

RESURGENS PHOENIX. EASTERN ROMAN DIPLOMATIC FOREIGN ACTION IN THE BALKANS FROM ATTLA'S AFTERMATH UP TO THE "ANASTASIAN ERA" (CA. 450-518): A STUDY FROM THE LITERARY SOURCES

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Abstract

This paper intends to discuss the proactivity, originality, degree of success and historical-political implications of the diverse diplomatic initiatives implemented by the imperial administration in the Balkan provinces of the Eastern Roman Empire during the second half of the 5th century as well as in the early 6th, particularly of those developed during the reign of emperor Anastasius I (491-518), from the eminent perspective of the main literary sources.

Keywords: Eastern Roman Empire, international relations, early-Byzantine diplomacy, Balkan provinces, Anastasius I

Resumen

El presente estudio pretende analizar la proactividad, originalidad, grado de éxito e implicaciones histórico-políticas de las diversas iniciativas diplomáticas implementadas por la administración imperial en las provincias balcánicas del Imperio Romano de Oriente durante la segunda mitad del siglo V y comienzos del VI, con especial atención a aquellas desarrolladas durante el reinado de Anastasio I (491-518), desde la eminente perspectiva de las principales fuentes literarias.

Metadatos: Imperio Romano de Oriente, relaciones internacionales, diplomacia proto-bizantina, Balcanes, Anastasio I

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1. Introduction

First and foremost, from a methodological perspective, three principal variables should be briefly considered in regard to our contribution.

The initial could be designated as the geographical one, which alludes to the physical space in which we primarily intend to focus our attention. This will be the Balkan Peninsula, particularly those territories which were under the direct dominion of the Eastern Roman Administration –mainly south of the Danube–, although sporadically we will also refer to some beyond these that were also under Constantinople's diplomatic sphere of influence. In the former case, we will split these into two halves, the Eastern and the Western one, encompassing the first all the imperial provinces of the Dioceses of *Dacia*, *Macedonia* and *Thracia* whilst the second will comprise those of *Dalmatia*, *Savia* and the three *Pannonias*: *Prima*, *Secunda* and *Valeria*.

The second could be labelled as the chronological one, which in our particular case refers to a period that approximately covers the reign of four emperors: Marcian (450-457), Leo I (457-474), Zeno (474-475/476-491) and Anastasius I (491-518). Accordingly, we embrace a period of approximately 70 years whose election might be based on diverse and varied reasons. On the whole, it cannot be denied that it was a particularly crucial moment for the historical development of the Eastern Roman Empire; furthermore, if we link it with our previously mentioned variable, it should be highlighted that the Balkans were both a central concern and a pivotal functioning basis, as the very fact that three of the four aforementioned emperors had themselves Balkan origins proves.

Additionally, in terms of combination with our third main methodological variable, as reflected in the own internal structure proposed for this piece, the first three reigns, with their respective particularities and predicaments, could be jointly combined and analyzed in contraposition with the fourth one. However, and despite the central role conferred to the figure of Anastasius I within our contribution, primarily as a landmark

regarding the application and extent of imperial diplomacy in the Balkans as we shall analyze, it should be remarked that it neither pretends to solely focus on his character nor, and more importantly, aspires to fully fill any potential existing historiographical gap concerning his reign, as both the overview is much broader and generalist and our main aim significantly modest.

Lastly, we need to stress our third and final variable, that could be denominated as the thematic one, which is diplomacy. Certainly, this is a very wide and complex subject of study that needs to be somehow limited in order to be adequately dealt with. As we have selected to focus only on a purely historical approach, mainly based on the information provided by the principal written sources of the period, we have left aside accordingly both the juridical implications as well as theoretical models that, in our view, tend to construct excessively rigid categories mainly based on the contemporary diplomatic functioning that impoverishes the historical nuance, far more necessary and decisive to fully understand Late Antique Roman Diplomacy.

Finally, due to the main selected topic and the elected approach, other primary sources of information, such as the epigraphic, numismatic or archaeological ones will be merely referred if necessary.

1.1. Historiographical sketch

In the early nineties of the past century, it could be stated that the reign of Anastasius I (491-518), as Fiona K. Nicks highlighted in his PhD dissertation, “[...] has tended to be neglected, yet it was a critical time in the history of the Later Roman Empire.”¹ The truth is that, until then, the principal major work centrally devoted to his figure had been that of the Italian Byzantinist Carmelo Capizzi;² and, nowadays, and up to my personal knowledge, only two more main works could be added to this tiny list: those of F. K. Nicks,³ which derives from her aforementioned doctoral work, and the German Historian Mischa Meier.⁴

If we combine these with the outstanding geographical scope of this paper, the Balkans, and the prime subject of analysis, the imperial diplomatic initiatives, the situation tends to worsen as the attention they had drawn could be qualified as merely

¹ F. K. Nicks (aka F. K. Haarer), *The Reign of Anastasius I, 491-518*, Oxford 1991, PhD diss.

² C. Capizzi, *L'Imperatore Anastasio I (491-518). Studio sulla sua vita, la sua opera e la sua personalità*, Rome 1969.

³ F. K. Nicks (aka F. K. Haarer), *Anastasius I. Politics and Empire in the Late Roman World*, Cambridge 2006.

⁴ M. Meier, *Anastasios I. Die Entstehung des Byzantinischen Reiches*, Stuttgart 2009.

anecdotic. For instance, Capizzi only included a paragraph dealing with the issue of foreign policy, linking it with Western affairs.⁵ In the same way did Nicks in his original dissertation,⁶ although on his later monograph dedicated a single but little paragraph to this subject.⁷ Finally, Meier tried to give new insight, dividing the Balkan predicament into several sections along three different chapters.⁸

Accordingly, as the evolution on the structure of the previously mentioned works tends to show, it might be pointed out that, fortunately, during the past decades the assessment over the historical importance of the Balkans, which for the major part of Late Antiquity constituted a primary frontier area between the *romanitas* and the *barbaricum* and where significant historical processes took place,⁹ has been profoundly and progressively shifting. To this process has decisively contributed an increasingly amount of archaeological fieldwork and research, providing not only a vast amount of diverse information but also equipping the specialist with innovative methodological tools, new insights and providing thus broader perspectives in many fields.¹⁰

Following this trend, and briefly speaking from a historical point of view, the diverse variety of studies over the Balkans, whose production has been steadily increasing over the last years, even in some cases skyrocketing, could be mainly divided into two broad categories. On the one hand, and if we primarily refer to the fifth century, the successive raids, invasions and migrations led by the so-called “barbarians”, such as

⁵ Capizzi, *L'Imperatore* (cit. n. 2), 157-174.

⁶ Also following the “traditional” pattern of linking it with the Western foreign policy. *Vid.* Nicks, *The Reign* (cit. n. 1), 108-145.

⁷ *Vid.* Nicks, *Anastasius I* (cit. n. 3), 109-115.

⁸ Particularly in chapters 3 –where he deals with the departure of the Ostrogoths to Italy–, 4 –about the consolidation of the Ostrogothic power in Italy and the Eastern Balkans, the “Bulgars” and the construction of the Long Walls– and, finally, in chapter 6 –drawing his attention on the struggle between the Eastern Romans and the Ostrogoths–. *Vid.* Meier, *Anastasios I* (cit. n. 4), 92-103; 118-148; 223-250, esp. 238.

⁹ On this particular perception, for instance, *vid.* F. Curta, “Frontier ethnogenesis in Late Antiquity: the Danube, the Tervingi and the Slavs”, in Id. (ed.), *Borders, Barriers and Ethnogenesis: Frontiers in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Turnhout 2005, 173-204, esp. 174-176, nn. 2-3; A. Sarantis, “East Roman management of barbarians tribes in the Lower-Middle Danube frontier zones, A.D. 332-610”, in O. Heinrich-Tamaska & D. Syrbe (eds.), *Grenz/übergänge: Spättrömisch, frühchristlich, frühbyzantinisch als Kategorien der historisch-archäologischen Forschung an der mittleren Donau*, Remshalden 2016, 41-65.

¹⁰ Both from a general and more local and regional perspectives. The multiplicity of works makes impossible for us even to try to make a brief remark. As broad examples *vid.* A. G. Poulter, *The Transition to Late Antiquity. On the Danube and Beyond*, Oxford 2007; F. Curta & R. Kolarev, *The Other Europe in the Middle Ages: Avars, Bulgars, Khazars and Cumans*, Leiden-Boston 2008.

the Visigoths,¹¹ Huns,¹² Gepids¹³ or Ostrogoths.¹⁴ On the other, well into the sixth century, both the problems and implications derived from the arrival and settlement of the Avars¹⁵ and Slavs.¹⁶ Equally, from the specific perspective of the historical development of the Eastern Roman Empire, the imperial measures implemented in order to counteract those two processes could also be defined as a primary concern for the specialists.¹⁷

¹¹ In this specific case we are talking also about the late fourth century. Amongst others, *vid.* H. Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, Berkeley 1988; P. J. Heather & J. F. Matthews, *The Goths in the Fourth Century*, Liverpool 1991; P. J. Heather, *Goths and Romans*, 332-489, Oxford 1991; Id., *The Goths*, Oxford 1996; Id., *The Visigoths from the Migration Period to the Seventh Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, Woodbridge 1999; Id. "Goths in the Balkans c. 350-500", in Poulter, *The Transition* (cit. n. 10), 163-190; R. Sanz Serrano, *Historia de los Godos. Una epopeya histórica de Escandinavia a Toledo*, Madrid 2009.

¹² *Vid.* O. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns. Studies in Their History and Culture*, Berkeley 1973; E. A. Thompson, *The Huns; revised and with an afterword by Peter Heather*, Oxford 1996; I. Bóna, *Les huns: le grand empire barbare d'Europa (IVe-Ve siècles)*, Paris 2002; H. Jin Kim, *The Huns, Rome and the Birth of Europe*, Cambridge 2013; M. Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Attila*, New York 2015.

¹³ *Vid.* I. Bóna, *The Dawn of the Dark Ages. The Gepids and the Lombards in the Carpathian Basin*, Budapest 1976; W. Pohl, "Die Gepiden und die gentes an der mittleren Donau nach dem Zerfall des Attilareiches", in F. Daim & H. Wolfram (eds.), *Die Völker an der mittleren und unteren Donau im fünften und sechsten Jahrhundert*, Vienna 1980, 239-305; I. Bóna, "From Dacia to Erdöelve, Transilvania in the period of the Great Migrations (271-896)", in L. Makkai & A. Mócsy (eds.), *History of Transilvania*, vol. I, New York 2001, 139-329, esp. 185-223; A. Kharalambieva, "Gepids in the Balkans: A Survey of the Archaeological Evidence", in F. Curta (ed.), *Neglected Barbarians*, Turnhout 2010, 245-262.

¹⁴ Including as well the early sixth century. *Vid.* T. S. Burns, *A History of the Ostrogoths*, Bloomington 1984; J. Moorhead, *Theoderic in Italy*, Oxford 1992; P. Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489-554*, Cambridge 2003. It could be included here as well the mentioned works of Wolfram, *History* (cit. n. 11); Heather, *The Goths* (cit. n. 11); Id., "Goths" (cit. n. 11).

¹⁵ O. Pristak, "The Slavs and the Avars", in Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo (ed.), *Gli Slavi occidentali e meridionali nell'alto Medioevo*, vol. I, t. XXX, Spoleto 1983, 353-435; W. Pohl, *Die Awaren. Ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa, 567-822 n. Chr.*, Munich 1988; G. C. Menis, *Gli Avari: un popolo d'Europa*, Udine 1995; W. Pohl, *The Avars. A Steppe Empire in Central Europe, 567-822*, Ithaca 2018.

¹⁶ P. M. Barford, *The Early Slavs. Culture and Society in Early Medieval Eastern Europe*, London 2001; F. Curta, *The Making of the Slavs. History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, c. 500-700*, Cambridge 2001; Id., *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages 500-1250*, Cambridge 2005.

¹⁷ Most of which have been mainly attributed to the figure who overwhelmingly dominates the sixth century: Justinian I (527-565). On him and his general policies, broadly speaking, *vid.* B. Rubin, *Das Zeitalter Justinian*, Munich 1960, 2 vols.; J. A. S. Evans, *The Age of Justinian: The Circumstances of Imperial Power*, London 1996; M. Meier, *Justinian. Herrschaft, Reich und Religion*, Munich 2004; M. Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, New York

Ultimately, we could finish this succinct historiographical review by pointing out that, also within the aforementioned tendency, some scholars have developed a particular interest on the subject hereby analyzed from a purely historical perspective: the imperial diplomatic initiatives in the Balkans. Being aware that, for the sake of concretion, we must also leave aside a significant variety of suggestive topics that also have been widely cultivated,¹⁸ some contributions from a mainly diplomatic point of view could be emphasized.

Accordingly, if we follow a chronological pattern, the first ones should be those of F. E. Wozniak, who during the late seventies and early eighties produced two fruitful papers which deal with several problems related to the Eastern Roman Empire's foreign policy on the Balkans, particularly between the second half of the fifth century up to the mid-sixth century.¹⁹ On this lately specific field, A. Sarantis has revealed both as a capital and prolific author. Since the past decade, he has been publishing various contributions which, although remarkably interdisciplinary and rigorously documented, only deal with the imperial foreign diplomatic initiatives in the Balkans, particularly with the Anastasian ones, as a mere end-chain of those implemented by Justinian I, which are his main concern.²⁰ Finally,

2005; P. J. Heather, *Rome Resurgent: War and Empire in the Age of Justinian*, New York 2018. For a wider chronological view *vid.* M. Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice and his Historian: Theophylact Simocatta on Persian and Balkan Warfare*, Oxford 1988; Id., "The Balkans and Greece 420-602", in A. Cameron, B. Ward-Perkins & M. Whitby (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History, 14: Late Antiquity. Empire and Successors, AD 425-600*, Cambridge 2000, 701-730. For a very specific view on international relations *vid.* A. Fernández Delgado, *De Re Diplomatica cum Barbaris, Legados, legaciones y evolución de los procesos diplomáticos del Imperio romano de Oriente en relación a su limes septentrional durante la segunda mitad del "largo" siglo VI*, Alcalá de Henares 2017, PhD diss.

¹⁸ For instance, the ethnogenesis process and historical evolution of other significant *gentes* in the area, such as the "Bulgars", Heruls or Lombards. For the formers, as sample *vid.* D. Dimitrov, *History of the Proto-Bulgarians north and west of the Black Sea*, Varna 1987; V. Vachkova, "Danube Bulgaria and Khazaria as parts of the Byzantine *Oikoumene*", in Curta & Kolarev (eds.), *The Other Europe* (cit. n. 10), 339-362. On the second *vid.* R. Steinacher, "The Heruls. Fragments of a History", in Curta (ed.), *Neglected Barbarians* (cit. n. 13), 319-360; A. Sarantis, "The Justinianic Herules: From Allied Barbarians to Roman Provincials", in Curta (ed.), *Neglected Barbarians* (cit. n. 13), 361-402; T. Brandt, *The Heruls in Scandinavia*, Copenhagen 2018. About the latter *vid.* K. Christou, *Byzanz und die Langobarden: von der Ansiedlung in Pannonien bis zur endgültigen Anerkennung (500-680)*, Athens 1991; N. Christie, *The Lombards: The Ancient Langobards*, Oxford 1995; W. Pohl & P. Erhart, *Die Langobarden. Herrschaft und Identität*, Vienna 2005.

¹⁹ F. E. Wozniak, "Byzantine diplomacy and the Lombard-Gepidic Wars", *BS* 20 (1979), 139-158; Id., "East Rome, Ravenna and Western Illyricum: 454-536", *Historia* 30 (1981), 351-382.

²⁰ As a representative sample of his production *vid.* A. Sarantis, "War and Diplomacy in Pannonia and the Northwest Balkans during the Reign of Justinian", in *DOP* 63 (2009), 15-40; Id., "Military Encounters and Diplomatic Affairs in the North Balkans during the reigns of Anastasius and Justinian", in Id. & N. Christie (eds.), *War and Warfare in Late Antiquity: Current Perspectives*, Leiden-Boston 2013, 759-808; Id., *Justinian's Balkan Wars. Campaigning,*

between these two could be placed a mid-nineties monography written by J. Prostko-Prostyński because, although focusing on a very specific topic, chronologically embraces the reign of Anastasius I (491-518) and, as we will see, the Goths played a primary role on the imperial foreign policy towards the Balkans during the whole period hereby covered.²¹

1.2. The primary written sources

In order to deconstruct the complex political situation that characterized both the previous decades as well as what we might call the “Anastasian era” in the Balkans, a significant range of both written and non-written testimonies are at our disposal. These, although significantly heterogeneous, present both several and meaningful complications. Due to the very topic chosen for this contribution, as previously stated, we will mainly focus on those posed by the formers. These challenges could be widely clustered into three big categories: fragmentary nature, chronology and bias.

The first one has left no other choice to the modern historian but to rely on several chronicles, histories and epistles whose attention and finality differs notably from ours. Moreover, some of them have only survived fragmentarily, emphasizing the difficulties to analyze this period and, on the other hand, decisively contributing to the aforementioned lack of interest from the scholars, at least until very recent years.

Further to this, and from a chronological point of view, it's necessary to stress that a significant amount of the written material nowadays available was composed later than the period we handle. Although indeed, the main information related to the Balkan question we intend to approach here dates predominantly from the period immediately subsequent, as we will describe below, this fact neither prevents the always tangled and discussed matter of the reliability of some of them nor sheds light on the third and last big problem, the bias.

To discuss properly this latter point in particular and the whole issue in general, it should be brought up the main authors which deal with the question of the imperial foreign policy towards the Balkan area in the “Anastasian era” and describe the main features of their works. In this specific frame, two sources are especially valuable chronologically speaking: the *Chronicle* of Count Marcellinus and the *History of the Goths* of Jordanes.

Marcellinus, of whom very little is known, was apparently an Illyrian and a Greek-Latin speaker who arrived at Constantinople at some point of the early sixth century. Nothing is stated from him before he wrote the first version of his *Chronicle* around 518,

Diplomacy and Development in Illyricum, Thrace and the Northern World, A.D. 527-65, Croydon 2016, esp. 124-135.

²¹ Vid. J. Prostko-Prostyński, *Vtraeque Res Publicae. The Emperor Anastasius I's Gothic Policy (491–518)*, Poznań 1994.

something that, possibly alongside with some military connections, allowed him to enter at the service of the future emperor Justinian I (527-565) as his *cancellarius*.²² Not long after, ca. 534, in the context of the Justinianic (re)conquest of North Africa, he updated his work up to that time, a text that was conceived as the continuation of the *Chronicon* of Jerome.²³ The great value of Marcellinus' narrative, which perhaps is the most useful regarding the aim we pursue, is the detailed information he provides about the political and diplomatic affairs that happened in the Balkans from Constantinople to Illyria, some of which, due to his origins and background, may have been witnessed or have access to first-hand information.²⁴

Jordanes was an obscure figure of either Alan or Goth origins which nowadays still wrapped in several controversies. As in the case of Marcellinus, virtually nothing is known from him except he worked as *notarius* before his "conversion" and most probable entry into the monastery of Vivarium ca. 551, where he wrote the *Historia Getarum*.²⁵ Beyond the biographical bickering, the pivotal issue is the supposed existing link between his work and the nowadays lost *History of the Goths* of Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator.²⁶ Despite de different opinions, the mainstream tends to favor a significant influence of the latter work on the former, but in no case attributes to Jordanes the role of a mere epitomizer.²⁷

Of the three main parts on which the book is divided, the last one, dedicated to the origins, history and evolution of the Ostrogothic *gentes* in general and the Amal dynasty

²² For his biographical data *vid.* B. Croke, *The Chronicle of Marcellinus. A Translation and Commentary*, Sydney 1995, xix-xx; Id., *Count Marcellinus and his Chronicle*, Oxford 2001, esp. 17-35; W. Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians*, New York 2007, 227-235.

²³ On this work *vid.* M. D. Donalson, *A Translation of Jerome's Chronicon With Historical Commentary*, Lewiston 1996.

²⁴ *Vid.* Croke, *The Chronicle* (cit. n. 22), xx-xxii; Id., *Count Marcellinus* (cit. n. 22), 48-77, esp. 61-72 for the treatment in the *Chronicle* of both "Bulgars" and Goths.

²⁵ Henceforth inaugurating so a new genre on Late Antique historiography, known as "National History". About his biography *vid.* W. A. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 500-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede and Paul the Deacon*, Princeton 1988, 20-111, esp. 42-47; J. M. Sánchez Martín, *Origen y gestas de los godos*, Madrid 2001, 9-13; A. S. Christensen, *Cassiodorus, Jordanes and the History of the Goths. Studies in a Migration Mith*, Copenhagen 2002, 84-103.

²⁶ As Jordanes himself (*Get. Praef.*, 1-2) tells to his "brother" Castallius in the prologue. To follow the debate *vid.* B. Croke, "Cassiodorus and the *Getica* of Jordanes", *Classical Philology* 82 (1987), 117-134; Goffart, *The Narrators* (cit. n. 25), 58-62; Sánchez Martín, *Origen* (cit. n. 25), 18-25; Christensen, *Cassiodorus* (cit. n. 25), 115-124.

²⁷ About this particular issue and the evolution of the point of view amongst the scholars *vid.* Goffart, *The Narrators*, 23-31, with notes and references.

in particular, specifically attracts our attention. As happened with the previous case, despite the strong influence of Cassiodorus, the presumable access to oral testimonies and the possibility of having witnessed some of the events he narrates makes the *Getica* of Jordanes a work of great interest and value. Finally, it should be also pointed out that this writing is not the only one preserved from this author, because shortly after he also composed his other major book, known as *Romana*.²⁸

From the perspective of the imperial diplomatic policies towards the Balkans that we are laying out, there are some other literary sources, both from the East as well as from the West, which also needed to be highlighted. Following the same chronological pattern, and starting with the Eastern ones, are crucial the so-called classicizing histories of Priscus of Panium and Malchus of Philadelphia, unfortunately only piecemeal preserved.

