriatic coast, see Ferluga 1976, p. 3; Dragojlović 1990, p. 202. For a careful notional distinction between Byzantine influence and Byzantine effective presence on the Dalmatian coast, see Goldstein 1991.

with the military and political situation beyond the northern and western borders of the Balkan themes. The perspective on developments in the southern Balkans remained Constantinopolitan and, as a consequence, sources based on information originating in the capital, such as the *Life of St Willibald* and Theophanes' *Chronography*, spoke exclusively of *Sklaviniai* and Sclavenes. The author of Book II of the *Miracles of St Demetrius* was the first to introduce tribal names, such as the Drugubites, the Sagudates, the Belegezites, the Berzites, and the Rynchines. In the mid-tenth century, Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus wrote of two other tribes, the Ezeritai and the Milingoi, fiercely defending their independence against Byzantine encroachment. In both cases, the difference between various groups was important, because of differing political interests linked with various ethnicities. Some of the tribes described in Book II of the *Miracles of St Demetrius* besieged Thessalonica. They were viewed as savage, brutish, and heathen. Others, like the Belegezites, were friendly, and, at times, potential and important allies, who were able to supply the besieged city with food. To Constantine Porphyrogenitus, the Ezeritai and the Milingoi, were different from all Slavs "and other insubordinates of the province of Peloponnesus," because of their successful resistance against various military governors of the theme. That a number of sources ranging from John of Biclar to the *Life of St Pancratius* used "Avars," instead of "Slavs," cannot be attributed to either confusion or the fluidity of the early medieval concept of ethnicity.⁸⁴ To the author of the *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, those conquering and holding Peloponnesus for 218 years were Avars, while those who had unsuccessfully opposed the army of the imperial *strategos* in the more recent past were Slavs. In all those cases, ethnicity was a function of power in a very concrete and simple way. Ethnic groups were not classified in terms of language or culture, but in terms of their military and political potential. Names were important, therefore, because they gave meaning to categories of political classification.

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⁸⁴ Pohl 1988, p. 107–108. Pohl believes that those who viewed themselves politically closer to the Avars, chose to leave at the end of the raid, together with the qagan. Those who presumably remained and settled in Greece, became Slavs. The analysis of the written evidence shows, however, that this interpretation does not stand against the existing evidence. See Turlej 2001, p. 52 with n. 89, who categorically rejects the idea of the author of the *Chronicle* not knowing the difference between Avars and Slavs.

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ВАРВАРИТЕ В ГЪРЦИЯ ПРЕЗ „ТЪМНИТЕ ВЕКОВЕ“: СЛАВЯНИ ИЛИ АВАРИ?

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Резюме

В тази статия са представени и анализирани историческите сведения за присъствието на „варвари“ в Гърция в периода края на VI – началото на IX в. според последните проучвания по темата. Вместо отново да се стреми към изследване в стила на класическия наратив, в статията авторът поставя на дискусия въпроса за възприемането – ако изобщо такова е било налице – на етническата идентичност на именуваните и описвани групи от страна на авторите на съответните свидетелства, както и хронологическия аспект на споменаваните от тях събития. Заключение на автора е, че в значителен брой извори, от *John of Biclar* до *Life of Pancratius*, се говори не за славяни, а за авари, когато се споменава за „варвари“ в ранносредновековна Гърция. Тази двойственост е отразена също така в Монемвасийската хроника, един проблем, чието решение е довело до сериозни затруднения ред изследователи. За автора на горепосочената хроника хората, завладяли и впоследствие удържали под своя власт Пелопонес в продължение на 218 години, са били авари, докато онези, които по-късно се противопоставяли безуспешно на армията на имперския стратег, са били славяни. И в двата случая етническата се явявала функция от мощта, и то чрез един твърде конкретен и прости чък способ: етническите групи не са били класифицирани в съответствие с техния език или култура, а в зависимост от военния и политическия им потенциал.