The literary work of the former, composed of eight books entitled *History of Byzantium*, is something earlier, covering the period between *ca.* 433 up to 474.²⁹ However, it is both a principal and a key source to understand not only the sequence of the diverse diplomatic exchanges between Constantinople and various Balkan *gentes*, mainly the Huns, somehow before, during and beyond Attila's reign, but also the protocol and ceremony on which they were based and performed and their implications. This is mainly due to the fact that Priscus himself travelled to Attila's court in *ca.* 448-449 acting as assistant of the main ambassador Maximinus, dispatched by the emperor Theodosius II in order to settle some political issues.³⁰

About the composition of the latter, whose *History* supposedly encompassed seven books from the reign of Constantine I (306-337) up to that of Anastasius I, few things can be said in our specific case, as only scarce fragments survive. These, entitled by Photius as Βυζαντιακά, form an account that conforms the effective continuation of the work of Priscus, covering from the end of the reign of emperor Leo I up to *ca.* 480.³¹

In a similar way of usefulness regarding the necessary contextualization of the diplomatic events that took place in the Balkans, particularly by the initiative of

²⁸ For the features and problematic of this work *vid.* Christensen, *Cassiodorus*, 103-113.

²⁹ Regarding more features of this work *vid.* R. C. Blockley, *The Fragmentary Classicizing Historians of the Later Roman Empire. Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus*, Liverpool 1983, vol. 1, 48-70; Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine* (cit. n. 22), 96-102.

³⁰ Beyond the official façade, which was the relaxation of the existing tensions between both powers due to the flight of some Hunnic fugitives, its clandestine and real motivation was to carry out an assassination attempt of Attila himself. *Vid.* Fernández Delgado, *De Re Diplomatica* (cit. n. 17), 117-118, esp. n. 234.

³¹ For more details, *vid.* B. Baldwin, "Malchus of Philadelphia", *DOP* 31 (1977), 89-107; Blockley, *The Fragmentary* (cit. n. 29), vol. 1, 71-85; Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine*, 103-107.

Anastasius I, some further sources could be mentioned. Those may be book sixteen of the *Chronographia* of John Malalas,³² the scanty surviving excerpts of the *Church History* of Theodorus Lector,³³ several chapters and passages from *The Wars*³⁴ and *The Buildings*³⁵ of Procopius of Caesarea³⁶ and, finally, some of the surviving fragments of the *Chronicle* of the Syrian John of Antioch.³⁷ Equally, albeit with a somewhat secondary character because of the amount and kind of information they provide, could be cited the *Ecclesiastical History* of the also Syrian Evagrius Scholasticus,³⁸ the anonymous

³² Whose main source of information for this particular period was Eustathius of Epiphaneia. For further information *vid.* E. Jeffreys, B. Croke & R. Scott (eds.), *Studies in John Malalas*, Sydney 1990, esp. 1-25; E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys, R. Scott *et al.*, *Chronographia; The Chronicle of John Malalas*, Melbourne 1996, xxi-xxiii; Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine*, 235-255.

³³ Whose nickname, *anagnōstēs*, derives from the office he held during the early sixth century at the basilica of Saint Sophia, in Constantinople. For more details on the author and his work *vid.* G. C. Hansen, *Theodoros Anagnostes Kirchengeschichte*, Berlin 2009, ix-xxiii. We have decided to place his work after Malalas' *Chronographia* because, although its second version reaches as far as the year 565 and the composition of Theodorus was possibly finished around 543, book sixteen of the former was certainly a part of its first version and was available to Evagrius Scholasticus when he composed his *Ecclesiastic History* in Antioch. However, book eighteen, which deals with the reign of Justinian I (527-565), was not, and formed part of a posterior version, updated in Constantinople at some point of the mid-sixth century.

³⁴ Possibly the most famous classicizing historian of Late Antiquity. Particularly interesting in our case are the first seven chapters of the first book of the *Vandal War*, the first chapter of the first book of the *Gothic War* and some interesting digressions introduced on the last two books of the latter, such as chapters 18-20 of the third book, which deal with the Gepids, the Lombards and some Hunnic "tribes".

³⁵ Particularly book four, which deals with the construction developed by Justinian I (527-565) in the Balkans.

³⁶ On the key importance and meaning of the various works of Procopius, as sample, *vid.* A. Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1985, esp. 124-151; A. Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity*, Philadelphia 2004, esp. 17-61; Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine*, 176-226; G. Greatrex, "Perceptions of Procopius in Recent Scholarship", *Histos* 8 (2014), 76-121.

³⁷ With a very particular point of view due to his origin, constitutes the most valuable source, alongside with Malalas' *Chronographia*, for the understanding of a capital event of the Anastasian era, Vitalian's rebellion. For his work and the main points about it still in debate *vid.* U. Roberto, *Chronica; Ioannis Antiochenis Fragmenta ex Historia chronica. Introduzione, edizione critica e traduzioni*, Berlin-New York 2005, xi-clxxiv; S. Mariev, *Ioannis Antiocheni Fragmenta quae supersunt omnia. Recensuit Anglice vertit indicibus intruxit*, Berlin 2008, 3-42; Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine*, 311-329.

³⁸ Evagrius provides us with a significantly distinct perspective, due to his Antiochene focus. About his literary work *vid.* V. A. Caires, "Evagrius Scholasticus: A Literary Analysis", *ByzF* 8 (1982), 29-50; M. Whitby, *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus. Translated with introduction*, Liverpool 2000, xiii-xxxiv; Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine*, 299-306.

Chronicon Paschale,³⁹ the former Coptic but nowadays only surviving Ethiopic version of the *Chronicle* of John of Nikiu⁴⁰ and the much later work of Theophanes Confessor.⁴¹

However, the whole picture of the diplomatic initiatives carried out by the imperial administration in the Balkans would be simply impossible to understand completely without the valuable information provided by several literary sources from the post-Roman West. Despite the intense communications existing between the different former provinces of the Western Roman Empire, its clear fragmentation from a political point of view, together with the character and chronology of the sources that follow, makes necessary to introduce a geographical criterion in combination with the chronological one that we have been following until now. Considering this we shall distinguish, in descendant order of importance, three main areas where the different literary works were progressively composed: Italy, Gaul and, finally, Africa.

Of the aforementioned territories, Italy was the nearest location to the Balkans, to which it was linked by land and the Adriatic Sea, and also had already shared varied close ties for centuries, especially with Dalmatia. Also, as the heart of the *romanitas*, it was the cradle of some key literary figures of Late Antiquity, such as Magnus Felix Ennodius, bishop of Pavia, who composed the first testimony to be hereby considered, the so-called *Panegyric of Theoderic*.⁴² Leaving aside the problems associated with the genre, the

³⁹ Composed in Constantinople at some point of the first half of the seventh century and which provides several interesting details. About the date of composition and the distinctive features of the work *vid.* M. Whitby & Ma. Whitby, *Chronicon Paschale, 284-628 AD. Translated with introduction and notes*, Liverpool 1989, ix-xxviii; Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine*, 340-349.

⁴⁰ Which, probably, deserves a new edition. About the transmission of the text and its features *vid.* R. H. Charles, *The Chronicle of John (c. 690 A.D.), Coptic Bishop of Nikiu: being a history of Egypt before the Arab conquest. Translated from Hermann Zotenberg's edition of the Ethiopic version with an introduction, critical linguistic notes and index of names*, Amsterdam 1982, iii-xii.

⁴¹ The great ninth century chronographer, whose *Chronographia* relies heavily on previous authors for late fifth and early sixth century events. About this particular, *vid.* C. Mango, "Who wrote the Chronicle of Theophanes?", *ZRVI* 18 (1978), 9-18.; Id., R. Scott & G. Greatrex, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor, Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284-813. Translated, with introduction and commentary*, Oxford 1997, xliii-c.

⁴² The *Panegyric* was composed *ca.* 512. Recently defined as "a gentleman of the Church", Ennodius produced several writings, preserved nowadays, that depict some interesting aspects of the political activity and influence of the Catholic Church in Italy during the early sixth century. As a churchman, he was probably not very interested in secular affairs, so he did not produce any account, at least known to us, about his two legations to Constantinople, in 515 and 517, on behalf of Pope Symmachus. About his life, career and writings *vid.* S. A. H. Kennel, *Magnus Felix Ennodius: A Gentleman of the Church*, Ann Arbor 2000, esp. 4-42; A. López

Panegyric could be seen as a capital source for understanding the diplomatic sequence of events between the Empire, the different groups of Gepids and the Ostrogothic Kingdom in the early regnal years of Anastasius I.

Regarding the diplomatic ebb and flow between Ostrogothic Italy and the Empire a predominant personality emerges amongst all, that of Flavius Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator. Of his large list of writings, three should be particularly highlighted, namely his *Chronicle*,⁴³ *Gothic History*⁴⁴ and, as the holder of several key posts in the administration under king Theoderic the Amal (493-526),⁴⁵ his first-hand *Variae*.⁴⁶

In the same way, particularly suitable for the understanding of the later years of the Ostrogothic Italy, the *Anonimous Valesianus*, also known as the *Chronica Theodericiana*, provides some key information for the Anastasian period and its background.⁴⁷ Finally,

Kindler, *Obra miscelánea. Declamaciones. Introducción, traducción y notas*, Madrid 2002, 7-26. On his diplomatic performances at the imperial court *vid.* S. A. H. Kennel, "Latin Bishops and Greek Emperors: Ennodius' Missions to Constantinople", in M. Gourdoba, L. Pietilä-Castrén & E. Tikkala (eds.), *The Eastern Mediterranean in the Late Antique and Early Byzantine Periods*, Helsinki 2004, 41-58.

⁴³ The first version of the *Chronicle* was finished around 519 as a gift to Eutharic, the Western consul for that year, on the occasion of his wedding with Amalasuintha, Theoderic's daughter. In this way, Eutharic became the apparent heir to the Ostrogothic throne. Later it was updated and, from the Creation of the World up to Theoderic's time, a list of consuls was added up to 559. *Vid.* M. W. Klaasen, *Cassiodorus' Chronica. Text, Chronography and Sources*, Charleston 2011, 1-26.

⁴⁴ Nowadays lost but whose close relation with the *Getica* of Jordanes has been already stressed. *Vid. supra.*, n. 26.

⁴⁵ For the origins of Cassiodorus' family, his early life and *cursus honorum* at Theoderic's service and his later retirement in *Vivarium* after its foundation, *vid.* J. J. O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, Berkeley 1979, esp. 7-122; S. J. B. Barnish, *Cassiodorus: Variae. Translated with notes and introduction*, Liverpool 1992, xxxv-l.

⁴⁶ A twelfth-book compilation of over 468 letters and official formularies wrote by Cassiodorus himself as *quaestor sacri palatii* (books one to four), *magister officiorum* (books five and eight-nine) and *praefectus praetorii* (books ten to twelve). It was collected around 537 and drawn on the basis of the letters Cassiodorus was able to find, avoiding so some particularly problematic issues such as Boethius' arrest in 523. For further details *vid.* O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus* (cit. n. 45), 30-54; Barnish, *Cassiodorus* (cit. n. 45), xiv-xxxiv.

⁴⁷ An anonymous chronicle that was composed, apparently, in the sixth century and which narrates the period between 474 and 526. On the name, date of composition and features of the text *vid.* G. Zecchini, "L' Anonimo Valesiano II: genere storiografico e contesto politico", in Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo (ed.), *Teoderico il Grande e i Goti d'Italia. Atti del XIII Congresso Internazionale di Studio sull'Alto Medioevo, Milano 2-6 novembre 1992*, Spoleto 1993, t. II, 809-818; I. Lasala Navarro & P. López Hernando, "Chronica Theodericiana, comentario, notas y traducción", *Habis* 40 (2009), 251-275.

some details about the embassy dispatched by Pope Hormisdas to Constantinople are recorded in the *Roman History* of Paul the Deacon.⁴⁸

In order to understand the at all negligible role played by the other main political character of the Italian board, the Catholic Church, two sources deserve to be especially underlined: on the one hand, the *Avellana Compilation* or *Collectio Avellana*,⁴⁹ and, on the other, the *Book of Pontiffs*, also known as *Liber Pontificalis*.⁵⁰

In the case of our second selected area, Gaul, two figures hoard our attention. Chronologically speaking, the first one is Alcimus Ecdicius Avitus, bishop of Vienne, a Gallo-Roman aristocrat who produced several interesting letters on behalf of the Burgundian kings Gundobad (476-516) and Sigismund (516-524).⁵¹ The second one is the most famous Gallic historian of Late Antiquity, Gregory, bishop of Tours, and his *Decem Libri Historiarum*.⁵²

⁴⁸ Although Paul's major work is the *Historia Langobardorum* or *History of the Longobards*, a major source for the events in Italy from mid-sixth century onwards, he also composed, between 766 and 771, his *Historia Romana*, conceived as the continuation of the *Breviarium* of Eutropius, adding thus six new books to the latter and updating it up to 553. For Paul the Deacon and his two major works *vid.* Goffart, *The Narrators*, 329-431, esp. 347-370 for the *Roman History*; P. Roldán Herrera, *Historia de los longobardos. Introducción, traducción y notas*, Cádiz 2006, 11-50.

⁴⁹ A collection of 244 different types of documents, dating from 334 up to 553, which were gathered approximately towards the end of the sixth century. Particularly noteworthy in our case of study is the intense diplomatic exchange in the later years of Anastasius I (491-518), between him and Pope Symmachus with regard to the so called Acacian Schism. On this latter subject *vid.* S. Margutti, "Le relazioni tra Anastasio e Ormisda: l'apporto della *Collectio Avellana*", in R. Lizzi Testa & G. Marconi (eds.), *The Collectio Avellana and its Revivals*, Cambridge 2019, 159-189.

⁵⁰ The anonymous and systematically compiled lives of the bishops of the city of Rome, from Saint Peter up to the Fifteen century. In our particular case, the lives of Gelasius I (492-496), Anastasius II (496-498), Symmachus (498-514) and Hormisdas (514-523) are of main interest. For the features and composition of the book, *vid.* R. Davis, *The Book of the pontiffs or Liber pontificalis: the ancient biographies of the first ninety Roman bishops to A.D. 715. Translated with introduction and notes*, Liverpool 1989, xi-xlix, esp. xlv-xlvii.

⁵¹ A key source in order to explain the involvement of the Burgundian Kingdom in the diplomatic affairs of the entangled triangle formed by the Empire, the Ostrogothic Kingdom and the Franks. About the main traits of Avitus' *Letters* *vid.* D. Shanzer & I. Wood, *Avitus of Vienne. Letters and Selected Prose. Translated with an introduction and notes*, Liverpool 2002, 58-85.

⁵² More commonly known as *History of the Franks*. The last chapters of the book II are those particularly interesting here. Although dating from the late sixth century (*ca.* 580) and not particularly interested in foreign diplomatic affairs, it remains our main source for the analysis of the diplomatic dealings between the Empire, Theoderic and Clovis in its early decades. For the problematic of Gregory's work *vid.* Goffart, *The Narrators*, 112-234, esp. 119-127, 153-168; R. Latouche, *Grégoire de Tours. Histoire des Francs*, Paris 1995, 5-26; P. Roldán Herrera, *Gregorio de Tours. Historias. Edición y traducción*, Cáceres 2013, xli-lxvi.

Finally, the last two sources that deserve to be highlighted have also a common but different horizon, North Africa. The first work, the *Panegyric to Emperor Anastasius* of Priscian of Caesarea, although most probably composed in Constantinople around 512, reflected his African background.⁵³ The second one is the *Chronicle* of Victor, bishop of *Tunnuna*.⁵⁴

2. The Anastasian Balkanic background: from the death of Attila to Theoderic's departure towards Italy (ca. 450 - 491)

2.1. Under Emperor Marcian (450-457)

On 28 July 450, Emperor Theodosius II (408-450) died from his injuries at Constantinople after falling from his horse, apparently hunting, without having designated an effective heir, since he did not have direct descendants.⁵⁵ It was not until nearly a month later, 25 August, when after intense court negotiations a new emperor was raised to the purple in the person of Marcian, a low profile military officer who had performed several commissions as *domesticus* under the more prominent figures of the time.⁵⁶

⁵³ For Priscian's reflection of his education in Africa *vid.* A. Luhtala, *Grammar and Philosophy in Late Antiquity: A study of Priscian's sources*, Philadelphia 2005, esp. 79-128. About the main features of his *Panegyric*, *vid.* A. Chauvot, *Panegyricus Anastasi Imperatoris; Procope de Gaza, Priscien de Césarée, Panégyriques de l'Empereur Anastase I. Textes traduites et commentés*, Bonn 1986, 98-114, 116-119; P. Coyne, *Priscian's De laude Anastasii imperatoris*, McMaster University 1988, PhD diss., 4-38.

⁵⁴ Conceived as a continuation of the *Chronicon* started by Julius Sextus Africanus, Victor's *Chronicle* covered the period between the years 444 to 566, where Prosper of Aquitaine left his part. Particularly significant for his orthodox point of view and key in order to understand the background of the Imperial policy towards Rome, as well as Vitalian's revolt. About his figure and work *vid.* C. Cardelle de Hartmann, *Victoris Tunnunensis Chronicon cum reliquiis ex Consularibus Caesaraugustanis et Iohannis Biclarensis Chronicon, with An Historical Commentary on the Consularia Caesaraugustana and Iohannis Biclarensis Chronicon* by Roger Collins, Turnhout 2001, 95-115.

⁵⁵ On Theodosius II *vid.* J. R. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire. Volume II A.D. 395-527*, Cambridge 1990, *sub.* Theodosius 6, 1100. Henceforth quoted as *PLRE*.

⁵⁶ For Marcian *vid.* *PLRE* II, *sub.* Marcianus 8, 714-715. About the dates, treatment of the sources and the key court figures who played a decisive role in his accession *vid.* R. W. Burgess, "The Accession of Marcian in the Light of Chalcedonian Apologetic and Monophysite Polemic", *BZ* 86-87 (1993/1994), 47-68 –who attributes it to Pulcheria, the monk sister of the former emperor; C. Zuckerman, "L'Empire d'Orient et les Huns. Notes sur Priscus", *Travaux et Mémoires* 12 (1994), 159-182 –who, on the contrary, argues in favour of the key involvement of the military in the figure of Zeno; A. D. Lee, "The Eastern Empire: Theodosius to Anastasius", in Cameron, Ward-Perkins & Whitby, *The Cambridge* (cit. n. 17), 33-62, esp. 42-43 –in the same way as the latter, considering also the possibility of Aspar.

His accession entailed a complete turn regarding the policy of subsidies that the Eastern Roman Empire had been following towards its main external Balkan menace: the Hunnic Confederation. The Huns, well established in the Carpathian Basin by that time, had been intermittently launching incursions into Roman territory south of the Danube since 421/422,⁵⁷ exploiting Constantinople's both internal and external struggles and being able of extorting increasing sums of gold in the form of diplomatic tributes, up to approximately six thousand pounds of gold at the point of Marcian's advent.⁵⁸ The newly appointed emperor said that this had to stop.⁵⁹

Although this harsher diplomatic approach towards the Huns was not completely new, as it had been previously proved by Theodosius II during part of the forties, it had not been favored by the imperial courtesan circle due to its proven catastrophic consequences for the Roman Balkan provinces.⁶⁰

One of his most staunch detractors and main architects of the foreign policy of the former emperor, the eunuch Chrysaphius,⁶¹ was immediately dismissed by Marcian, sending thus a clear and direct message to Attila about his renewed intentions. This sudden and complete turn on the direction of the Hunnic foreign affairs, which has been even labelled as "reckless" or "gamble" by some scholars,⁶² could be attributed to various

⁵⁷ Regarding this particular episode, by which the Hunnic chief of the time, Rugila, managed to extract from Theodosius II three hundred five thousand pounds of gold in exchange for peace (Prisc., *Fr.* 2), *vid.* B. Croke, "Evidence for the Hun Invasion of Thrace in A.D. 422", *GRBS* 18 (1977), 347-367; R. C. Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy. Formation and Conduct from Diocletian to Anastasius*, Leeds 1992, 59-60; Fernández Delgado, *De Re Diplomatica*, 115-116.

⁵⁸ Briefly summarized, Theodosius II signed three successive treaties with the Huns in *ca.* 435 (Prisc., *Fr.* 2), 441/3 (Prisc., *Fr.* 6) and 448 (Prisc., *Fr.* 3), which progressively incremented the sum of the payments. For further details of these events, for which Priscus is the sole source of information, *vid.* W. N. Bayless, "The Treaty with the Huns of 443", *AJPh* 97 (1976), 176-179 –exclusively for the second; Blockley, *East Roman* (cit. n. 57), 59-62; Zuckerman, "L'Empire" (cit. n. 56), 159-167; Fernández Delgado, *De Re Diplomatica*, 116-117.

⁵⁹ Prisc., *Fr.* 24, 2; Theoph., A.M. 5946.

⁶⁰ This strategy was followed between *ca.* 442-446, ultimately triggering Attila's campaign of devastation during 447/8. For a detailed account and its implications *vid.* Maenchen-Helfen, *The World* (cit. n. 12), 119-125; Zuckerman, "L'Empire", 168-172; Thompson, *The Huns* (cit. n. 12), 98-103; J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, "The Lower Danube Region under Pressure: from Valens to Heraclius", in Poulter, *The Transition*, 104-105.

⁶¹ About Chrysaphius' career and his final fate *vid.* *PLRE* II, *sub.* Chrysaphius *qui et* Ztummas, 295-297.

⁶² *Vid.* R. L. Hohlfelder, "Marcian's Gamble: A Reassessment of Eastern Imperial Policy toward Attila A.D. 450-453", *AJAH* 9 (1984), 54-69 –for the latter; Thompson, *The Huns*, 220 –about the former.

reasons, both internal and external, beyond the fact that the payments constituted a real heavy burden for the imperial treasure.⁶³

Externally, Attila seemed, at that particular time, much more interested in Western affairs, preparing a campaign that would fully test Ravenna's strength at the Catalaunian Plains in summer 451, first, and in Italy itself in 452.⁶⁴ Internally, however, the situation was much more worrisome, as the emperor's position was notoriously precarious. This was mainly due to the fact that, in spite of his marriage with Aelia Pulcheria after his accession⁶⁵ and the alleged support of main court figures such as Aspar and even Zeno,⁶⁶ he lacked recognition from the Western Emperor Valentinian III (425-455), something that was not achieved until March 452.⁶⁷ This combination, alongside with the quarrels of the senatorial class on the basis of the new emperor's humble origins and the serious concerns expressed by the Balkan landowners due to their difficult situation,⁶⁸ most probably boosted Marcian towards new touches in his foreign policy.

After his two repeated and soundly failures in the West, Attila's nearly mythical position as the invincible leader of the Huns seemed beginning to shake and promised to worsen even further if Constantinople's new diplomatic position was not contested. He threatened Marcian with a new invasion, but he was incapable of fulfilling his threats because death surprised him during his wedding night and died suddenly in early 453.⁶⁹

Although somehow favorable, Attila's death could not cover the extremely delicate situation of the Empire in the Balkans. In its Eastern part, the Hunnic invasions of 441/2 and 447/8 had devastated severely the territory by disassembling the defensive system,

⁶³ A recurrent *topos* in Late Antique written sources, based mainly on the origins of the diverse authors and their general disgust for the idea of the Roman administration paying to "barbarians", rather than on the real costs that this diplomatic procedure implied for Constantinople. On the contrary, these subsidies, which were a clearly cheaper mechanism of control over the barbarians than military campaigns, were extremely useful as they maintained the balance of power by boosting the competitiveness within their elites. For further details *vid.* J. Iluk, "The Export of Gold from the Roman Empire to Barbarian Countries from the 4th to the 6th Centuries", *MBAH* 4 (1985), 79-102; Fernández Delgado, *De Re Diplomatica*, 612-613.

⁶⁴ For further details *vid.* Maenchen-Helfen, *The World*, 129-143; Thompson, *The Huns*, 137-163; Jin Kim, *The Huns* (cit. n. 12), 69-88.

⁶⁵ Mal., 14, 28; *Chron. Pasch.*, s.a. 450.

⁶⁶ *Vid. supra.*, n. 56.

⁶⁷ On the process *vid.* Burgess, "The Accession" (cit. n. 56), 63; Lee, "The Eastern" (cit. n. 56), who suggest that the Western emperor was even considering taking military action against the "usurper".

⁶⁸ Prisc., *Fr.* 3.

⁶⁹ Prisc., *Fr.* 23; Marc. Com., s.a. 469; Jord., *Get.* 43, 225; 49, 254-258; Theoph., A.M. 5946.

dislocating both the urban and rural development and so creating a no-man's land between the Danube and the Balkan range within the imperial domains.⁷⁰ In the Western one the situation was, simply, desperate. Allegedly under the sovereignty of Ravenna, it was the East which effectively had to take concern of what was left of it,⁷¹ since much of Pannonia had been lost to the Huns, consequently breaking the Roman dominion in the Middle Danube.⁷²

However, although extremely weakened internally in the Balkans, Constantinople had his momentum as the Hunnic Confederation began, almost immediately, its process of effective dissolution. It seems very likely that, even before the decease of Attila, internal tensions and aristocratic competition between the several *gentes* that formed the Hunnic Confederation were in the way of undermining its foundations from within; sadly, the sources remain silent in this point.⁷³ This somehow messy context was certainly exploited by Ardaric, leader of the Gepids, who rose in arms against Attila's sons and achieved an unexpected but decisive victory at the banks of the *Nedao* in 454/5,⁷⁴ allowing thus Marcian to resettle the imperial balance of power in the Balkans.

It was clear that Constantinople could afford neither a confrontation against these *gentes* nor a big-scale rebuilding program in order to reassert his authority over this area, so the opportunity was capitalized diplomatically.⁷⁵ Accordingly, around the year 455/6, the emperor signed a treaty with the Gepids, the most powerful Germanic group that

⁷⁰ About the effects and the archaeological evidence of Attila's campaigns in the Lower Danube and its consequences in a long-term run *vid.* Liebeschuetz, "The Lower" (cit. n. 60), 101-134; J. Wilkes, "The Archaeology of War: Homeland Security in the South-West Balkans (3rd-6th c. A.D.)", in Sarantis & Christie (eds.), *War* (cit. n. 20), 735-758, esp. 747-749.

⁷¹ For this process *vid.* Wozniak, "East Rome" (cit. n. 19), 352-355.

⁷² A circumstance that will not reverse despite the initiatives taken later by Justinian I during the mid-sixth century. For the loss of *Pannonia*, which started at least in the early twenties, *vid.* Maenchen-Helfen, *The World*, 76-81; Wozniak, "East Rome", 352-353; N. Christie, "From the Danube to the Po: The Defense of Pannonia and Italy in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries AD", in Poulter, *The Transition*, 547-578, esp. 560-563 for an archaeological view.

⁷³ These sentiments of disaffection most probable were fueled by both the Western failures and Marcian's decision of ceasing the policy of subsidies, something that certainly diminished Attila's prestige. *Vid.* Maenchen-Helfen, *The World*, 143; Pohl, "Die Gepiden" (cit. n. 13), 252-254; Whitby, *The Emperor* (cit. n. 17), 712.

⁷⁴ On Ardaric *vid.* *PLRE II, sub.* Ardaricus, 138. It seems that he was not only leading the Gepids, but a coalition conformed also by Rugians, Heruls, Scirians, Suebi and some Goths (Prisc., *Fr.* 25; Jord. *Get.* 50, 260-263; Theoph., A.M. 5946). For further details about this process *vid.* Maenchen-Helfen, *The World*, 147-152; Pohl, "Die Gepiden", 252-254; Jin Kim, *The Huns*, 92-96; H. Gračanin & J. Škrkulja, "The Ostrogoths in Late Antique Southern Pannonia", *AAC* 49 (2014), 165-205, esp. 168, nn. 8-9.

⁷⁵ It cannot be forgotten that the Empire, at this very time, also had to face serious problems in his Eastern frontier, from Lazica to Arabia. *Vid.* Blockley, *East Roman*, 67-71; Lee, "The

emerged from *Nedao*. Although much of its content fades away due to the silence of the written sources, it seems that the Empire recognized them as *foederati* and granted dominion eastwards of the river Tisza, in Dacia, a territory that would be onwards known as *Gepidia*.⁷⁶ As this condition was to last until Anastasian times, it could have also implied the payment of a subsidy, but this extreme cannot be firmly assessed.⁷⁷

Another powerful Germanic *gens* that came up strengthened from the Hunnic collapse was the “Pannonian” Goths, although they seemed to have taken not much part in the *Nedao* events.⁷⁸ Led at this time by Valamer,⁷⁹ who could have arisen as their leader by fighting at some point against Attila’s sons,⁸⁰ they were either settled by the Huns in *Pannonia* or, at some point later, recognized by Marcian after having fought their former masters and seeking imperial acknowledgement in order to avoid a potential conflict.⁸¹ Whatever the case may have been, Constantinople signed another treaty with them conceding their dominion over *Pannonia*.

Additionally, other diverse “barbarian” groups were also settled in the area, completing thus the new imperial drawn *status quo* on the Balkans. In this way the Sarmatians, Cemandri and some Huns were granted lands near *Castra Martis* (Kula, Bulgaria), in *Dacia Ripensis*. The Scirians, Sardagari and certain Alans somewhere in the provinces of *Moesia Minor* and *Scythia*. Equally, the Rugians and others near *Byzie* (Vize, Turkey) and *Arcadiopolis* (Lüleburgaz, Turkey), both in the province of *Europa*. Ernach,⁸² the minor son of Attila, was also allowed to enter *Scythia* and, finally, other “hunnic” groups were settled in *Dacia Ripensis*, near *Uto* (river Ut, Bulgaria), *Oescus* (Gigen, Bulgaria) and *Almus* (Lom, Bulgaria).⁸³

Eastern”, 45; G. Greatrex & S. N. C. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persians Wars. Part II, AD 363-630. A Narrative Sourcebook*, London-New York 2002, 56-58.

⁷⁶ Jord., *Get.* 12, 74; 50, 263.

⁷⁷ Walter Pohl believes that it could have been even significant. *Vid.* Pohl, “Die Gepiden”, 263. For further details *vid.* Wozniak, “Byzantine” (cit. n. 19), 140-141; Fernández Delgado, *De Re Diplomatica*, 118.

⁷⁸ *Vid.* Maenchen-Helfen, *The World*, 144; Pohl, “Die Gepiden”; Heather, *Goths*; Thompson, *The Huns*, 198.

⁷⁹ Although there were other important leaders, it seems that he was the head of them. *Vid.* *PLRE II, sub.* Valamer, 1135-1136.

⁸⁰ Something that could had taken place around 453/4. For the date, very much discussed, *vid.* Heather, *Goths*, 246, n. 15. Also, *vid.* Maenchen-Helfen, *The World*, 152-168.

⁸¹ Jord., *Get.* 50, 264; 52, 268-269. Some scholars tend to favor the second hypothesis. *Vid.* Heather, *Goths*, 240-244.

⁸² On his figure *vid.* *PLRE II, sub.* Ernach, 400-401.

⁸³ Jord., *Get.* 50, 265-266.

Marcian's reshaping of significant areas of the Roman Balkans during 455-456 could be conceptualized as a masterpiece. He had made a risky move and, clearly favored by the circumstances, he had succeeded in gaining back the prestige Constantinople needed for being the main arbiter over the process of reorganization of the post-Attila Balkans. Accordingly, he had managed not only to pacify the main war front for the Empire during the last three decades, but also to create a chain of security buffer areas that may had lay the basis to regain a certain degree of recovery if the new situation was able to endure. Unfortunately for the Roman interests, it did not.

2.2. Under Emperor Leo I (457-474)

Marcian died early in 457 without a named successor and, this time, it was Aspar⁸⁴ who effectively chose it in the person of an also middle-aged military of Balkan origins, Leo.⁸⁵ The first foreign crisis the newly appointed emperor had to face spread two years later, when around 459 the so-called "Pannonian" Goths broke the standing treaty between both sides and plundered Western *Illyricum*.⁸⁶

The motives of this breach are obscure. From the testimonies of Priscus and Jordanes it could be argued that it could have started, on the one hand, because of Leo's intention of not carrying on with the payments agreed by Marcian, perhaps a gesture of independence from Aspar as his predecessor also did at his time regarding the Huns, in order to consolidate his position; on the other, on Valamer's initiative, seeking for more imperial gold that might strengthen his own position and guarantee his people's necessities, as Heather believes.⁸⁷

In the meantime, another great group of Balkan-settled Goths whose leader was Theoderic Strabo,⁸⁸ who dwelt in Thrace possibly as imperial *foederati*,⁸⁹ began to play an increasingly important role in imperial politics in order to counterbalance the formers. However, before that happened, a new agreement was signed and the "Pannonian" Goths were granted a subsidy of 300 pounds of gold.⁹⁰ In return, the

⁸⁴ On his figure *vid. PLRE II, sub. Fl. Ardabur Aspar*, 164-169.

⁸⁵ Prisc., *Fr.* 19; Marc. Com., s.a. 457, 1; Theod. Lect., *Epit.* 367; Mal., 14, 34; Evagr., *HE* 2, 8; *Chron. Pasch.*, s.a. 457; Theoph., A.M. 5950. For further details about Marcian's decease *vid. B. Croke*, "The date and Circumstances of Marcian's Decease", *Byzantion* 48 (1978), 5-9. For Leo's background *vid. PLRE II, sub. Leo 6*, 663-664.

⁸⁶ Prisc., *Fr.* 37; Jord., *Get.* 52, 270-271.

⁸⁷ *Vid. Heather, Goths*, 247-248.

⁸⁸ For his figure *vid. PLRE II, sub. Theodericus Strabo* (5), 1073-1076.

⁸⁹ Jord., *Get.* 52, 270.

⁹⁰ Prisc., *Fr.* 37. This figure, in our opinion, might give us an approximative idea about the amount fixed for the previous treaties signed by Marcian with the Gepids, Goths and other

emperor demanded that the king's nephew, Theoderic, had to be sent to the imperial capital as a hostage.⁹¹

It was not until the sixties that the imperial interests in the Balkans were newly threatened. *Ca.* 462/3, whilst Leo's concerns laid westwards on the Vandals,⁹² an embassy from various "Oguric tribes" arrived at Constantinople presenting a proposal of understanding with the Empire.⁹³ This was a product of the coming and going, in the Eurasian Steppe, of several "fugitive peoples" that fought one-another trying to fill somehow the vacuum of power left by the Huns; a process that the Empire tried to avoid at all cost but, at the end, splashed him directly, perhaps on the basis of an apparently careful and quite balanced calculated strategy.⁹⁴ However, in spite of the friendly treatment granted at the Imperial court, seemingly no official agreement was signed that year.⁹⁵

At some point in the early mid-sixties, a conflict also erupted between certain remnants of the Huns and the "Pannonian" Goths.⁹⁶ This, combined with the pressure the formers were suffering at the Westernmost part of the Steppe at the hands of some "Oguric tribes", led Dengizich and Ernach,⁹⁷ two of the main surviving sons of Attila, to contact with Constantinople despite the fact that, according to Priscus, "they were at

gentes in 455-456. Although it is a mere hypothesis, as they were signed in equal terms, it might be considered also that a slightly lower amount could have been originally agreed.

⁹¹ Jord., *Get.* 52, 271. On the implications of the policy of diplomatic hostages, as sample, *vid.* A. D. Lee, "The Role of Hostages in Roman Diplomacy with Sasanian Persia", *Historia* 40 (1991), 366-374; E. Nechaeva, *Embassies-Negotiations-Gifts. Systems of East Roman Diplomacy in Late Antiquity*, Stuttgart 2014, 111; Fernández Delgado, *De Re Diplomatica*, 629.

⁹² *Vid.* Blockley, *East Roman*, 72; Lee, "The Eastern", 48.

⁹³ Those were the Saraguri or "yellow/white Ogurs from the West", the Onoguri or "ten tribes" and the Urogi (Prisc., *Fr.* 40, 1). On their names and characteristics, most probably Turkic-speaking groups, *vid.* P. B. Golden, "Nomads of the western Eurasian steppes: Oğurs, Onoğurs and Khazars", in C. Hriban (ed.), *Peter B. Golden. Studies on the Peoples and Cultures of the Eurasian Steppes*, Bucharest 2011, 135-162, esp. 136-137. For the date of the legation *vid.* Blockley, *East Roman*, 73; Fernández Delgado, *De Re Diplomatica*, 110-111.

⁹⁴ As the information provided by Priscus, our main written source for this chain of events, seems to suggest in the context of a later diplomatic contact between the Saraguri and Leo I (Prisc., *Fr.* 40, 1-2). *Vid.* Blockley, *The Fragmentary*, 345, n. 158; Fernández Delgado, *De Re Diplomatica*, 111.

⁹⁵ Prisc., *Fr.* 40, 1.

⁹⁶ *Ca.* 463. *Vid.* Jord., *Get.* 53, 272-273. For this conflict *vid.* Maenchen-Helfen, *The World*, 162-165; Heather, *Goths*, 249; Jin Kim, *The Huns* 117-119; P. Heather, "The Huns and Barbarian Europe", in Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge* (cit. n. 12), 209-229, esp. 226-228.

⁹⁷ On the former *vid.* *PLRE* II, *sub.* Dengizich, 354-355. For the latter *vid. supra.*, n. 82.

odds with the eastern Romans”.⁹⁸ They demanded, *ca.* 465/6,⁹⁹ that a new peace treaty should be concluded between both sides, acknowledging them as well to re-open a marketplace somewhere close to the Danube.¹⁰⁰ The imperial answer was a direct and blatant rejection to both demands,¹⁰¹ a posture that only achieved to put on hold the problem, not even partially solving it.

If this was not enough, *ca.* 466 another fire flared up at the Roman Balkans as the Suebi, led by a certain Hunimund, raided the interior of *Dalmatia*. This act prompted Valamer’s military response since the “Pannonian” Goths were the main power in the region. Accordingly, he engaged them early next year –467– near *Lacus Pelso* (Lake Balaton, Hungary), accomplishing an unmitigated victory.¹⁰² Although a peace agreement, that even included the adoption of the rebel Suebian leader, was concluded in the aftermath, the latter, seeking for revenge, came to terms with the Sciri and arose in arms once more, breaking as well the understanding that, according to Jordanes, was in force between the Goths and the latter.¹⁰³

This new quarrel, which more than in the personal grievances between Hunimund and Valamer themselves was more probably based on the increasingly winning force of the “Pannonian” Goths in the Middle Danube, caused a stalemate, leading both sides to call for Eastern Roman aid. Aspar, which still remained one of the most influential political figures at court,¹⁰⁴ seemed to favor the position that had been characterizing the

⁹⁸ Prisc., *Fr.* 41. This was most probably caused by the fact that Ernach, as former *foederatus* of the Empire, was considered a traitor.

⁹⁹ The chronology remains a controversial point. For the purposed date *vid.* Maenchen-Helfen, *The World*, 165; Blockley, *East Romans*, 73; Jin Kim, *The Huns*, 119; Fernández Delgado, *De Re Diplomatica*, 110-111; *contra* Thompson, *The Huns*, 172, who proposes a late one, 468/9.

¹⁰⁰ It has to be also considered that an imperial edict enacted by Marcian in 455/66 (*Iust., Cod.* 4. 41. 2) forbade the exportation of arms and materials to the barbarians beyond de Danube, something that would have inflicted seriously on the Hunnic warmongering. *Vid.* Thompson, *The Huns*, 199, n. 90. On the subject of imperial constitutions *vid.* A. Fernández de Buján, *Derecho Público Romano*, Madrid 2020, esp. 197.

¹⁰¹ Prisc., *Fr.* 46.

¹⁰² Jord., *Get.* 53, 274.

¹⁰³ Jord., *Get.* 53, 275.

¹⁰⁴ Aspar’s influence, based mainly on the support he enjoyed from the Gothic *foederatii*, was clearly waning as Leo I had been progressively backing, as a political counterbalance, the Isaurian chief Tarasicodissa (later emperor Zeno). This preference later manifested in the alliance concluded between both sides through Ariadne’s betrothal, who was the emperor’s eldest daughter, with the latter. Furthermore, in 466 Ardabur, the son of Aspar, was accused of treason and, in 467, he backed Anthemius, Marcian’s son in law, in his aspirations of being Emperor of the West. For Zeno’s early life and service to Leo I *vid.* *PLRE II, sub.* Fl. Zenon 7, 1200-1202.

foreign imperial policy towards the Balkans until that moment: neutrality. However, Leo I, who had been hoping for an opportunity like that to try to turn the tables, was not up to it and decided to join forces with the weakest side, the rebel Suebians and their Scirian allies. Therefore, he sent a letter to the *magister militum per Illyricum* ordering him to provide military help to the Scirii.¹⁰⁵ Although this change in the imperial diplomatic strategy seemed to be doomed as the emperor bet for the losing side, at the very end succeeded in its purpose, at least temporarily, since Valamer was killed in action and the position of the “Pannonian” Goths accordingly weakened.¹⁰⁶

In 468, the unsolved menace of the Huns, although partially, reappeared in the Danubian theatre. Whilst Ernach, after achieving nothing from the emperor, headed northwards and achieved to prompt some sort of tribal union with some of the “Oguric tribes” during the subsequent years, which may even have conformed the core of the “Bulgars” later mentioned in this contribution,¹⁰⁷ his brother Dengizich just acted in a complete opposite direction. Taking advantage of Constantinople’s delicate situation due to both several natural disasters and the punitive expedition to the Vandals,¹⁰⁸ the Hunnic chief tried to extract both lands and a significant subsidy from Leo I. Although the emperor might even have considered those terms in such difficult times, the true fact is that during next year –469– Dengizich’s head was brought to Constantinople and stacked on a spike, ending thus with the problem.¹⁰⁹

About Ardabur *vid. PLRE II, sub. Ardabur iunior* 1, 135-137. On Anthemius *vid. PLRE II, sub. Anthemius* 3, 96-98. For further details also *vid. B. Croke, “Dynasty and Ethnicity: Emperor Leo and the Eclipse of Aspar”, Chiron* 35 (2005), 147-203; M. Mcevoy, “Becoming Roman?: the not-so-curious case of Aspar and the Ardaburii”, *JLA* 9 (2016), 483-511.

¹⁰⁵ Prisc., *Fr.* 45.

¹⁰⁶ Jord., *Get.* 53, 276. On the evolution of this conflict *vid. Heather, Goths*, 248-250; P. Crawford, *Roman Emperor Zeno. The Perils of Power Politics in Fifth-century Constantinople*, Barnsley 2019, 58.

¹⁰⁷ From an ethimologic point of view, the Turkic voice “*bulgha*” means “to stir, confusion, mixture”, which also may refer this process incited by Ernach between diverse groups of Hunnic and Turkic origins. *Vid. Golden, “Nomads”* (cit. n. 93), 138; Jin Kim, *The Huns*, 137-138; Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars*, 32, esp. n. 58.

¹⁰⁸ On that year a big earthquake shook Hellespont, the Greek islands and Thrace, and also flooding affected Constantinople and Bithynia. Furthermore, Basiliscus lead a naval expedition against the Vandal capital, Carthage, which ended in a surrounding failure after de defeat at Cape Bon. On the natural disasters, *vid. Prisc., Fr.* 48; Evagr., *HE* 2, 14. For the unsuccessful campaign against the Vandals *vid. Prisc., Fr.* 52-53; Jord. *Rom.* 337; Proc., *BV* 1, 6, 1-8; Evagr., *HE* 2, 16; Theoph., A.M. 5961; 5963. Equally *vid. Blockley, East Roman*, 75-76; Lee, “The Eastern”, 48-49.

¹⁰⁹ Prisc., *Fr.* 49; Marc. Com., s. a. 469. For further details *vid. Crawford, Roman Emperor* (cit. n. 106), 60.

Between 470 and 473, decisive changes began to take place in the Balkans, especially regarding the balance of power between the two main Gothic groups, the so called “Pannonian” and “Thracian” Goths. Although the former still enjoyed the preeminent position of the two and during the previous year –469– were victorious at the banks of the *Bolia* against a new coalition of Suebians and Sarmatians,¹¹⁰ their power had begun to diminish since the decease of their former king, Valamer, which left them in a particularly dangerous crossroad. Victories continued for a while, since in 470 and 471 they were also capable to impose by force again over the Suebians, next the Alamans and anew the Sarmatians,¹¹¹ and even seemed to regain their former strength with the returned and triumphant figure of Theoderic,¹¹² but this was a mere illusion since the previous years of fighting had progressively exhausted them and now, another powerful groups, such as the Gepids, were stepping into the scene.¹¹³

In the meantime, the so-called “Thracian” Goths, the group led by Theoderic Strabo, remained seemingly quiet and unconditionally loyal to the imperial cause until 471. In that year Aspar, their principal protector, was assassinated in a palace coup orchestrated by the emperor himself with both the approval and support of the Isaurian faction, taking advantage of the religious turmoil that, during the previous year, had aroused in Constantinople due to Aspar’s Arian creed and the subsequent revolt of the *magister militum per Thracias* Anagast.¹¹⁴ This triggered not only Theoderic’s rebellion against the throne but also had direct consequences at the imperial capital, as the crime tried to be also avenged by some supporters headed by Ostrys, but they were neutralized on their attempt.¹¹⁵

The year 473 marked however a new milestone in the history of the Roman Balkans, and certainly, a new turning point such as the 455/6 could have become, but this time

¹¹⁰ Jord., *Get.* 54, 277-279.

¹¹¹ For more information *vid.* Heather, *Goths*, 249-251.

¹¹² It seems that after the first campaign, Theoderic returned from Constantinople and, the following year, was at the head of the Goth army that conquered *Singidunum* (Belgrade, Serbia) to the Sarmatians. *Vid.* Jord., *Get.* 55, 280-282.

¹¹³ Thus contradicting Jordanes, who depicted the victories of the Amal-led Goths crushing and complete and stated that the territory had been completely exhausted by the preceding wars. *Vid.* Jord., *Get.* 56, 283. For the Gepids *vid.* Pohl, “Die Gepiden”, 288-291; Sarantis, “War” (cit. n. 20), 17-19; Id., *Justinian’s Balkan Wars*, 61.

¹¹⁴ About his figure *vid.* PLRE II, *sub.* Anagastes, 75-76. It seems that the previous attempt of Aspar to force Leo’s I hand by asking for the bestowal of the title of *Caesar* over his son Patricius, trying to take advantage of his briefly regained prestige after Basiliscus’ catastrophic expedition to Africa, was enough for the emperor. On this *vid.* Croke, “Dynasty” (cit. n. 104), 147-203; Mcevoy, “Becoming Roman?” (cit. n. 104), esp. 498-502; Crawford, *Roman Emperor*, 62-71.

¹¹⁵ *Vid.* Mal., 14, 40; *Chron. Pasch.*, s. a. 467; Theoph., A.M. 5964. For Ostrys *vid.* PLRE II, *sub.* Ostrys, 814-815.

just in the opposite direction. Theoderic the Amal, taking advantage of Strabo's rebellion in Thrace, advanced into *Illyricum*, attacking on his way *Naissus* (Nis, Serbia), *Ulpiana* (Lipljan, Kosovo), *Scupi* (Skopje, Macedonia) and *Stobi* (Gradsko, Macedonia), reaching as far as Thessalonica (Greece), the capital of the Diocese of Macedonia.¹¹⁶

Unable to cope with both threats, Leo I was forced to make remarkable concessions to both of them. In this way, the "Pannonian" Goths were granted, through the intermediation of the *magister officiorum* Hilarius, fertile lands in Macedonia, which encompassed several strategically located cities¹¹⁷ and perhaps even also a small subsidy was conceded.¹¹⁸ Regarding the "Thracian" Goths, the leader of this former *foederati* was the most benefited, as he was proclaimed the sole ruler of the whole Goths, bestowed with the position of *magister militum praesentalis*¹¹⁹ and granted an stipendium of two thousand pounds of gold for his services to the Empire.¹²⁰

The implications of these imperial decisions are challenging to assess. On the one hand, it is true that Constantinople was apparently able to neutralize two exterior menaces that had become interior ones, thus securing both the immediate stability of the Roman Balkans and the dominion over the whole Thrace without paying an unreasonable price. Additionally, Leo I had created the conditions for internal competition between the two groups of Goths, something that might be very useful to keep them both at bay. However, on the other, by using this perilous strategy of divide and conquer within the Eastern Roman borders, the emperor had invited disaster, as an increasingly fierce competition could become a real threat for the very heart of the Empire or, in the worst case scenario, as it finally happened, could be the starting point for the emergence of a very dangerous and powerful counterpower in the core of the *romanitas* itself, if both groups ever achieved to cooperate or unify themselves.

2.3. Under Emperor Zeno (474-475/476-491)

Unaware of this huge miscalculation, Leo I passed away because of dysentery in early 474, being briefly succeeded by his underage grandson Leo II.¹²¹ The infant died months

¹¹⁶ Jord. *Get.* 56, 285-286.

¹¹⁷ *Vid.* Jord., *Get.* 56, 287.

¹¹⁸ For the discussion *vid.* Heather, *Goths*, 264-267.

¹¹⁹ Becoming so, in fact, not only one of the main leaders of the imperial forces stationed at Constantinople but also a politician, as he was permitted to own both wealth and properties at the imperial capital. *Vid.* Malch., *Fr.* 18, 4; Theoph., A.M. 5970.

¹²⁰ Malch., *Fr.* 2. For further details on this process *vid.* Heather, *Goths*, 267-271.

¹²¹ Marc. Com., s.a. 474, 1; Mal., 14, 45; Evagr., *HE* 2, 17-18; *Chron. Pasch.*, s.a. 473; 474; Theoph., A.M. 5966; 5967.

later, being succeeded by his father, Tarasis, the most prominent Isaurian protégée of the first Leo who, through his marriage with Aelia Ariadne, was invested with the purple on late autumn that year.¹²² Both his regional origins and the extensive promotion of his fellow countrymen made him a highly unpopular ruler from the very beginning. His reign even appeared to be shorter than his son's when, on 9 January 475, the empress mother, his mother-in-law Aelia Verina,¹²³ proclaimed Basiliscus as the new Roman sovereign, forcing thus Zeno and his family to leave the imperial capital.¹²⁴

Once the struggle initiated, both contenders approached diplomatically one of the main sources of military manpower that could turn the balance on their respective favor: The Gothic *foederati* that had been settled on the Balkans by Leo I. Theoderic and the “Pannonian” ones sided with Zeno, whilst Strabo and his “Thracian” fellows, fervent antagonists of the challenged emperor, preferred to join forces with the pretender.¹²⁵ Events developed and, at the end, it was the contested emperor who managed to return to Constantinople and consolidate his imperial position around August 476.¹²⁶ Accordingly, this time the tables turned and Theoderic the Amal was the most benefited part of the two, being granted honors and the political position Strabo enjoyed previously,¹²⁷ a circumstance that fueled even further the existing competition between the two main leaders and definitely transformed the “Gothic issue” from a foreign into a domestic affair, decisive for the evolution of the Roman internal politics up to 488.

¹²² For Zeno's name *vid.* R. M. Harrison, “The Emperor Zeno's Real Name”, *BZ* 74 (1981), 27-28. On the transfer of power from Leo II, *vid.* M. Mcevoy, “Leo II, Zeno, and the transfer of imperial power from a son to his father in 474AD”, in J. W. Drijvers & N. Lenski (eds.), *The Fifth Century: Age of Transformation*, Bari 2019, 197-208. About his origins, relations with Leo I and the process of accession to power *vid.* R. Kosiński, *The Emperor Zeno: Religion and Politics*, Cracow 2010, esp. 57-72; Crawford, *Roman Emperor*, 102-105.

¹²³ *Vid.* PLRE II, *sub.* Aelia Verina, 1156. On her significant political importance on the political events of Zeno's reign *vid.* M. Vallejo Girvés, “Empress Verina amongst the Pagans”, in M. Sághy & E. M. Schoolman (eds.), *Pagans and Christians in the Late Roman Empire. New Evidence, New Approaches (4th-8th centuries)*, Budapest 2017, 43-58.

¹²⁴ Marc. Com., s.a. 475, 1; Mal. 15, 2-3; Iohan. Ant., *Fr.* 233; Evagr., *HE* 3, 3; *Chron. Pasch.*, s.a. 477; Theoph., A.M. 5967. For his meagre two first regnal months *vid.* Kosiński, *The Emperor* (cit. n. 122), 76; Crawford, *Roman Emperor*, 108. On Basiliscus *vid.* PLRE II, *sub.* Basiliscus 2, 212. For the gestation and implications of his revolt *vid.* Kosiński, *The Emperor*, 79-82; Crawford, *Roman Emperor*, 109-112.

¹²⁵ Malch., *Fr.* 20. On their respective motivations, *vid.* Heather, *Goths*, 273-275.

¹²⁶ Marc. Com., s.a. 476; Mal., 15, 5; Evagr. *HE* 3, 8; *Chron. Pasch.*, s.a. 478; Theoph., A.M. 5969. For further information on the events *vid.* Kosiński, *The Emperor*, 91-97; Crawford, *Roman Emperor*, 118-123.

¹²⁷ Malch., *Fr.* 2.

Zeno tried to exploit this rivalry on his own interest with poor results, as both Theoderics were well aware of their respective position of power and counter-applied it brilliantly, contributing to a significant degree of internal instability between 476-479.¹²⁸ This complete failure regarding his Gothic policy might have revealed to him that, as main Balkan actors, perhaps a feasible solution could be just trying to involve more pieces into this theatre. In this way, *ca.* 480,¹²⁹ Zeno brought the “Bulgars” into the scene by concluding an alliance with them. Both who really were these people and the conditions under which they came to terms with the Eastern Roman Empire cannot be traced due to the scanty details provided by our main source, John of Antioch,¹³⁰ but it might be hypothesized, especially regarding the second question, that because of their recurrent presence in the area during the subsequent years it might had included the possibility of settlement somewhere in the Eastern Balkans, and even a subsidy, in exchange of military aid against the Goths.¹³¹

The emperor assessed both their reliableness and military potential next year, when he most probably encouraged them to attack the “Thracian” Goths. Theoderic Strabo defeated them in 481 and, when the cure threatened to be worse than the pain as he even initiated after a march on Constantinople, disaffection within his own ranks prevented him from capitalizing his triumph as he had to return to his quarters, dying accidentally on his way back.¹³² This lucky chain of events surely bolstered Zeno’s new alliance as Theoderic the Amal, whose way was completely paved for the unification of both groups of Goths, was most interested in a peaceful settlement with Constantinople. Accordingly, meanwhile Dalmatia fell in the hands of Odoacer in the Western Balkans,¹³³ the Eastern part was pacified as the former was appointed *magister militum praesentalis* and consul for the year 484, being granted as well for his Goths the provinces of *Dacia Ripensis* and *Moesia Inferior*.¹³⁴

However, tranquility was never a characteristic feature of Zeno’s reign. The previous year –483–, the so-called Acacian Schism echoed and shocked the Empire as the

¹²⁸ On this entangled process *vid.* Heather, *Goths*, 278-293; Crawford, *Roman Emperor*, 127-132.

¹²⁹ It is Ennodius who, in a later context, mentions it. *Vid.* Ennod. *Pan.* 5.

¹³⁰ *Vid.* Iohan. Ant., *Fr.* 234, 4-5.

¹³¹ It is also feasible that this so-called “Bulgars” by John of Antioch would have been in reality just a tribe of Huns. On the distinction between the voices “Bulgar” and “Hun”, as sample, *vid.* Curta, *The Making* (cit. n. 16), 208; Golden, “Nomads”, 138; Jin Kim, *The Huns*, 137-138. About the terms of the alliance *vid.* Fernández Delgado, *De Re Diplomatica*, 112.

¹³² Marc. Com., s.a. 481, 1; Jord., *Rom.* 346; Evagr. *HE* 3, 25; Iohan. Ant., *Fr.* 234, 5; Theoph., A.M. 5970.

¹³³ For these events, *vid.* Wozniak, *East Rome*, 356; 362-364.

¹³⁴ Marc. Com., s.a. 483. On further details *vid.* Heather, *Goths*, 294-303; Crawford, *Roman Emperor*, 135-140.

relations with the Roman Church, that had trembled in the balance since the promulgation of the *Henotikon* a year earlier –482–, definitely broke down, dividing thus the *christianitas*.¹³⁵ If that was not enough, the Isaurian general Illus revolted against the emperor and, having secured Verina's support, had Leontius crowned in Tarsus, initiating thus a new revolt that was to last for another four years, up to 488.¹³⁶

In this delicate context, though not immediately, the conflict also spread progressively to the whole Balkans. In 486 Theoderic, who had remained loyal to the emperor and even provided him with substantial military assistance in his internal strife, rose in arms and ravaged Thrace, most probably due to a food shortage.¹³⁷ Zeno's reaction was immediate, encouraging his main allies in the area, the "Bulgars", to attack the Goths. They answered the call and before the Amal set out for Constantinople, though unsuccessfully, attacked him.¹³⁸ This time external circumstances did not favor the imperial cause and the new military defeat of his weakened allies implied that he had to pay Theoderic a large sum to force him to withdraw from the surroundings of the imperial city.¹³⁹

Also, during that year –487–, Odoacer, who had been dangerously playing with the rebel pretenders,¹⁴⁰ took advantage of the ongoing quarrel between Zeno and the Goths by outmanoeuvring the former and launching thus a preventive attack on the Rugians, one of the main imperial allies in the Western Balkans.¹⁴¹ This movement had been significantly bold and, as the grudges between the emperor and the Amal had been temporarily halted, tension needed to be reduced in order to avoid an imperial adverse reaction. Accordingly, the Scirii sent a delegation to Constantinople which apparently

¹³⁵ On the gestation of this episode and its implications *vid.* Kosiński, *The Emperor*, 125-146 –for the *Henotikon*; 177-202 –about the Acacian Schism; Crawford, *Roman Emperor*, 166-181 –on both.

¹³⁶ Regarding Illus *vid.* *PLRE II, sub.* Illus 1, 586-590. On Leontius *vid.* *PLRE II, sub.* Leontius 17, 670-671. For the evolution of events, *vid.* Kosiński, *The Emperor*, 147-167; Crawford, *Roman Emperor*, 190-202.

¹³⁷ *Jord. Get.* 57, 290; *Iohan. Ant., Fr.* 237, 7; *Ps. Zach., HE* 6, 6.

¹³⁸ *Marc. Com., s.a.* 487; *Mal.,* 15, 9; *Iohan. Ant., Fr.* 237, 8; *Theoph., A.M.* 5997.

¹³⁹ For which the emperor even had Theoderic's own sister, at court that time, to intervene. *Vid.* *Marc. Com., s.a.* 487; *Mal.,* 15, 9; *Iohan. Ant., Fr.* 237, 8; *Theoph., A.M.* 5977. *vid.* Heather, *Goths*, 304-305; Kosiński, *The Emperor*, 177; Crawford, *Roman Emperor*, 203-204.

¹⁴⁰ According to John of Antioch (*Fr.* 237, 7), contacts were frequent with Illus and nearly had culminated in a formal alliance. It is difficult though to assess who took the initiative in the first place, but both the *Anonymous Valesianus* (10.48) and Paul the Deacon (*Hist. Lang.* 1, 19) insight that it originally corresponded to Odoacer, perhaps trying to take advantage of the troublesome context and to expand even further his domains in the area.

¹⁴¹ About the Rugians *vid.* Pohl, "Die Gepiden", 278-280. On the attack, *vid.* Heather, *Goths*, 307; Kosiński, *The Emperor*, 177-178; Crawford, *Roman Emperor*, 212-214.

placated Zeno, who in exchange of lavish gifts allegedly recognized his right to administrate the recently acquired domains in Italy in his name.¹⁴²

However, this last impression was just the opposite of reality. In 488, which constitutes another milestone in the history of the fifth century Roman Balkans, what seemed impossible occurred: Zeno and Theoderic reached what seemed to be a stable and utterly permanent understanding. The negotiations, which are scarcely described by the written sources and, depending on the point of view and bias, differ significantly about the responsibility and initiative of each protagonist on the final agreement,¹⁴³ ended with Theoderic's departure towards Italy with the intention of removing Odoacer and bringing it under the emperor's formal control.¹⁴⁴

In our opinion, a particular point that has not been especially stressed out and which might have had significant importance is that, in the context of the previous conflict between Odoacer and the Rugians, when the latter were defeated, the son of their king, Frederic,¹⁴⁵ escaped and took refuge amongst the Goths. This was most probably because between both sides, as Ennodius seems to highlight, existed close ties within their respective royal families.¹⁴⁶ If this was the case, it might have provided Theoderic with an immaculate *casus belli* against Odoacer, something that would have also been seen by Zeno, who would possibly have considered this as the perfect opportunity to neutralize definitely the Gothic threat.

Nonetheless, this "opportunist"¹⁴⁷ blow only implied that the Ostrogoths and their demands moved westwards, and in the long run, this would have serious repercussions for the Balkan equipoise, mainly in its Western part. This was displayed by Theoderic himself not very long after, since his first action after leaving imperial territory was to attack the Gepids, who had taken advantage from his departure from Pannonia years before and now had become the major power on the region.¹⁴⁸ A battle was fought at

¹⁴² *Vid.* Iohan. Ant., *Fr.* 237, 8.

¹⁴³ Basically, the breach is between the Eastern sources, which maintain that Zeno played a main role (*vid.* Proc., *BG* 1, 1, 9-12; Evagr., *HE* 3, 27; Theoph., A.M. 5977), and the Western ones, who ascribe that part to Theoderic (Ennod., *Pan.* 6; Jord., *Get.* 57, 290-292). The *Anonymous Valsianus* (11, 49) and Jordanes (*Rom.*, 348), although Western sources, also remark Zeno's initiative.

¹⁴⁴ For further details about the accord and its implications *vid.* Heather, *Goths*, 306-308; Moorhead, *Theoderic* (cit. n. 14), 17-20; Prostko-Prostyński, *Vtraeque Res Publicae* (cit. n. 21), 103-129; Kosiński, *The Emperor*, 178.

¹⁴⁵ For his figure *vid.* *PLRE* II, *sub.* Fredericvs 2, 484-485.

¹⁴⁶ *Vid.* Ennod., *Pan.* 6.

¹⁴⁷ *Vid.* Blockley, *East Roman*, 79.

¹⁴⁸ On further details of this process *vid.* Pohl, "Die Gepiden", 288-291; Sarantis, "War", 18-19; Id., *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, 60-61.

the banks of river *Ulca* (Vuka) in early 489,¹⁴⁹ where the Ostrogoths secured not only his eastern flank but also killed the Gepid king Thrapsila, decisively diminishing the position of the main imperial ally on the region, since they were still, most probably, *foederati*. This movement may have seriously concerned Zeno, particularly if *Sirmium* (Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia), their principal seat of power, was conquered.¹⁵⁰

Later in the same year –489–, before reaching his destination, they also defeated another old enemy, the Sarmatians.¹⁵¹ These lightning successes should have worried both Constantinople and Ravenna, and perhaps this would have been the reason for the acceptance of Faustus, a latter's candidate, by the former for the consulship in 490.¹⁵²

Whatever the case might have been, it was too late. By the end of 489, significant parts of Italy were in Theoderic's hands and, in the next year, he sent to Constantinople the *Senatus prior* Festus in order to assure Zeno's recognition of his conquests and demanding from him royal *regalia*.¹⁵³ Before that could happen, the emperor passed this world and a new one was chosen in the figure of Anastasius I, on 10 April 491.¹⁵⁴

In conclusion, it could be said that the Balkan foreign policy implemented by the immediate predecessors of Anastasius I was completely mediated, with three main milestones (454, 473, and 488), by the downfall of the Hunnic Confederation and the subsequent emergence of the Gothic power in the Eastern Balkans and the Gepid one in the Western. The main mechanism followed by Constantinople was the signature of different kinds of treaties that intended to maintain a favorable balance of power on the basis of monetary subsidies and agricultural lands in exchange for peace or military service as *foederatii*. This also contributed to several conflicts both within and between the aristocracies of various *gentes*, something which tended to form a vicious circle from which they tended to take advantage by exploiting the internal as well as the external turbulences the Empire had to face. So finally, when he acquired the purple in 491, it could be

¹⁴⁹ *Vid.* Ennod. *Pan.* 7.

¹⁵⁰ Paul. Diac. *Hist. Rom.* 15, 15. For these events, *vid.* Wozniak, "Byzantine", 141; Pohl, "Die Gepiden", 291-292; Moorhead, *Theoderic*, 20-21; Sarantis, "War", 18; Crawford, *Roman Emperor*, 214-215.

¹⁵¹ *Vid.* Ennod. *Pan.* 7.

¹⁵² *Vid.* Moorhead, *Theoderic*, 21, n. 71. For a recent view of his process of conquest, *vid.* Crawford, *Roman Emperor*, 215-219.

¹⁵³ *Vid.* Anon. *Val.* 12, 64. It is not clear if those claimed were the same sent to Constantinople by Odoacer in 476. For further details, especially the legal implications of this initiative, *vid.* Prostko-Prostyński, *Vtraeque Res Publicae*, 131-138.

¹⁵⁴ *Vid.* Marc. Com., s.a. 491, 1; Mal., 15, 16; Evagr., *HE* 3, 29; Ps. Zach., *HE* 7, 1; *Chron. Pasch.*, s.a. 491; Theoph., A.M. 5983. On his accession, also *vid.* Capizzi, *L'Imperatore*, 71-86; Nicks, *Anastasius I*, 1-10; Meier, *Anastasios I*, 63-74; Crawford, *Roman Emperor*, 229-231.

summarized that the Eastern Balkans were essentially free of significant external threats, being now the Goths mainly a Western one, although the conflict between Odoacer and Theoderic was still glowing.

3. The “Anastasian era” (491-518)

3.1. The early years, a passive Balkan foreign policy? (491 - ca. 500)

The election of Anastasius I as emperor was, in many ways, unexpected. At first sight, all eyes were fixed on Longinus,¹⁵⁵ Zeno’s brother, but the main role that Ariadne played on the choice and her election of the aged *silentarius* Anastasius disgusted many people in Constantinople. Furthermore, despite the elaborate ceremony of accession and the marriage between them,¹⁵⁶ the lack of any further dynastic link constituted a potentially serious problem, especially regarding the Isaurian “lobby”. Well aware of this, he took advantage of the first opportunity that presented and tried to remove the problem once and for all. In this way, a riot at the hippodrome few months after his election served as an excuse for the removal and banishment from the imperial city of the main Isaurian leaders.¹⁵⁷

This prompted a rebellion early in 492 which, in spite of the quick and clean victory of the imperial troops at *Cotyaeum* (Kütahya, Turkey) during the same year, was going to last until 497-498 and focused the main attentions and resources of the new emperor during his early years.¹⁵⁸ Thus, significantly compromised by the hostilities in Isauria, which in fact implied a fight for survival in the throne in terms of stability and popular support, the Empire had to face, at the very same time, other serious external threats.

It is not an easy task to assess the political situation in the Eastern Balkans after Theoderic’s departure, mainly due to the sparing coverage provided by the sources. The first piece of relevant information dates from *ca.* 493, when Count Marcellinus tells that the *magister militum* Julian was killed, stroked by a Scythian sword during a night battle

¹⁵⁵ On his figure *vid. PLRE II, sub. Longinus* 6, 689-690.

¹⁵⁶ It took place either 20 or 24 May 491. *Vid. Jord., Rom.* 354; Mal., 16, 1; Evagr., *HE* 3, 29; *Chron. Pasch.*, s.a. 491; Theoph., A.M. 5983; Const. Porph., *De Cer.* 1, 92 –on the ceremony of accession.

¹⁵⁷ *Vid. Marc. Com.*, s.a. 491, 2; Mal. 16, 2; Iohan. Ant., *Fr.* 239, 2-3; Theoph., A.M. 5984; 5985. On the banishment of several key figures, *vid. Capizzi, L’Imperatore*, 96-97; Nicks, *The Reign*, 43-44; Ead., *Anastasius I*, 22-24; Meier, *Anastasios I*, 79-84.

¹⁵⁸ For details about the covering of the rebellion by the sources and its development *vid. Capizzi, L’Imperatore*, 97-100; Nicks, *The Reign*, 44-49; Ead., *Anastasius I*, 24-28; Meier, *Anastasios I*, 79-84; Crawford, *Roman Emperor*, 231-234.

in Thrace.¹⁵⁹ This passage has been interpreted as an imperial action against the “Bulgars”, tending to link it with a much later note provided by the twelfth century chronicler John Zonaras.¹⁶⁰ However, the issue is not so conclusive because, if we are to support this version, this would mean that, at some point between 487 and 493, the “Bulgars” and the Romans ended their allegedly friendly relationship, initiated *ca.* 480, and entered a phase of a military confrontation that aggravated progressively on the subsequent years, as we shall see. Nonetheless, taking into account the term “Scythian” used by Marcellinus and the place where the supposedly “Bulgar” raid is placed by Zonaras,¹⁶¹ it could have been also led by some Hunnic *gentes*, as much traditional historiography argues.¹⁶²

Taking all this into account, our proposal is that Anastasius I, engaged in a war of uncertain outcome with the Isaurians and aware of the successes of Theoderic in Italy, was not probably interested at all in thin breaking the understanding in force with the “Bulgars”, even though they might have tried to exploit his precarious position, becoming thus one of the main potential threats in the Eastern Balkans. Furthermore, considering anew the information provided by Count Marcellinus, the only source that speaks of it, the emperor had to face civil strife at Constantinople, the second in barely two years of reign.¹⁶³ This circumstance could have prompted the necessity of a small but solid military campaign in Thrace seeking for a victory that would strengthen Anastasius’ I position, or even a convincing military response to a small-scale raid led by some former *foederati*. Nevertheless, whatever the imperial intentions might have been, these were probably dashed away when Julian died campaigning against the foes of the Empire.

At the same time, things were also on the move in the Western Balkans. Theoderic was on the edge of securing all Italy for the Goths, thus fulfilling his old aspiration of establishing a Gothic “independent” state, in this case in the historical heart of *romanitas*.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ *Vid.* Marc. Com., s.a. 493, 1. About Julian *vid.* PLRE II, *sub.* Iulianus 15, 639.

¹⁶⁰ *Vid.* Zon., 14, 3, 26. For the interpretation on secondary sources *vid.* Nicks, *The Reign*, 135; Croke, *The Chronicle*, 108; Id., *Count Marcellinus*, 69.

¹⁶¹ After the issue of the so-called Laurentian Schism (498) and before the signature of the *foedus* with the Ghassanids (502), because of which it could be also perfectly interpreted as a reference for their later raid of 502.

¹⁶² *Vid.* J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire: from the death of Theodosius I to the death of Justinian I (A.D. 395 to A.D. 565)*, London 1993, 2 vols, 434-435 –arguing for remnants of the Hunnic Confederation; P. Lemerle, “Invasions et migrations dans les Balkans depuis la fin de l’époque romaine jusqu’au VIII^e siècle”, *Revue Historique* 11 (1954), 265-308, esp. 282-283 – for predecessors of Kutrigurs and Utigurs.

¹⁶³ Marc. Com., s.a. 493, 1.

¹⁶⁴ For the chronology of the fight between 491-493 and its implications *vid.* Moorhead, *Theoderic*, 25-31; Prostko-Prostyński, *Vtraeque Res Publicae*, esp. 131-138.

In order to both communicate his successes to the emperor and secure his position as *Rex Italiae*, he sent to Constantinople Faustus *Niger*, Odoacer's last consular nominee for 491,¹⁶⁵ who might have been also entrusted by Pope Gelasius I (492-496) with the mission of scrutinizing the imperial will towards the issue of the Acacian Schism.¹⁶⁶ This latter issue is not conclusive at all as the authenticity of the papal letter is much discussed,¹⁶⁷ even though is a particularly interesting piece of information since it provides us with a meaningful description of how Eastern Roman diplomacy was viewed from Rome, with the Pope warning his envoy about the “tricks” and “sleights” of “Greek diplomacy”.¹⁶⁸

In the meantime, most probably in early 493, Ravenna was finally conquered and Odoacer definitely removed. The chronology of the events is obscure and it is not clear if Theoderic, who immediately after was proclaimed “king” by the Goths without having secured imperial recognition,¹⁶⁹ did it before or after Faustus had reached Constantinople, or if the news even reached or not the imperial court when negotiations were still in process. Taking into account the unstable position of Anastasius I, especially at the capital, he could probably have been significantly interested in setting the issue of the Acacian Schism, bounding thus Theoderic's recognition with a compromise with the papal acceptance of the *Henotikon*, something that was not even contemplated by Gelasius, as his *Duo Sunt* letter, written in reply to the previous embassy, demonstrates.¹⁷⁰ However, although neither of the stakeholders got fully what they wanted, it was at least some room for understanding, as the nomination of one of the two consuls proposed for the next year –494– was made by Theoderic himself.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁵ On Faustus *vid. PLRE II, sub. Fl. Anicius Probus Faustus iunior Niger 9, 454-456.*

¹⁶⁶ *Vid. Gelas., Ep. 10; Lib. Pont. 51.*

¹⁶⁷ About it, *vid. Moorhead, Theoderic, 37, n. 11.* On the whole process, which might even have included a coming and going of several embassies from the Gothic part, *vid. Prostko-Prostyński, Vtraeque Res Publicae, 138-141.*

¹⁶⁸ Primarily a repeated literary *topos* derived from the close scrutiny to which foreign envoys were submitted during their visits to the imperial capital, with the main purpose of trying to avoid further gathering of information and preventing thus any kind of clandestine activities. About the reception of foreign envoys at court *vid. Nechaeva, Embassies (cit. n. 91), 34-42; Fernández Delgado, De Re Diplomatica, 502-504.*

¹⁶⁹ *Vid. Anon. Val. 12, 57.*

¹⁷⁰ *Vid. Gelas., Ep. 12; Vict. Tonn., a. 494; Lib. Pont. 51.* For further details *vid. Capizzi, L'Imperatore, 161-163; J. Richards, The Popes and the Papacy in the Early Middle Ages, 476-752, London-Boston (Mass.) 1979, 65-66; Nicks, The Reign, 113; Moorhead, Theoderic, 37; Prostko-Prostyński, Vtraeque Res Publicae, 141-146; Nicks, Anastasius I, 130-131; Meier, Anastasios I, 94-96.*

¹⁷¹ On the presumable terms of the agreement *vid. Capizzi, L'Imperatore, 163; Nicks, The Reign, 113, esp. n. 23; Prostko-Prostyński, Vtraeque Res Publicae, 146-149; Nicks, Anastasius I, 82, esp. n. 37.*

From that year up to 496/7, a dense fog hangs over the Balkans since no news is recorded for that period by the written sources. A little streak of light could be considered the information provided by Count Marcellinus, who informs that Anastasius I, along with the usual anniversary contributions to his soldiers, granted a special one due to the consulship of his brother in 496.¹⁷² Nonetheless, even if it was customary for him to award his *militēs* every *quinquennialia* with a lavish donative,¹⁷³ this action might be interpreted as a sign of military unrest since the particular soldiers to which it was handed are not precisely recorded and furthermore, two years later –in 498–, he had to issue a law exempting from paying the *coemptio* in Thrace, on which most probably were included military men.¹⁷⁴ This proves that not only the conditions of service but life, in general, might have been extremely harsh in the whole Balkans during these years, where the Empire was unable to improve conditions and even further predatory activity might have worsened the situation, as subsequent military events shall prove.

Some light is cast from the year 497 onwards, a decisive date for Anastasius I on two main fronts. From an inner perspective, it marked the beginning of the end of the Isaurian revolt, as three of their main leaders were decapitated and their heads paraded on poles both in Constantinople and Tarsus.¹⁷⁵ Victory celebrations were held while the last remnants of the rebels were put to an end during next year.¹⁷⁶

From a foreign perspective, and particularly regarding the Balkans, the successful crushing of this revolt, which obviously strengthened Anastasius I's position at the head of the Empire, was decisively perceived in the Western part. Theoderic, who has not remained idle in his process of securing and consolidating his position as ruler of Italy, sent some months before –late in 496– an embassy to Constantinople headed by the same Faustus *Niger* who had already served twice as legate on his behalf.¹⁷⁷ He reached the imperial capital early that year, Theoderic's intentions being presumably to gain the emperor's recognition regarding his authority over both the former "Roman" subjects

¹⁷² *Vid.* Marc. Com., s.a. 496, 1.

¹⁷³ On this practice *vid.* Ps. Zach., *HE* 7, 8.

¹⁷⁴ For the measures, *vid.* Iust., *Cod.* 10. 28. 2. 3. Also, W. E. Kaegi, *Byzantine Military Unrest, 471-843: An Interpretation*, Amsterdam 1981, 91-92.

¹⁷⁵ *Vid.* Marc. Com., s.a. 497, 2-3; Mal., 16, 3; Theod. Lect., *Epit.* 449; Vict. Tonn., a. 495; Evagr., *HE* 3, 35; Theoph., A.M. 5988.

¹⁷⁶ For further details, *vid.* Capizzi, *L'Imperatore*, 98-99, nn. 48-49; Nicks, *The Reign*, 47-48; Ead., *Anastasius I*, 26-27; Meier, *Anastasios I*, 82, esp. n. 143.

¹⁷⁷ This was an usual repeated pattern in Late Antique diplomatic practice, as both previous experience and confidence constituted decisive factors to be appointed as ambassador. On this particular issue *vid.* Nechaeva, *Embassies*, 123-131; Fernández Delgado, *De Re Diplomatica*, 453-464. For the date of the embassy *vid.* Prostko-Prostyński, *Vtraeque Res Publicae*, 151-153.

and the *populi* over which Odoacer once ruled.¹⁷⁸ However, as the main envoy was accompanied by two bishops, Cresconius of *Tuder* and Germanus of *Pisarum*, and a new Pope had been elected recently in the figure of Anastasius II,¹⁷⁹ it could not be discarded either the inclusion of some kind of negotiation regarding the Acacian Schism.¹⁸⁰ Either way, the task presumed difficult if we take into account the expression *facta pace* used by the *Anonymous Valesianus*, which not only implied that the two powers were at odds but also might even allude to some sort of armed conflict.¹⁸¹

However, and perhaps unexpectedly, things went as smoothly as they could for Theoderic. Although the religious predicament remained unsolved, he achieved more than he allegedly wanted as Anastasius I not only recognized his new position in Italy but also, as a sign of it, sent back all the *ornamenta palatii* that had been previously sent by Odoacer several years before.¹⁸² Much has been written about the reasons that moved the emperor to do so, the moment he chose, the implications and even the real status which this decision implied for Theoderic's authority over Italy, a debate that clearly is beyond the boundaries of this contribution.¹⁸³ Leaving all those entire aside, the fact is, as F. K. Nicks has pointed out,¹⁸⁴ that cordial relations were reestablished between both sides, at least for a while, and Anastasius I, although recently free from the Isaurians, had really not much room for maneuver, so he had to give Theoderic some acknowledgement under the façade of imperial authority if he wanted to regain a real control over the Western affairs, a *status quo* that Theoderic, at first sight, didn't reject at all.

In the meantime, regarding the Eastern Balkans, with the Western flank secured, the war in Isauria effectively over and with no sign on the horizon of potential trouble, resources were finally at hand in order to try to reconstruct the military forces, rebuild the network of settlements and restore the Roman authority in this particular area. This process began with the transfer of significant masses of population from Isauria to Thrace, a measure in which converged, on the one hand, the necessity of repopulation of certain

¹⁷⁸ *Vid.* Nicks, *Anastasius I*, 82, n. 39.

¹⁷⁹ Specifically, on November 24th. *Vid. Lib. Pont.* 52.

¹⁸⁰ Moreover, taking into account the allegedly pro-Eastern position manifested by the new Pope. *Vid.* Richards, *The Popes* (cit. n. 170), 67-68; Moorhead, *Theoderic*, 38; Prostko-Prostyński, *Vtraeque Res Publicae*, 152-153.

¹⁸¹ *Vid. Anon. Val.* 12, 64.

¹⁸² *Vid. Anon. Val.* 12, 64; Theoph., A.M. 5992.

¹⁸³ For further details *vid.* Capizzi, *L'Imperatore*, 164-165; Nicks, *The Reign*, 120-121; Moorhead, *Theoderic*, 39-51; Prostko-Prostyński, *Vtraeque Res Publicae*, 154-211 –the most detailed analysis of all the provisions contained in the treaty; Nicks, *Anastasius I*, 83-89; Meier, *Anastasios I*, 97-102.

¹⁸⁴ *Vid.* Nicks, *Anastasius I*, 88-89.

areas of the North-Eastern Balkans after years of inattention and presumable barbarian raiding and, on the other, the need of pacification of major areas of Isauria, where the main fortresses were destroyed as a punishment for the support provided to the rebels.¹⁸⁵ Although it is difficult to assess which of the two aforementioned circumstances weighed more, perhaps it also included a point of imperial propaganda as some of the newcomers, according to Procopius of Gaza, could have been settled near *Anastasiopolis* (Axamades, Greece), in the East-end of the Rhodope Mountains, very close to Constantinople.¹⁸⁶

Next year, in 499, Anastasius I took a step further in his strategy and prepared for a full-scale campaign that targeted the main imperial threat in the area: the “Bulgars”. Preparations ensued and a massive force of fifteen thousand men was assembled, whose command was given to the *magister militum per Illyricum* Aristus.¹⁸⁷ The size of the Roman army, which was notoriously considerable for the standards of the time,¹⁸⁸ could be much more interpreted as an indication of the punitive measure that the expedition intended to enforce rather than as a sign of the potential threat that the Empire had to confront. However, it has to be taken also into account the fact that relations between both powers, on which written sources remain completely silent most probable because they were broken since the previous military encounter of 493, were inexistent and the “Bulgars”, whose position as former *foederati* might even have increased Anastasius’ I desire for revenge, could have strengthened due to imperial inactivity in the previous years.

Whatever the underlying reasons might have been, the sources state that the igniting spark of the Eastern Roman response was a raid that the “Bulgars” previously carried out in Thrace,¹⁸⁹ a situation that could even have become endemic during the previous years.¹⁹⁰ From either Constantinople itself or *Naissus* (Niš, Serbia), where the headquarters of the *magister militum per Illyricum* were located, the imperial *milites* marched

¹⁸⁵ *Vid.* Prisc., *Pan.* 119-129; Proc. Gaz., *Pan.* 10; Ps. Jos. Styl., § 23; Mal., 16, 3; Theoph., A.M. 5988.

¹⁸⁶ *Vid.* Proc. Gaz., *Pan.* 10. Equally, *vid.* A. Chauvot, *Procopé de Gaza, Priscien de Césarée, Panégyriques de l'Empereur Anastase I. Textes traduites et commentés*, Bonn 1986, 37, n. 1; Nicks, *Anastasius I*, 27, esp. n. 85.

¹⁸⁷ About Aristus *vid.* *PLRE II*, *sub.* Aristus 2, 147.

¹⁸⁸ For this particular point *vid.* W. Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army, 284-1081*, Stanford 1995, 14-15; 49-59; L. I. R. Petersen, *Siege Warfare and Military Organization in the Successor States (400-800 AD)*, Leiden-Boston 2013, 97-103.

¹⁸⁹ Marc. Com., s.a. 499, 1; Jord., *Rom.* 356; Zon., 14, 4, 8.

¹⁹⁰ As previously stated, the extraordinary exemption of taxes legally implemented by the imperial administration could be interpreted in this way, and also as a decisive proof of Constantinople’s precarious foothold in the Eastern Balkans.

northwards, most probably along the *Via Militaris*, up to the Maritsa basin.¹⁹¹ There, at the banks of a certain river *Tzurta*, the Roman army encountered their foe and was utterly crushed, perhaps surprised and overwhelmed by their battle cries, as Zonaras states.¹⁹² This unexpected setback, certainly the worst in the Balkans for almost half a century, ended with heavy casualties as, according to Count Marcellinus, who might have been an eyewitness of the campaign, what formed Illyrian soldiery's gallantry perished.¹⁹³

This perilous blow to the imperial prestige, whose glory and credit for the Isaurian triumph had been temporarily washed away, forced a quick action in order to take control back. Accordingly, Anastasius I prevented further disaffection within his ranks by hastily sending to the remaining imperial troops of *Illyricum* an extraordinary donative through the *tribunus notariorum* Paulus.¹⁹⁴

However, although the allegedly discontent seemed to be kept at bay by the emperor within the military, at least temporarily, severe riots erupted between the circus factions at Constantinople during the Brytae festival on 501, on which the "Bulgarian disaster" certainly played a catalyst role.¹⁹⁵ A much more direct effect certainly had in the raid of 502, when either the "Bulgars" either the "Huns" entered imperial territory and razed Thrace unopposed, where no troops were available to defend it.¹⁹⁶ This inaction, more than a sign of unrest amongst the Roman *milites*,¹⁹⁷ should be interpreted as a clear sign of the real extent of the previous military disaster in the Balkans, which certainly shook his *status quo* of power, favoring and motivating a radical change in the imperial "grand strategy" towards this area, alongside with two greater conflicts that Anastasius I had to handle during the following years: against the Sassanid Persia in the East and the Ostrogothic Kingdom in the Western Balkans.

But before drawing our attention over those episodes, it could be summarized that, at least up to 497/8, until the Isaurian revolt was put satisfactorily to an end by imperial troops, both the Eastern and Western Balkans were a secondary front for the emperor, who had other urgent concerns. However, this circumstance involved neither passivity

¹⁹¹ *Vid.* Croke, *The Chronicle*, 53.

¹⁹² *Vid.* Zon., 14, 4, 9. On the psychological effect of the "Bulgar's" battle cries *vid.* B. Croke, "Justinian's Bulgar Victory Celebration", *BSI* 41 (1980), 188-195, esp. 189; *Id.*, *The Chronicle*, 110.

¹⁹³ *Vid.* Marc. Com., s.a. 499, 1.

¹⁹⁴ *Vid.* Marc. Com., s.a. 500, 2. For his figure *vid.* *PLRE* II, *sub.* Paulus 29, 853.

¹⁹⁵ *Vid.* Marc. Com., s.a. 501, 1-3; Iohan. Ant., *Fr.* 240. For further details *vid.* Nicks, *The Reign*, 251; *Ead.*, *Anastasius I*, 226-227.

¹⁹⁶ *Vid.* Marc. Com., s.a. 502, 1; Theoph., A.M. 5994. We opt for the first testimony as it is nearly contemporary and well aware of the Balkan reality of that time.

¹⁹⁷ *Vid.* Croke, *The Chronicle*, 111.

nor disregard, since significant energies were focused on the resolution of the two main predicaments: the new status of open war with the “Bulgars” and their periodical raids, which certainly worsened the quality of life of the provincials and the conditions of service of the Roman troops, and the position of Theoderic and the Ostrogothic Kingdom, whose position was recognized and the relationships between both powers seemed normalized. From 497/8 onwards, when resources were relieved from other fronts, Anastasius I devoted all his attention to deal with the “Bulgarian” threat, although the results were not the expected and the major defeat of 499 implied, besides both internal and external turbulences, a clear sign of the need of a new approach to the Balkan problems, especially in the Eastern part.

Accordingly, it might not be a fair statement to define Anastasius’ I Balkan policy as a “passive” one. Undoubtedly, it was very much mediated by other conflicts and most certainly implied a diminishing of the status of power of the Empire in the area, both in the Eastern and the Western Balkans, where the interest of the “Bulgars” and the Ostrogoths respectively were strengthened. If he wanted to bolster the imperial position and his dominion there, a major and decisive reaction which implied a huge change of fate was needed. The opportunity was to be provided, once more, by conflict.

3.2. Putting the imperial power into the scales: A decade of total war (ca. 500 - 510)

However, the storm that was about to be unleashed over the Empire did not come from the West, but from the East. On August 502 the Sassanid forces, led by their own king Kavadh I (488-496/499-531), penetrated over Roman Armenia and laid siege to the city of *Theodosiopolis* (Erzurum, Turkey),¹⁹⁸ beginning thus what has been denominated as the “Anastasian War” by modern historiography.¹⁹⁹ The war possibly was not in the plans of the emperor, and certainly delayed the beginning of the implementation of extensive measures in the Balkans, where things were, once more, beginning to change.

Regarding the Western Balkans, relations between Rome and Constantinople began to cool down after the death of Pope Anastasius II in November 498, when virulent strife divided not only the clergy of the Church of Rome but also the senatorial class due to the election of his successor in the See of Saint Peter. The two candidates,

¹⁹⁸ Ps. Jos. Styl., § 47-48; Marc. Com., s.a. 502, 2; Mal. 16, 9; Proc., *BP* 1, 7, 2; Evagr., *HE* 3, 37; Ps. Zach., *HE* 7, 3-4; Theoph., A.M. 5996.

¹⁹⁹ The coverage of this conflict is beyond our current frame of research. About the circumstances that prompted it, its development, the final overtures and its aftermath *vid.* Capizzi, *L’Imperatore*, 179-185; Nicks, *The Reign*, 84-105; Blockley, *East Roman*, 89-93; G. Greatrex, *Rome and Persia at War*, Leeds 1998, 1-120; Id. & Lieu, *The Roman* (cit. n. 75), 62-82; Nicks, *Anastasius I*, 47-64; Meier, *Anastasios I*, 174-222.

Laurentius and Symmachus, backed respectively by the so-called pro-Eastern faction and the Ostrogothic one based on diverse interests,²⁰⁰ contended from 498 up to 502 for their primacy, being the latter elected after the decisive backing of Theoderic and their supporters. This, who implied once again a significant blow to Anastasius' I interests in Italy, prompted a new crisis known as the Laurentian Schism, which lasted up to 506 when the former candidate, Laurentius, finally died and Symmachus, officially Pope since 502, remained alone at the head of the Church until his own death in 514.²⁰¹

This episode could be perceived as the starting point of a sort of “cold war” between the Ostrogothic Kingdom and the Empire which reached its climax with the so-called War of Sirmium in 504/5. After consolidating both *de iure* and *de facto* his position in Italy, Theoderic directed his attention towards Western *Illyricum*, a region under the Italian prefecture in Odoacer's times. After securing his position in the area with his dominion over the key site of *Salona* (Solina, Croatia), the natural geographical direction of the Ostrogothic interests in Dalmatia led them towards the vicinity of an old rival, the Gepids.²⁰²

After their defeat at the river *Ulca* in 488, the Gepids, who under the former king's son Thraseric²⁰³ continued their amicable relationship with Constantinople as *foederati*,²⁰⁴ managed to reorganize their dominion around the city of *Sirmium* (Sremska-Mitrovica, Serbia), a strategic point for the dominion over the Sava and Drava valleys and traditionally conceptualized as the natural frontier of both parts of the Empire.²⁰⁵

However, division outbreak within them as the “brigand” Mundo, nephew of the deceased king Thrapsila, did not respect the prevailing *status quo* with the Empire and during the early 500 started a predatory activity over *Moesia Prima*.²⁰⁶ His military force, which acted autonomously in an area around the confluence of the Morava and Danube rivers and even might have matched the total strength of the Gepids themselves,²⁰⁷ altogether with his predisposition against the imperial interests, constituted circumstances

²⁰⁰ On this predicament *vid.* Richards, *The Popes*, 77-99.

²⁰¹ To follow these events *vid.* J. Moorhead, “The Laurentian Schism: East and West in the Roman Church”, *Church History* 47 (1978), 125-136; Richards, *The Popes*, 69-76.

²⁰² For the process and implications of Ostrogothic dominion over coastal Dalmatia *vid.* Wozniak, *East Rome*, 365-369; Prostko-Prostyński, *Vtræque Res Publicæ*, 215-221.

²⁰³ *Vid.* *PLRE II, sub.* Trasericus, 1125.

²⁰⁴ About the alliance *vid.* Pohl, “Die Gepiden”, 293; Wozniak, *East Rome*, 370; Nicks, *Anastasius I*, 93; Fernández Delgado, *De Re Diplomatica*, 120.

²⁰⁵ *Vid.* *Amm. Marc.*, 21, 9, 8; *Ennod.*, *Pan.* 12.

²⁰⁶ On his figure *vid.* *PLRE II, sub.* Mundo, 767-768. For further details *vid.* B. Croke, “Mundo the Gepid. From Freebooter to Roman General”, *Chiron* 12 (1982), 125-135.

²⁰⁷ Regarding the area *vid.* Jord., *Get.* 58, 301. On his military strength *vid.* Pohl, “Die Gepiden”, 292-293.

that the cunning Theoderic was not willing to let through in order to secure his interests in the area. Accordingly, he offered an alliance to the group of Mundus in advance of his next move, which was a military expedition against *Sirmium* itself.²⁰⁸ Thraseric tried to counterbalance the adverse equipoise by enlisting a group of Gepids that dwelt beyond the Danube under the leadership of a certain Gunderith, but all was in vain.²⁰⁹ The Ostrogothic force, led by Count Pitzias,²¹⁰ marched towards the city on 504 and, after a failed negotiation attempt, stormed and conquered the place,²¹¹ taking thus advantage of the recently formed alliance with a substantial part of the Gepids and the inability of Anastasius I to deal with a potential conflict in the West, engaged now in the decisive phase of his war with the Sassanids.

This rampant expansionism displayed by Theoderic, which restricted the main imperial ally in the Western Balkans to their former Dacian territories in the East, was most certainly perceived in Constantinople as a direct challenge to the Empire's authority in the area. It further worsened when Mundo, bolstered by the Ostrogothic victory, had a free hand and extended his predatory activity over the province of *Moesia Prima*.²¹² These actions put Anastasius I in the most awkward spot since his Western flank was nearly gone and both Mundo and the Ostrogoths, once secured *Sirmium*, were now a potential source of concern insomuch as they controlled the backdoor to the Lower Danube. The situation, if wanted to be reversed, demanded a vigorous reaction, and this came next year, on 505, in the form of the expedition of the *magister militum per Illyricum* Sabinianus.²¹³

But before drawing our attention to that campaign, two decisive initiatives should be highlighted that favored not only the marshaling of a sizable army for that campaign but also prompted the stabilization of the Eastern Balkans.

The progressive deterioration of relationships with the Ostrogoths and their expansionist actions in Dalmatia, alongside with the considerable military reverses of 502 and particularly of 499, boosted the first one, which was a radical change of approach

²⁰⁸ *Vid.* Pohl, "Die Gepiden", 290; Sarantis, "War", 19-20; Fernández Delgado, *De Re Diplomatica*, 121.

²⁰⁹ *Vid.* Ennod., *Pan.* 12. On the Gepid leader *vid.* *PLRE II, sub.* Gunderith, 522. For further details *vid.* Wozniak, *East Rome*, 370-371.

²¹⁰ *Vid.* *PLRE II, sub.* Pitzias, 886-887.

²¹¹ *Vid.* Ennod., *Pan.* 12; Jord., *Get.* 58, 300. For further motivations and details about this expedition *vid.* Pohl, "Die Gepiden", 293-294; Wozniak, *East Rome*, 370-371; Prostko-Prostyński, *Vtraeque Res Publicae*, 221-224; Nicks, *Anastasius I*, 92; Meier, *Anastasios I*, 223-226; Sarantis, "War", 19-20; Gračanin & Škrkulja, "The Ostrogoths" (cit. n. 74), 181-183.

²¹² *Vid.* Nicks, *Anastasius I*, 93; Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, 52-53, esp. n. 185.

²¹³ For Sabinianus *vid.* *PLRE II, sub.* Sabinianus 5, 967-968.

by the imperial administration towards the “Bulgar” predicament. If we are to believe an interesting piece of information provided by Cassiodorus in his chronicle regarding his allegedly help to *Sirmium* in the context of Pitzias’ attack upon the Gepids in 504,²¹⁴ it could be said that at some point between that year and that of their previous raid in Thrace –502– the *status quo* sifted completely between the Empire and, at least, certain part of the “Bulgars”. Furthermore, following this path it could be also stated that the initiative might have corresponded to Anastasius I himself, concerned about both the delicate situation in the Eastern Balkans and the entente between Mundo and Theoderic in the Western ones who, with little room for maneuver due to the war with Persia, might have enlisted them in order to neither let down his Gepid allies. As sources remain completely silent, it only might be speculated that some “Bulgars” might have regained the status of imperial *foederati* that held in the decade of the eighties under Zeno, perhaps including additionally some kind of monetary payments of even lands.

What we do know for certain is that this type of practices on dealing with the barbarian *gentes*, which had been and will continue to be a tool of capital importance in the context of imperial foreign policy, was at that time strengthened by the second of those initiatives, a novelty that consisted on a centralized policy based on the (re)-construction of the main defenses of the Eastern Balkans, and whose one of first main expressions was the so called Anastasian Wall or Long Wall of Thrace.²¹⁵

Thus, by combining both a softer approach towards the “Bulgars” and initiating an active and expansive building program, Anastasius I, at the edge of concluding an armistice in the Eastern front,²¹⁶ appeared laying the foundations not only for a strengthening of the imperial position in the Eastern Balkans but also for dealing decisively with the barbarian entente that threatened the whole Western Balkans.

²¹⁴ *Vid. Cass., Chron.* 1344.

²¹⁵ Although it has aroused a striking debate amongst the scholars regarding its chronology and even its authorship, now tends to agree that either its reparation, strengthening, or complete construction was conceived under the rule of emperor Anastasius, the beginning of the works being dated between the years 503-506. To follow the debate *vid.* B. Croke, “The date of the Anastasian Long Wall in Thrace”, *GRBS* 23 (1982), 59-78; Nicks, *The Reign*, 137-141; J. G. Crow, “The Long Walls of Thrace”, in C. Mango & G. Dagron (eds.), *Constantinople and its Hinterland: Papers from the Twenty-seventh Spring Symposium on Byzantine Studies, Oxford, April 1993*, Aldershot 1995, 109-124; Id. & A. Ricci, “Investigating the hinterland of Constantinople: interim report on the Anastasian Long Wall”, *JRA* 10 (1997), 253-288; Nicks, *Anastasius I*, 106-109; Meier, *Anastasios I*, 141-148; Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars*, 126-127, esp. n. 76.

²¹⁶ A truce had been concluded at the end of 504, but negotiations ensued for a much more stable agreement due to a “Hunnish” attack through the Caucasus and Armenia that affected both sides. On it, *vid. Proc., BP* 1, 8, 9. About the truce *vid.* Blockley, *East Roman*, 91; Greatrex, *Rome* (cit. n. 199), 114-115; Id. & Lieu, *The Roman*, 72.

Despite this progress, and although the real target, at the very end, was Theoderic himself, the imperial position wasn't strong enough to challenge him openly, so Constantinople had to continue his strategy of "cold war" by facing the second part in discord: Mundus. With the double purpose of ending his predatory activity and cutting the link that bounded both,²¹⁷ a major force was assembled, composed by nearly ten thousand fighting men, including his newly recruited allies, the "Bulgars". As his leader was, as aforementioned, the *magister militum per Illyricum* Sabinianus, it could have been gathered and departed either from *Naissus* or Constantinople.²¹⁸

Meanwhile, Mundus also mobilized, calling for aid to the Ostrogoths through an embassy sent to Pitzias, who presumably was established in *Sirmium*.²¹⁹ Although we must be careful with the information provided by Ennodius, which constitutes our main source for this particular piece, due to his laudatory purposes, the degree of detail of his account provides field not only for trusting him but also to considering this fragment as first-hand information. Theoderic, seemingly caught by surprise by Anastasius' I energetic initiative, ignored the plea and decided to wait for events to happen. Perhaps after reassessing the situation and receiving another petition from his ally, Theoderic consented to help Mundus by allowing his deputy, Count Pitzias, to engage only the "Bulgars" while the Gepids had to face the Romans on their own.²²⁰ The fate of the campaign was decided at *Horreum Margi* (Ćuprija, Serbia), near the Morava river, where the imperial prospects of securing *Moesia Prima* or even taking back *Sirmium* were completely dashed away by the combined force of his enemies. The defeat was so shattering that the remaining Roman troops had to retreat hastily, running for their lives, losing on their way back even the provision wagons.²²¹ Through this masterstroke, Theoderic secured not only the territorial gains earned the year before, but also strengthened the loyalty of Mundus and their followers, which presumably united under his banner as faithful subjects of the Ostrogoths, fading away from the sources until the age of Justinian I.²²²

²¹⁷ On its motivations *vid.* Wozniak, "Byzantine", 142-143; Id., *East Rome*, 371-372; Prostko-Prostyński, *Vtraeque Res Publicae*, esp. 225-228; 232-233; Sarantis, "War", 19-20.

²¹⁸ As occurred in the case of the previous one, that of 499, carried out by Aristus against the "Bulgars". *Vid. supra.*, pp. 35-36.

²¹⁹ Ennod., *Pan.* 12.

²²⁰ Jord., *Get.* 58, 300-301.

²²¹ Marc. Com., s.a. 505.

²²² About Theoderic's position *vid.* Wozniak, *East Rome*, 373; Moorhead, *Theoderic*, 174-174; Sarantis, "War", 20. For Mundus *vid.* Croke, "Mundo" (cit. n. 206), 129-131. On the whole episode *vid.* Capizzi, *L'Imperatore*, 166-167; Nicks, *The Reign*, 123-125; Prostko-Prostyński, *Vtraeque Res Publicae*, 225-236; Nicks, *Anastasius I*, 91-93; Meier, *Anastasios I*, 223-226; Gračanin & Škrgulja, "The Ostrogoths", 182-183; Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, 125-126.

This comprised both a significant and sound victory for the Ostrogothic cause in the Western Balkans, where its power and influence were extended and consolidated, posing thus a direct challenge to the Empire's interests in Dalmatia and Pannonia.²²³ However, Anastasius I was very far from allowing such an unfavorable change in the *status quo* to endure, so he began to play a diplomatic game very similar to that which had been used by Theoderic to gain the upper hand in the area. Before that happened, he managed to secure a peace deal with the Sassanids,²²⁴ a circumstance that allowed him not only to shift resources and his main concern from the East to the West but also to start a (re)-building program in the Eastern frontier in order to reinforce and secure the newly agreed balance of power.²²⁵

By 506, once secured the Persian issue and with the Balkan question on the horizon, the emperor headed westwards, to Gaul, where all interests of the main powers of the Mediterranean basin, this is the Burgundians, the Franks and the Visigoths, were to converge and where the real chance to turn the tables laid. Before and during his conflict with the Eastern Roman Empire, Theoderic had been weaving an intricate web of alliances with these in order to secure his own position in Italy and, perhaps, also with the intention to avoid any further imperial attempt to reclaim Western territories. However, this strategy began to show cracks when, in the same year, Theoderic himself declined to hand over the Alamans, which had sought their protection in *Raetia*, to Clovis and their Franks, who had defeated them completely years before at *Tolbiac* (Zülpich, Germany).²²⁶

News of this potentially exploitable rivalry most probably reached Constantinople not long after, perhaps late during the same year or early in 507, when also a diplomatic attempt of approach presumably made by Theoderic has been also located by certain specialists.²²⁷ The central complication is that none of them cite their primary source of information, apparently misplacing the first letter of the *Variae* of Cassiodorus, which

²²³ To the point that Theoderic even minted coin at the city of *Sirmium*. *Vid.* Moorhead, *Theoderic*, 175, esp. n. 8.

²²⁴ Ps. Jos. Styl., § 80-81; Marc. Com., s.a. 504; Proc., *BP* 1, 9, 24; Ps. Zach., *HE* 7, 5; Theoph., A.M. 5998. The negotiations, which were held at the frontier, extended over the whole 506. Finally, in November a truce was signed for the next seven years in exchange of the payment of more than one thousand pounds of gold. For further details *vid.* Blockley, *East Roman*, 91-92; Greatrex, *Rome*, 112-115; Id. & Lieu, *The Roman*, 77.

²²⁵ Which included the construction of the frontier fortress of *Dara - Anastasiopolis* (Oğuz, Turkey). About this *vid.* Nicks, *The Reign*, 101-105; Ead., *Anastasius I*, 65-70, with notes and bibliography.

²²⁶ In 496. For further details on this process *vid.* Capizzi, *L'Imperatore*, 167-168; Nicks, *The Reign*, 125-126; Moorhead, *Theoderic*, 175-177; Nicks, *Anastasius I*, 94; Meier, *Anastasios I*, 227-229.

²²⁷ *Vid.* Capizzi, *L'Imperatore*, 167; 170; Wozniak, "Byzantine", 143; Id., *East Rome*, 373.

according to others should be placed in the subsequent context of the imperial military action in Italy in 508.²²⁸

If the emperor received or not a Gothic legation made any difference since both parts continued at odds and, furthermore, the Eastern Roman Empire began to intensify the diplomatic relations with the Frankish court and, in the same manner that the Ostrogoths had previously done before with the Gepids, showed increasing interest on their affairs in order to exploit their both present and future rivalries and use them to gain an advantage over his rival. In this direction could be interpreted the *aliena malignitas* which, according to Cassiodorus, fanned the flame of conflict between Clovis and Alaric, king of the Visigoths and main ally of Theoderic,²²⁹ who clashed violently at Vouillé in spring 507 without any sign of direct involvement of neither Theoderic nor Anastasius I.²³⁰

Returning to the Balkans, the year 508 saw a progressive escalation in the existing tensions between the Eastern Roman Empire and the Ostrogothic Kingdom up to the point of open war, which had its theatre in the Western Balkans and in Italy itself. In his process of definitely securing his North-Eastern position in the former area, Theoderic had adopted, perhaps at some point of the previous year –507–,²³¹ the Herulian king Rodulf as his *filius per arma*,²³² consolidating thus the patronizing relationship that had been building from *ca.* 505 and recognizing also the rising leadership of the Heruls in the region, where they had significantly prospered after the vanquishing of the Gepids.²³³

If Theoderic's intentions were also beyond and included to entangle somehow the Heruls in his quarrel against the Franks, these vanished when *ca.* 508 conflict erupted

²²⁸ Vid. T. Hodgkin, *The Letters of Cassiodorus. Being a Condensed Translation of the Variae Epistolae of Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator*, Oxford 2006, 142-143, esp. n. 209.

²²⁹ Vid. Cass. *Var.* 3, 4, 4. For the real motives of the conflict, which are quite obscure, *vid.* Capizzi, *L'Imperatore*, 169-179; Nicks, *The Reign*, 126; Moorhead, *Theoderic*, 182; Nicks, *Anastasius I*, 94; Meier, *Anastasios I*, 228-229.

²³⁰ Both had to wait until next year –508– to display their initiatives, this time on a clear open conflict. On Theoderic's delay *vid.* Moorhead, *Theoderic*, 183, esp. n. 43. For Anastasius' allegedly adjourn, it could have been a consequence of the riot that erupted that same year in Constantinople. *Vid.* Marc. Com., s.a. 507; Mal., 16, 6; *Chron. Pasch.*, s.a. 498.

²³¹ The exact date of the event is unknown, even though if we accept the hypothesis that the adopted was the same Rudolf later killed in battle by the Lombards, it should had taken place before the year 508. *Vid.* Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, 43; Brandt, *The Heruls* (cit. n. 18), 23.

²³² *Vid.* Cass., *Var.* 4, 2. On his figure *vid.* PLRE II, *sub.* Rodulfus, 946. For the implications, *vid.* Moorhead, *Theoderic*, 193, esp. n. 89.

²³³ *Vid.* Proc., BG 2, 14, 8-10. Equally, for the whole process *vid.* S. Turlej, "Herulian Settlements in Byzantium under Emperors Anastasius and Justinian", *Electrum* 20 (2013), 163-176, esp. 165-167; Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, 42-43; Brandt, *The Heruls*, 22-23.

between the latter and another Germanic *gens*, the Lombards. Both chronology and the circumstances that provoked it are subjects of dispute amongst scholars. About the first, it can be pointed out that the main source, Procopius of Caesarea, poses serious problems for the dating as he places these events three years after the accession of Anastasius I,²³⁴ preferring the specialists to place it in the aforementioned data, following the information provided by the much later *History of the Lombards* of Paul the Deacon.²³⁵ On the motives, opinions are less unanimous, being preferred internal motives rather than the imperial involvement.²³⁶ Whatever the case, it cannot be denied that Constantinople was the most benefited part of the two with the Heruls' crushing defeat at the hands of the Lombards, repaying the previous stroke to Theoderic, unable to assist his ally due to his own problems both in Italy and Gaul.²³⁷

The horizon darkened even further for the Ostrogothic Kingdom when Anastasius I decided to make a risky step farther in the form of a punitive naval expedition that targeted the Apulian coast of Italy itself. In the year 508,²³⁸ and perhaps in direct connection with the ongoing war between the Franks and the Visigoths in Gaul²³⁹ rather than with the still in force Acacian Schism,²⁴⁰ a force of two hundred ships and eight thousand men was marshaled and placed under the command of the *comes domesticorum* Romanus and the *comes scholariorum* Rusticus.²⁴¹ With this task force, half of which was composed by *dromones*, they carried out a systematical campaign of devastation that, in accordance with the words of Count Marcellinus, "with piratical daring" raided the Apulian coast

²³⁴ *Vid.* Proc., BG 2, 14, 10.

²³⁵ *Vid.* Paul. Diac., *Hist. Lang.* 1, 20. To follow it *vid.* Turlej, "Herulian" (cit. n. 233), 169, esp. nn. 19-20; Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, 43, esp. n. 121; Brandt, *The Heruls*, 22-23.

²³⁶ On the formers, *vid.* Capizzi, *L'Imperatore*, 171 –who misplaces the events and dates them in 511; Brandt, *The Heruls*, 22 –placing also the battle in 509. For the later hypothesis, which we also share, *vid.* Moorhead, *Theoderic*, 193; Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, 126, esp. n. 73.

²³⁷ As Nicks mentions, an evidence of Anastasius' I success in his policy of support to both Franks and Burgundians as a counterbalance towards the Ostrogoths. *Vid.* Nicks, *The Reign*, 131, esp. n. 95.

²³⁸ We prefer to place it on the basis of the data provided by our primary source of information, Count Marcellinus, although a slightly previous dating –507– has been also considered by the historiography. On this regard *vid.* Moorhead, *Theoderic*, 182; Prostko-Prostyński, *Vtraeque Res Publicae*, 237-238; Nicks, *Anastasius I*, 96; Meier, *Anastasios I*, 230.

²³⁹ Maybe even including some kind of previous arrangement between the emperor and the Frankish king. *Vid.* Moorhead, *Theoderic*, 182-183; Prostko-Prostyński, *Vtraeque Res Publicae*, 238, esp. n. 124.

²⁴⁰ *Vid.* Croke, *The Chronicle*, 113.

²⁴¹ For their respective figures, *vid.* PLRE II, *sub.* Romanus 8, 948-949; PLRE II, *sub.* Rusticus 7, 964.

up to the city of *Tarentum* (Tarento, Italy).²⁴² The impact of the Roman action in the area was felt significantly, as Cassiodorus reports that the *conductores* of that region had their crops burnt, the merchants of *Sipontium* (Siponto, Italy) were granted two years of fiscal exceptions and numerous harbors required to be repaired.²⁴³

What at first sight seemed to be both a masterstroke and a resounding victory for emperor Anastasius I, who certainly delayed Theoderic's plans of intervention in Gaul as he was caught by total surprise,²⁴⁴ was not so much capitalized in the long term. The Ostrogothic king reacted strongly and, in addition to his military movements against the Franks and the Burgundians in Gaul shortly after,²⁴⁵ he organized a sizeable fleet at Ravenna which, composed of between five thousand and one hundred ships, ravaged in response major coastal areas of Dalmatia.²⁴⁶ Furthermore, if we take into account the assessment of Count Marcellinus, who perceived the events as a "shameful victory, which Romans snatched from Romans"²⁴⁷ and has raised within the specialist the hypothesis that the Roman troops exceeded in their actions the real purpose of the expedition which was a trade blockading,²⁴⁸ it might be even suggested the possibility of internal opposition not only within some circles of the court at Constantinople but also amongst certain groups of the local population in the Balkans, to whom this alleged exhibition of excessive force could have seemed going too far, contributing thus, on the long run, to the internal instability that was to characterize the subsequent years in the form of the so-called revolt of Vitalian.

During the same year 508, another remarkable event took place which, although strictly aside from our geographical framework, needs to be mentioned due to its direct relation to the aforementioned events. This was the concession of the honorific consulship for that year to the Frankish king Clovis after his outright triumph against the Visigoths, which was bestowed upon him by Anastasius I himself.²⁴⁹ More than the real implications

²⁴² *Vid.* Marc. Com., s.a. 508: [...] *quam piratico ausu* [...]; Jord., *Rom.* 356.

²⁴³ *Vid.* Cass., *Var.* 1, 16; 1, 26; 2, 38.

²⁴⁴ *Vid.* Moorhead, *Theoderic*, 182-183; Prostko-Prostyński, *Vtraeque Res Publicae*, 238.

²⁴⁵ An army was gathered around the 24th of June and headed into Gaul, were the next year –509–, led by Count Ibba, achieved a great victory. *Vid.* Cass. *Var.* 4, 17; Jord. *Get.* 58, 302. *Vid.* also, Moorhead, *Theoderic*, 183.

²⁴⁶ *Vid.* Cass., *Var.* 4, 15; V, 16. For further details *vid.* Capizzi, *L'Imperatore*, 170; Nicks, *The Reign*, 129; Ead., *Anastasius I*, 97; Meier, *Anastasios I*, 230-231.

²⁴⁷ Marc. Com., s.a. 508: *inhonestam victoriam* [...] *Romani ex Romanis rapuerunt*.

²⁴⁸ *Vid.* Moorhead, *Theoderic*, 182, esp. n. 41. Nevertheless, it cannot be omitted the possibility of magnification of the event by the same Marcellinus due to his hostility towards the emperor, whose purpose even would have been also to impose his religious views over the Papacy. On this latter interpretation *vid.* Croke, *The Chronicle*, 113; Id., *Count Marcellinus*, 131.

²⁴⁹ *Vid.* Proc., *BG* 3, 33, 4; Greg. Tours, *Hist. Franc.* 2, 38.

that such a concession actually implied, which are beyond our contribution,²⁵⁰ the fact is that it might be conceptualized, from a purely diplomatic point of view, as the apex of a series of previous contacts between both powers, which perhaps had begun sometime after the imperial setback in the Sirmian War, and which certainly had helped them to improve their respective positions regarding a common adversary: the Ostrogothic Kingdom. Accordingly, with this gesture Anastasius I not only recognized somehow and strengthened Clovis' position in Gaul, but also ratified him as the preferred counterpart to try to keep at bay Theoderic's influence in the Western Mediterranean, taking also an advantage of the bitter personal rivalry that existed between the Goth and the Frank.²⁵¹ Considering all this, the energetic reaction displayed by Ostrogothic sovereign during the subsequent year –509– is far better understood, in which the Empire also played a significant diplomatic role, as the epistolary evidence of Avitus of Vienne shows.²⁵²

Although Theoderic chose the sword to deal with his problems in the West, his approach to the East was significantly different. Perhaps worried by the succession of events both in Italy and Gaul and presumably alarmed by the imperial consular bestowal upon his Frankish nemesis, he decided to test the emperor's intentions towards a potential negotiated settlement. Therefore, most probably in early 509, he sent the patrician Agapitus as main ambassador to Constantinople with the mission of finding a stable compromise.²⁵³ As the evidence of Cassiodorus suggests,²⁵⁴ more than on the ground of peer partners, something that was mainly reserved during the whole Late Antiquity to Sassanid Persia,²⁵⁵ the negotiations, although initiated by the Ostrogoths, revealed the manifest unfavorable position of the Eastern Roman Empire in the Western Balkans. After approximately a whole year of intense negotiations, a compromise was finally reached in 510. The Ostrogothic Kingdom consented to hand back to the Empire the city of *Bassianae* (Syrmia, Serbia) and the easternmost part of *Pannonia Secunda*, keeping in

²⁵⁰ On these, as sample, *vid.* Nicks, *The Reign*, 126-129; Moorhead, *Theoderic*, 184-188; Prostko-Prostyński, *Vtraeque Res Publicae*, 247-278 –for a complete analysis of the potential alliance between Constantinople and the Franks; Nicks, *Anastasius I*, 95-97; Meier, *Anastasios I*, 231-233.

²⁵¹ On this latter issue, *vid.* Nicks, *The Reign*, 128-129; Ead., *Anastasius I*, 97.

²⁵² *Vid.* Avit., *Ep.* 49; 78; 93; 94.

²⁵³ About Agapitus *vid.* *PLRE II, sub.* Fl. Agapitus 3, 30-32. On his appointment as ambassador, *vid.* Cass., *Var.* 2, 6.

²⁵⁴ *Vid.* Cass., *Var.* 1, 1.

²⁵⁵ For this subject *vid.* Nechaeva, *Embassies*, 72-74; Fernández Delgado, *De Re Diplomatica*, 556-565; Id., “*Duo Lumina Mundi*: Interaction and defining features of the Eastern Roman-Sassanid diplomatic paradigm of equality and mutual recognition”, in M. Marcos Aldón (ed.), *Oriente-Occidente. Transferencias Culturales en la cuenca mediterránea II. Oriente Próximo Antiguo y Mediterráneo*, Córdoba 2018, 117-134.

return and obtaining thus recognition of his authority over the rest of the province, including the key fortress of *Sirmium*.²⁵⁶

This understanding, which implied the definitive and peaceful regularization of the relations between both powers up to Justinian's I times, has received diverse and occasional antithetic assessments from the specialists considering its implications for the Eastern Roman Empire. It is true that Constantinople had to make meaningful concessions, such as the factual recognition of his defeat against the Ostrogoths on their struggle for the dominion over the region or his resignation over the strategic enclave of *Sirmium*, which implied the ratification *de iure* of an unfavorable *status quo* in the North-Eastern Balkans.

However, it is no less true that Anastasius I possibly really lacked from the resources in order to reassess his authority over this sector, as the tenuous imperial presence there suggests,²⁵⁷ so his main concern might have been, on the basis of a manifest adverse position, to take advantage of Theoderic's willingness to settle the issue peacefully, gaining on his way a solid foothold in the Western Balkans in the form of a buffer area that could enable, in the context of a potentially better future, to regain influence over this territory.

Furthermore, and leaving aside the problematic issue of Mundus' status and his presence on the region, which might have been also recognized by the same treaty by acknowledging his position over the Danube region in *Moesia Prima* to the East of the river Morava as federate of Theoderic,²⁵⁸ the Ostrogothic sovereign added further room for its consolidation by ordering Pitzias a withdrawal from the Upper Moesian-Morava valley as far as *Singidunum* (Belgrade, Serbia), avoiding so that the arrangement implied an Ostrogothic hegemony over the region and making in consequence the imperial concessions balanced and understandable.

Summarizing, it could be said that the first decade of the sixth century was a moment of complete and total conflict for the Empire, both in the political and religious spheres, in its Eastern *limes* as well as in the Western one. From the point of view of the imperial foreign policy, these years undoubtedly constituted the most important period of Anastasius' I reign.

Its primary feature was a complete and radical change of strategy, firstly implemented in the Eastern Balkans, mainly due to the experienced previous military reverses

²⁵⁶ *Vid.* Proc., BG 3, 33, 8; 34, 10. For further information on the terms, *vid.* Capizzi, *L'Imperatore*, 170; Wozniak, *East Rome*, 373-374; Nicks, *The Reign*, 129-130; Prostko-Prostyński, *Vtraeque Res Publicae*, 238-245; Nicks, *Anastasius I*, 98, esp. n. 110; Meier, *Anastasios I*, 235-237; Sarantis, "War", 30; Id., *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, 126.

²⁵⁷ *Vid.* Wozniak, *East Rome*, 374, esp. n. 78.

²⁵⁸ *Vid.* Id., *ibid.*, 374; Nicks, *The Reign*, 130, esp. n. 91; Ead., *Anastasius I*, 98, esp. n. 110.

there. It targeted the “Bulgars”, who from bitter and perilous rivals allegedly regained, at some point in the early 500, the status of *foederati* and became thus one of the principal mechanisms to reassess Roman authority in that region. This was further strengthened with the brick, as the emperor combined it with the beginning of a policy of significant (re)building, which continued during the subsequent years as we shall mention, and whose main expression was the so-called Anastasian wall.

The intensification of the Ostrogothic menace, based on Theodoric’s expansionism in the Western Balkans, especially after the entente with Mundo’s Gepids and their victory over the “Bulgaro”-Roman forces at *Horreum Margi* in 505, demanded new solutions in order to, at least, counterbalance the adverse situation. Anastasius I found it in the person of the Frankish king, Clovis, with whom he bolstered diplomatic ties and exploited the manifest existing tensions between him and Ravenna. This, combined also with an intensification of the contacts with other powers such as the Burgundians and the final peace in the East with the Sassanid Persia, allowed the Empire even to launch a punitive expedition over Italy itself. The Ostrogothic king perceived the danger of a direct clash with the Empire, particularly after the bestowal of the honorific consulship to the Frank, and accordingly, he approached Constantinople seeking to heal the wound between both powers, something finally achieved in 510.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that these initiatives have to be also placed on a more general frame of internal reorganization carried out by Anastasius I, also during this period, which enacted a more powerful and efficient position of the Eastern Roman Empire. These, as the so-called Vitalian’s revolt might suggest, were achieved neither on the basis of complete support of the local population nor fully taking into account the interests of the regional elite, especially from a religious point of view, notably in the Balkans.

3.3. *The last years: old and new challenges against consolidation (ca. 510 - 518)*

Although the peace treaty of 510 and further diplomatic details, such as the publication in the East of the list of Western Consuls from 508 onwards,²⁵⁹ point out towards the existence of relatively cordial relations between the Empire and the Ostrogothic Kingdom, a fierce competition for being the main pole of attraction for the various Balkan *gentes* beyond the Danube endured as well; which evenly implied that Anastasius I had not given up entirely regarding the unfavorable imperial status in the Western Balkans.

In this way the Heruls, who had been wandering in *Noricum* after their defeat at the hands of the Lombards *ca.* 508, allegedly headed southwards and settled, in the

²⁵⁹ *Vid.* Cass., *Var.* 2, 1. For further details *vid.* Moorhead, *Theoderic*, 187; Prostko-Prostyński, *Vtraeque Res Publicae*, 240-241.

first place, in the former Roman Dacia, now Gepid lands, presumably with their consent, at some point between that year and 512.²⁶⁰ However, during that latter year, perhaps due to tensions between both *gentes*, an official request from the Heruls reached Constantinople, in which most probably settlement within the imperial territory was applied for. Anastasius I, following partially the nearly forgotten patterns of Marcian's foreign policy regarding the settlement of barbarian allies in Roman lands, consented, giving them thus the status of *dedici* and allowing them to establish either nearby the city of *Singidunum* (Belgrade, Serbia) or somewhere within the provinces of *Moesia Prima* or *Dacia Ripensis*.²⁶¹ This movement, as some authors have remarked, was most probably a *fait accompli* merely acknowledged by the emperor due to both the previous split of the Heruls themselves, some of which had previously departed towards the mythical island of Thule, as well as to the tenuous imperial dominion over the area they settled.²⁶²

If the imperial aspirations with this movement intended somehow to change, at some point, the previous *status quo* signed with the Ostrogothic Kingdom in 510, hopes became futile when, two years later, *ca.* 514, the Heruls started to abuse the local population according to Procopius, which is our only source for this episode.²⁶³ Count Marcellinus' silence in this regard has been interpreted as a clear sign of disapproval towards this concession,²⁶⁴ something that might be even conceptualized as a veiled statement of dangerous discontent within the Balkan locals, who by some means perceived Constantinople as incapable to deal effectively enough with external threats by the force of arms, being so obliged to make intolerable cessions which reverted negatively in their already fragile and compromised security.

This last circumstance, which was to play an undoubtedly central role during the subsequent years in the form of the so-called Vitalian's revolt, perhaps was also both perceived and tried to be exploited by the Heruls themselves. Even though they probably were significantly weakened by their partition and the previous military defeats against Lombards and Gepids, they posed a menace serious enough that obliged Anastasius I to

²⁶⁰ *Vid.* Proc., BG 2, 14, 10. For the whole process of migration *vid.* Turlej, "Herulian", 170.

²⁶¹ *Vid.* Marc. Com., s.a. 512, 11; Proc., BG. 2, 15, 30; 3, 33, 13. About their status within the Empire and the diverse proposed locations *vid.* Wozniak, *East Rome*, 374 –who argues in favor of being *foederati*, following the traditional hypothesis; Prostko-Prostyński, *Vtraeque Res Publicae*, 242-243; Turlej, "Herulian", 172, esp. nn. 35-37; Fernández Delgado, *De Re Diplomatica*, 122, esp. nn. 269-270.

²⁶² For instance, *vid.* Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, 44-45.

²⁶³ Proc., BG 2, 14, 29-32.

²⁶⁴ *Vid.* Croke, *The Chronicle*, 117; Id., *Count Marcellinus*, 131; Turlej, "Herulian", 170.

send an army in order to restore the situation.²⁶⁵ The exact date of this action is not provided, as neither is clear the subsequent status of relations between both sides. It might be considered, as some specialists have argued, that the tumultuous inner situation of the Eastern Balkans during his last years of reign prevented the emperor to crush completely the Heruls, so most likely he spared the lives of the survivors and allowed them to live in the lands they had been given, even though he rejected their offer of service as allies.²⁶⁶ In other words, the discontent gathered around Vitalian was so serious that no potential ally could be spared.

Although Anastasius I had not remained idle and tried resolutely to implement an energetic program of domestic reforms and (re)fortification, especially in areas that had been severely damaged due to war and barbarian incursions during the course of the fifth century, such as the coast of the Black Sea, the low Danube *limes* and the interior of *Moesia Secunda* and *Scythia*,²⁶⁷ trouble within the Balkan Eastern provinces had been brewing long enough and surfaced in 514 in the form of a major rebellion, whose leader was an imperial high military officer from both Balkan and half-barbarian origins, the charismatic *comes foederatorum* Vitalian.²⁶⁸

Close scrutiny of this complex process, as a primary matter of inner policy that has been also fully covered by several authors, is clearly beyond the scope of our contribution. However, several foreign interests that also converged in it, due primarily to the varied military, political and religious motivations that, at least, shaped it on the basis of the information provided by primary sources,²⁶⁹ need to be also considered. First and

²⁶⁵ *Vid.* Wozniak, *East Rome*, 374; Turlej, “Herulian”, 173; Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars*, 45-46.

²⁶⁶ *Vid.* Turlej, “Herulian”, 173-174; Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars*, 46.

²⁶⁷ For an overview of this reforming initiatives *vid.* Capizzi, *L’Imperatore*, 137-155; Nicks, *The Reign*, 206-247; Ead., *Anastasius I*, 190-223; Meier, *Anastasios I*, 118-137. Particularly about his general building activity, *vid.* Nicks, *The Reign*, 256-266; Ead., *Anastasius I*, 230-245; Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars*, 126-129.

²⁶⁸ He was the son of a certain Patriciolus –*vid.* *PLRE II, sub.* Patriciolus, 837–, who had held the same position between 503 and 513, born in *Zalbada* (Abrit, Bulgaria), located in *Moesia Secunda* and most probably had either Scythian or Gothic origins. For further information *vid.* *PLRE II, sub.* Fl. Vitalianus 2, 1171-1176.

²⁶⁹ According to those, the “religious explanation” could be conceptualized as the main cause, truly shared or simply masterly capitalized by Vitalian, mainly based on both the growing influence of the Monophysism in the East and the so-called “Trishagion incident” that took place in Constantinople in 512. For them *vid.* Marc. Com., s.a. 512, 2-9; Theod. Lect., *Epit* 503; Mal., 16, 16; 19; Vict. Tonn., a. 510; Evagr., *HE* 3, 44; Ps. Zach., *HE* 8, 2; *Chron. Pasch.*, s.a. 517; Ps. Dion., 818; Iohan. Nik., 89, 64; Theoph. A.M. 6005; Zon., 14, 3, 37. However, and although this clashed directly with the traditional Chalcedonian idiosyncrasy of the Balkan provinces,

foremost, the rebel was the highest military authority in the area in charge of the barbarian imperial allies, and as such he probably was the primary and principal echelon between Constantinople and their main leaders when diplomatic interaction was necessary, enjoying possibly thus their trust as well as a not inconsiderable degree of influence amongst them. Taking this into account, and although the sources describe poorly the diverse groups he managed to gather under his umbrella beyond the local Balkan populace, certainly “Bulgars” and “Huns” were amongst them.²⁷⁰

This, which certainly converts this affair, though partially, into a matter of foreign policy, needs to be carefully measured in terms of its influence within the uprising. It is true, as has been stressed out by some scholars, that a key point in order to assess the real strength and scope of this rebellion against the emperor himself was the heterogeneity and diversity of the groups that clustered around Vitalian’s cause.²⁷¹ Nonetheless, considering both the massive numbers given by the primary sources as well as the total duration of the insurrection,²⁷² it could be considered that, most probable, its hard core was composed by Roman Balkan population, mainly peasants and soldiers, who were as well backed by some elements of the local civil and ecclesiastical pro-Chalcedonian elites. Perhaps other foreign parties that might take advantage of a diminished Anastasius I, such as the Ostrogothic King Theoderic or even Pope Hormisdas,²⁷³ were secretly involved and granted their support to Vitalian, but their contribution was far from decisive.

During the climax of the struggle, specifically on the 20th of July 514, Pope Symmachus died, being succeeded by Hormisdas as head of the Church.²⁷⁴ This fact,

this was not the unique motivation, since also has to be considered the local unrest amongst the taxpayers was critical due to the maintenance of the *coemptio*, which had been abolished elsewhere except from Thrace. Furthermore, Anastasius I tried to implement military reforms during the previous years that led to the withdrawal of the imperial *annona*, triggering thus a deep malaise amongst the troops, who neither were happy with the *magister militum* in charge, his own nephew Hypatius –*vid.* Iohan. Ant., Fr. 242, 1. Accordingly, religious opposition, military unrest, peasant disaffection and perhaps even personal ambition of such as well related and charismatic figure as Vitalian could explain this major and open rebellion that decisively mediated the last years of his reign.

²⁷⁰ *Vid.* Mal., 16, 16; Evagr., HE 3, 43; Iohan. Ant., Fr. 242, 1; Theoph., A.M. 6005.

²⁷¹ *Vid.* Nicks, *Anastasius I*, 165; Meier, *Anastasios I*, 295.

²⁷² If we are to believe the testimony of John of Antioch, during the three years of insurrection Vitalianus had between fifty and sixty hundred thousand men at his disposal. *Vid.* Iohan. Ant., Fr. 242, 1.

²⁷³ On the former, perhaps due to his presumable Gothic origins, *vid.* Capizzi, *L’Imperatore*, 171; Moorhead, *Theoderic*, 195; Prostko-Prostyński, *Vtraeque Res Publicae*, 279. On the latter, *vid.* Nicks, *The Reign*, 1991.

²⁷⁴ *Vid.* Lib. Pont. 53; 54.

despite the difficult situation the emperor had to face in the Eastern Balkans due to Vitalian's increasing military pressure, gave way to new possibilities as the new Pope seemed to be some more inclined towards dialogue regarding the still remaining rift between Constantinople and Rome: the Acacian Schism. The rebels had repeatedly stressed their religious assertions and, since they had obtained several military triumphs, forced Anastasius I to fulfill his word.

Accordingly, as part of a second agreement between both parts,²⁷⁵ and under the close scrutiny of the insurgents, the emperor, through the *comes sacri consistorii* Severianus,²⁷⁶ sent a letter to the Eternal City on the 28th December 514, offering the Pope to preside a synod that was to be held at the city of *Heraclea* (Marmara Ereğlisi, Turkey) on the next 1st July 515.²⁷⁷ It, however, came to nothing as either the Roman sovereign himself either Vitalian's followers deliberately delayed its delivery.²⁷⁸

Without any clear explanation, another letter was sent from the imperial capital towards Rome on the 12th January 515, whose delivery was entrusted to Patricius.²⁷⁹ This, which presumably outlined the imperial intentions, was received on the 14th March 515, receiving a warm papal welcome, who expressed a clear desire of understanding with Constantinople.²⁸⁰ This position was reaffirmed when the first letter finally reached his destination, being additionally demanded not only counsel from Theoderic regarding the matter but also that a synod had to be summoned in Rome. With the approval obtained from both sides, Hormisdas sent a reply to Anastasius I telling him that an embassy will very soon follow his reply in order to open negotiations between both sides.²⁸¹

Correspondingly, that same year –515– the Pope sent to the imperial capital a formal embassy composed by the bishops of *Ticinum* (Pavia, Italy) and *Catina* (Catania, Italy), Ennodius and Fortunatus, accompanied by a priest from Rome, Venantius, as well as by the papal deacon Vitalis and the notary Hilarius.²⁸² They carried with them four

²⁷⁵ Which included, in the first place, the compromise of Anastasius I to negotiate with Rome –*vid.* Vict. Tonn., a. 510; Iohan. Ant., *Fr.* 214, 4– and the reinstating of some previously banished bishops –*vid.* Theod. Lect., *Epit* 510; and, in the second, also the celebration of a synod –*vid.* Theod. Lect., *Epit* 510; Iohan. Ant., *Fr.* 214, 14; Vict. Tonn., a. 514; Theoph., A.M. 6006.

²⁷⁶ *Vid.* PLRE II, *sub.* Seuerianus 5, 1000.

²⁷⁷ *Vid.* Coll. Avell., 109.

²⁷⁸ Whoever might have been the responsible, the motivations are not definite. On the former hypothesis, *vid.* Capizzi, *L'Imperatore*, 126; Nicks, *Anastasius I*, 173. On the latter possibility, *ibid.*, 173.

²⁷⁹ *Vid.* Coll. Avell., 107. For the legate, *vid.* PLRE II, *sub.* Patricius 11, 839.

²⁸⁰ *Vid.* Coll. Avell., 108.

²⁸¹ *Vid.* Coll. Avell., 110.

²⁸² *Vid.* Lib. Pont., 54.

main diplomatic documents: two letters, one directed to the emperor and another, whose content was forbade to him, addressed to Vitalian,²⁸³ an *indiculus*, which basically was a strict set of instructions that indicated precisely all the obligations, movements and restrictions that the legates should observe during the accomplishment of their mission,²⁸⁴ and, finally, the *libellus*, whose signature was the main goal of the mission. If so, this would imply, nothing more and nothing less, the full support of Anastasius I towards the Chalcedonian formula and the Tome of Leo, the expurgation of the Monophysite heretics from the diptychs, the return of all the exiled bishops and the recognition and submission of the emperor towards Rome and the Papacy.²⁸⁵ The emperor, still with real hopes of victory in his struggle against Vitalian, was possibly not interested in such a binding and averse agreement that would imply the rejection of the very essence of the religious policies of his lifetime, so the ambassadors returned to Rome towards the winter empty-handed, carrying only an imperial letter informing that imperial legates will shortly follow in order to continue with the negotiating process.²⁸⁶

Negotiations resumed in mid-516, immediately after the crushing defeat of Vitalian's troops in the waters of the Bosphorus.²⁸⁷ Nonetheless, the situation remained worrisome for the emperor as significant members of the Balkan ecclesiastical hierarchy resumed manifesting openly their direct opposition against Anastasius I. Some of them, such as the bishop of Nicopolis *ad Istrum* (Nikyup, Bulgaria), even gone further and demanded openly to the Papacy to take control of their churches.²⁸⁸

He, at the very same time that summoned some of them at Constantinople to answer for their challenging behavior,²⁸⁹ sent to Rome during the summer the same *comes sacri consistorii* Severianus, accompanied by the *comes domesticorum* Theopompus,²⁹⁰ with two letters, one addressed to the Senate and the other to Hormisdas.²⁹¹ The Pope seemed notably displeased with the rank of the imperial envoys,²⁹² something that could had im-

²⁸³ *Vid. Coll. Avell.*, 110. Equally, *vid. Nicks, Anastasius I*, 173.

²⁸⁴ *Vid. Coll. Avell.*, 116a.

²⁸⁵ *Vid. Coll. Avell.*, 115; 116b.

²⁸⁶ *Vid. Coll. Avell.*, 125; *Lib. Pont.*, 54.

²⁸⁷ For the battle, which constituted the third unsuccessful attempt made by Vitalian upon Constantinople, that mainly took place in the Golden Horn and was hardly won thanks to the use of a certain kind of flaming sulfur, *vid. Mal.*, 16, 16; *Evagr.*, *HE* 3, 43; *Iohan. Ant.*, *Fr.* 242, 17; *Iohan. Nik.*, 89, 86; *Theoph.*, A.M. 6007.

²⁸⁸ *Vid. Coll. Avell.*, 117.

²⁸⁹ *Vid. Marc. Com.*, s.a. 516, 3.

²⁹⁰ On his figure, *vid. PLRE II, sub. Theopompus* 3, 1109-1110.

²⁹¹ *Vid. Coll. Avell.*, 111; 113.

²⁹² *Vid. Coll. Avell.*, 137.

ply that the imperial legates might have pressed towards much more balanced terms than the previously proposed by their counterpart. The Supreme Pontiff, well aware of the precarious Eastern Roman position in the Balkans despite his military triumph, stood firm on his primary demands concerned to the observation of the Chalcedonian Creed and the submission of the *potestas* of the Emperor to the *auctoritas* of Christ's main representative on Earth,²⁹³ a position on which was also backed by the Roman Senate.²⁹⁴

With both parts locked on their respective positions, the process of exchange of embassies continued, but with not too much hope of finding a settling compromise. In this way, Hormisdas replied to Anastasius' previous initiative by sending again to the imperial capital, on April 517, Ennodius, bishop of *Ticinum* (Pavia, Italy), this time accompanied by the bishop of *Misenus* (Miseno, Italy) Peregrinus and the subdeacon Pullio.²⁹⁵ The papal legates infuriated the emperor not only when they handed over the reply, but also when they pretended to make him give up on his religious convictions, as they had been instructed to do.²⁹⁶ Seeing all lost he attempted, on a desperate maneuver, to bribe the dignitaries, seeking thus to weaken Hormisdas' position. They refused and, in a clear violation of the protocol, Anastasius I dismissed poorly the ambassadors from the court who, additionally, and under close watch, were prohibited from stopping in any port on their way back to Rome.²⁹⁷

After this ultimate failure, and being clear that none of the parties had the intention to budge, Constantinople ended the previously started diplomatic process of negotiation with Rome by sending a new letter that remarked his position of preeminent position.²⁹⁸ The Acacian Schism was a problem that had simply to wait until his successor to be healed.²⁹⁹

In regard to the other quite directly involved part, this is Theoderic and his Ostrogoths, relations remained tensely calmed concerning the Western Balkans. Inevitably, a certain degree of suspicion existed between both powers as no diplomatic exchange is attested in these years between them. Particularly worrisome for the Ostrogothic king might have been the improvement of the friendly pre-existing relations between Constantinople and the Kingdom of Burgundy, particularly after the accession of Sigismund (516-524), up to the point that he even tried to sabotage the diplomatic contacts by delaying, *ca.* 516,

²⁹³ *Vid. Coll. Avell.*, 112.

²⁹⁴ *Vid. Coll. Avell.*, 114.

²⁹⁵ *Vid. Coll. Avell.*, 126-128; *Lib. Pont.*, 54.

²⁹⁶ *Vid. Coll. Avell.*, 134.

²⁹⁷ *Vid. Coll. Avell.*, 135.

²⁹⁸ *Vid. Coll. Avell.*, 138.

²⁹⁹ For further details *vid.* Richards, *The Popes*, 100-103.

a Burgundian embassy on his way towards the imperial court.³⁰⁰ However, neither any further sign of potential conflict is attested, so it could be pointed out that the treaty of 510, although reluctantly, defined the *status quo* for these years.

Regarding the Eastern Balkans, despite the intense building activity carried out by the imperial administration during this particular period, barbarian predatory activity resumed. Thus, *ca.* 517, a significant number of Gothic cavalymen deeply penetrated in Greece, ravaging the provinces of *Macedonia* and *Thessalia*, reaching as far as *Epirus Vetus* and even the Thermopylae.³⁰¹ Although a significant part of the scholars have traditionally identified the *Getae equites* with the Slavs,³⁰² erroneously identifying as equivalents both terms, it has been lately stressed that those might have been either a troublesome group of “Bulgars”³⁰³ either the Gepids, connecting this action with the aftermath of Vitalian’s revolt in the area.³⁰⁴ Whatever the case, the emperor was unable to repel the invasion, so he had to send the *tribunus* Paulus³⁰⁵ to the prefect of *Illyricum*, carrying one thousand pounds of gold to ransom the captives. However, it was not enough and many were slaughtered.³⁰⁶ This, in our opinion, demonstrates that although the Anastasian efforts to re-establish a significant degree of imperial control in this particular area of the Balkans had been remarkable, his success, if any, was very much restricted, particularly due to Vitalian’s military triumphs between the years 514-516.

Finally, emperor Anastasius I passed away on the 9th of July 518, at the ripe old age of 88.³⁰⁷ Despite his maturity, he continued to fight on many fronts against both the internal and external menaces that characterized his last years of rule, with the vigor and sagacity that had also distinguished the previous decades. The most important was perhaps, as occurred shortly after his accession to the throne, the inner threat posed by Vitalian’s complex rebellious movement, against which he did not only fight with the sword when the time was propitious, but also with the brick and the feather. Accordingly, he tried to re-establish a more long-run Roman weave throughout the Balkans not only

³⁰⁰ *Vid.* Avit., *Ep.* 94. For further details on this episode *vid.* Prostko-Prostyński, *Vtraeque Res Publicae*, 279-280; Shanzer & Wood, *Avitus* (cit. n. 51), esp. 149.

³⁰¹ *Vid.* Marc. Com., s.a. 517.

³⁰² Particularly with the *Antae*, *vid.* Croke, *The Chronicle*, 71, esp. n. 56; Id., *Count Marcellinus*.

³⁰³ *Vid.* Nicks, *The Reign*, 232.

³⁰⁴ *Vid.* Curta, *The Making*, 75; Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars*, esp. 134-135.

³⁰⁵ Who had already been sent, *ca.* 500, to this area in order to appease the remaining Roman *milites* after the disastrous campaign against the “Bulgars” of 499. For his figure, *vid. supra.*, n. 194.

³⁰⁶ *Vid.* Marc. Com., s.a. 517.

³⁰⁷ *Vid.* Marc. Com., s.a. 518, 1-2; Theod. Lect., *Epit.* 524; Mal., 16, 22; Ps. Zach., *HE* 7, 15; Evagr., *HE* 3, 44; *Chron. Pasch.*, s.a. 518; Theoph., A.M. 6010; Zon., 14, 3, 4.

by the (re)-construction of the defenses and other significant buildings of many forts, towns and cities, but also by a more ambitious reorganization of all the social, military and fiscal structures that would endow to this area the growth and internal stability it needed, completing also the picture with certain foreign diplomatic initiatives, such as the settlement of the Heruls. However, all this intense activity was not enough to fully prevent further barbarian incursions. Correspondingly, true that not with the same periodicity, their predatory activity in the area, and also beyond, resumed with the same degree of devastation and negative consequences for the Roman rule, preventing so that all these efforts might be considered entirely successful, at least in the short term.

It can be neither denied that in this atmosphere of compelling instability and notable hostility against Anastasius I in the Balkans, the religious factor played a key role. In spite of the opening of diplomatic overtures with the Papacy that, in the end, came for nothing because of the immobility of both sides, a strong pro-Chalcedonian feeling characterized both the local population and clergy, which was against the official posture patronized by the emperor. Accordingly, the rebuff against Constantinople was manifest, such up to the point that many bishops sought for the protection of Rome in order to remain in the Orthodoxy; becoming thus manifest that a change of policy was necessary if, in the long run, the Balkan area was to be under the imperial sovereignty.

4. General conclusions

Primarily, what derives from our contribution at first sight is that, from a purely diplomatic and more generalist historical perspective, the Roman World faced an era of complete reshaping which had in the Balkans one of the key areas in order to be fully understood. Geographically in the middle of the two hearts of the *romanitas*, Italy on the one hand and Constantinople on the other, experienced more directly the echoes of the defragmentation of the Western Empire and, both physically and historically, perfected the role of a kind of bridge in the continuation of Rome in the East, to where it was progressively rotating.

Accordingly, the period we have chosen to scrutinize could be perfectly conceptualized as a transitional one, both decisive and significantly influential not only for the survival of the Roman Empire in the East but also for the immediate resurgence it experienced under Justinian I. In our opinion, it appears clear that it could be further divided into two sub-periods with their own issues and personality, dependent on both internal historical processes and foreign affairs: one that could encompass from the decease of Theodosius II up to that of Zeno (*ca.* 450-491) and another one that could comprise the whole reign of Anastasius I (491-518).

Starting with the first one, from our proposed approach of diplomatic international relations, it could be highlighted that it was completely mediatized by the rise and fall that the Hunnic Confederation experienced in the Balkans during the fifth century. The provinces under the Roman Administration not only had to face pillage, military fighting and a significant degree of devastation, but also were the theatre of a more serious struggle that, at the very end, posed a far serious menace for Constantinople: the competition for being the main source of attraction, of soft power in diplomatic language, in the area. In other words, the Romans had to face a real counterpower within his natural borders that, for the very first time but not the last in Late Antique Balkans, challenged his dominion over this area in capital letters.

Emperor Marcian was perhaps one of the political figures at the imperial court that, beyond the military menace that certainly the Huns posed, fully understood what was at stake and reversed completely the diplomatic strategy developed until then in a sort of gamble. Truly favored by the external political circumstances, he was not only able to stop the Hunnic threat but also to become the main architect of a new but fragile reshaped political map of the Balkans in the aftermath of Attila's death.

Unfortunately for the imperial interest, some of these *gentes* that might had become part of the solution for a revitalized Roman position in the Balkans became, under the reign of Leo I, not only a factor of external instability but also one, and a key one, of internal struggle. We are referring not only to the Goths in the Eastern Balkans, who in order to be both pleased and pacified received significant concessions that, instead of achieving their weakening through the strategy of divide and conquer during both his reign and the subsequent of Zeno, developed into a new counterpower in the Balkans, but also to the Gepids, who although loyal *foederati* also took advantage of the fragile position of Constantinople in the Western Balkans by building their own sphere of influence.

Regarding the second phase, it could be stated that was undoubtedly Anastasius I who steadily, but not always successfully, began the improvement of the Roman *status quo* in the Balkans and reached a point that constituted the main basis for his immediate successors, especially Justinian I, in order to become not only the predominant power in the area but a Mediterranean superpower.

More specifically, as we have been drawing throughout our contribution, during his twenty-seven years in office he had to face several and complex external threats regarding his foreign policy towards the Balkans. On the whole, in the case of the Western Balkans, these were intimately linked with the political events that spread from the two main actors of the time: the Ostrogothic Kingdom –best said Theoderic– and the Papacy, whilst in the Eastern Balkans the menace came primarily from beyond the Danube. Some of

them were, at least to some extent, inherited from his predecessors, even though the vast majority were the product of his own decisions and the historical circumstances he had to experience. The division made in this paper between the two main geographical areas of the Balkans had proved to be useful, at least concerning the diplomatic predicament, since the three main aforementioned challenges Anastasius I had to deal with –the Ostrogoths, the Papacy and the “Danubian barbarians”– were of very different nature, in accordance to the diverse measures carried out in order to solve the situation in the advantage of the imperial interests there.

As already pointed out, from the chronological point of view, the “Bulgars” and the crisis they provoked in the Eastern Balkans during the ‘90s was his first great exterior test. The given military response proved to be unsuccessful, being thus forced to change radically his approach to this problem. They, as many other *gentes* before, during and after the Anastasian era, passed from foe to friend through various mechanisms –payments, different kind of *foedus*, settlement– and helped actively both to strengthen the Roman position in the area and to counterbalance the growing military power of the Ostrogoths in the Western part. The other well-known example in this way was those of the Heruls during the last years of the Emperor. These were neither a new imperial strategy nor the first choice in Anastasius’ agenda for the Eastern Balkans. On the contrary, it was mainly the lack of military power, combined with the repeated disasters, the key factors that obliged the Emperor to a complete turn of his approach, betting thus for a combination of diplomatic agreements and fortification of the space that, in the short run, and considering also the instability and support that favored Vitalian’s revolt, was not fully successful.

Nevertheless, the biggest foreign challenges for Anastasius’ I regime came from the West, more precisely from Italy, whose consequences were mainly manifested in the Western part of the Balkans. Theoderic was the first and major threat due to his military success against Odoacer and his policies of integration of the Roman aristocracies in his new founded Kingdom, something that certainly helped both to consolidate his position in the first place and to get the imperial recognition he had been seeking for. But the Ostrogothic king didn’t stop there and, after achieving his purposes, began to expand his influence beyond Italy, testing the real strength of the Eastern Roman Empire by waving of an intricate net of alliances in the former Roman West at the very same time he began to disrupt the imperial one by attacking an old foe, the Gepids, who played a merely puppet role between the struggle of both powers. Anastasius I, although not strong enough from a military point of view, due to both the war with Persia and the limited manpower at his disposal in the area, certainly aware about Theoderic’s game, didn’t refuse to answer him by force.

Accordingly, he attacked alongside his anew “Bulgar” ally in a smokescreen movement, but his real concern was to build a more powerful and long-run effective strategy against Ravenna. Thus, he inflicted a masterstroke to Theoderic when he began what might be called a political and effective return of the Empire to the West, sealing significant and strong ties with two of Theoderic’s main rivals: Clovis and Gundobad. This move, certainly an innovation of the Anastasian administration, was outstanding up to a point that allowed him to counterbalance the growing strength of the Ostrogoths in the Balkans by signing a treaty between both sides in 510 that clearly acknowledged that fact and even granted Constantinople certain room for recovery and consolidation in the Western Balkans. Tensions remained, especially due to the good relations between Burgundy and the Empire, even though Theoderic had no taste for more direct confrontation and, although relations cooled, the *status quo* remained.

Rome, the Papacy, constituted the third main factor of disruption for the Balkan area in the Anastasian period. In the framework of the Acacian Schism, the relations between the Holy See and Constantinople fluctuated during the reign of Anastasius I due to several reasons, particularly the personality of the Pope in charge and the intensity of the emperor’s pro-monophysite policies. Both, at the very beginning and during his last years, were carried out the major attempts in order to heal the rift between the two main Patriarchates of Christianity, particularly under Popes Gelasius and Hormisdas, being the time when the issue was closer to be solved was, indeed, during the last years of his reign. However, the strong and immobile postures that characterized the coming and going of correspondence, legates and embassies, as well as the intensification of the emperor’s pro-Monophysitism posture, prevented any compromise. This fact troubled exceedingly the Balkan area, equally the local populace and the ecclesiastical authorities, favoring thus the breeding ground for Vitalian’s revolt and seeking support and protection from Rome.

Finally, on the basis of all the pointed facts, we can say that Anastasius’ I foreign policy towards the Balkans was a very active one, evolving from a local and mostly military position towards a wider and more diplomatic measured approach. It entailed not only this area, but also many beyond the Balkan Peninsula, especially Italy, to which, as previously pointed out, was closely bounded. Thus his “grand strategy” for the Balkans was formed step by step, adapted to the predicament he had to face each time and, in most cases, characterized by an increase predilection for diplomatic measures. It was revolutionary when it had to be –as in the case of Theoderic– and followed the same lines when it was precise to do so –for example, with the “Bulgars” and Heruls–, combining both trends and giving to the area a growing importance during his reign. It can be defined as balanced, appropriate and notably successful. It is true that his diplomatic measures,

which combined cunning, force and a high degree of adaptability, except in the case of the religious issues with Rome, were, if we consider only the secular side of the events, mostly outstanding.

Summarizing, he ended with the Ostrogothic influence in the Western Balkans at a minimal cost, kept at bay the barbarian incoming and, although the failure with the Papacy that resulted in unrest and instability, combining it with his other administrative measures, clearly served as an example for his immediate successors, opening thus the room for hope regarding a strengthening and consolidation of the Roman domain in the Balkan area; which, even though never being considered as an unite entity –neither political nor geographical– from the imperial point of view, was a major concern for Constantinople in the Anastasian times.