UDC: 94(495.02)"0610/0641"
321.17:929 ИРАКЛИЈЕ
316.613.432(495.02)"06"

Original scientific article

WHEN EVENTS LIKE STREAMS FLOOD THE EARTH – THREAT DISCOURSE IN THE REIGN OF HERAKLEIOS

Theresia RAUM
Faculty of Philosophy,
University of Tübingen

The seventh century is widely regarded as a time of epoch-making changes in the Eastern Roman Empire and some students of the period are inclined to speak of it as a time of "crisis". But what does "crisis" entail and can this concept help to explain the social dynamics? Social theory regards the establishment of a "threat discourse" as the first step towards successful crisis management and stresses the fact that coping is only possible after such a threat discourse has become predominant. This paper considers the evidence for the development of a threat discourse in the reign of Herakleios. During the first decades of the seventh century the Roman Empire faced major threats from the outside and the inside: the attacks of the Avars and the Slavs, the war with the Sasanian Persians together with a shortage of grain supply and money, military defeat, and internal strife led to frustration among the population. Those tensions are mirrored in contemporary literary sources: the poems of Georgios Pisides; the homily on the siege of Constantinople in 626 commonly attributed to Theodoros Synkellos; the work of the historian Theophylaktos Simokates. The aim of this paper is to describe how contemporaries perceived the current threat. It is argued that specific aspects of the threat discourse created a sense of community among the population and a bond of trust between the people and the emperor. This association was finally able to concentrate all available forces to handle the crisis and save the Roman Empire.

Key words: Herakleios (610–641), Communication strategies, social theory, Crisis management, discourse, rhetoric of threat

theresia.raum@uni-tuebingen.de

Introduction

Towards the end of Late Antiquity, the Eastern Roman Empire was stuck in a crisis. Since the last days of Justinian, the Persians had intensified their pressure on the eastern borders of the Roman Empire. In the north, the Balkan regions were threatened by the Avars and the Slavs, and their raids had become an almost annually recurring plague. Still worse, the state treasury was empty. Emperor Maurikios, who reigned from 582 to 602, tried to solve those problems first by reducing the salary for the soldiers and then by taking personal command of the Balkan troops. While the reduction of the military expenses was an appropriate, although not a very popular measure, the second method meant a turn in the political behaviour of the Roman Emperor since it had become common that military command was no longer exercised by the emperor, but by his generals. The introduction of both measures was extraordinary – and a failure. Maurikios encountered incomprehension not only among his soldiers but among the entire Roman population. He was accused of being a miser and in the end, he was overthrown and murdered by a rebelling soldier, Phokas (Stratos 1968, 40–56).

There is a simple reason for starting with the story of the unlucky Maurikios: Herakleios, his alleged avenger, and later emperor, found himself in a similar situation: the outer threats were pressing, the financial resources lacking. In order to overcome the crisis, he applied the same measures as Maurikios did. He campaigned in person, reduced the soldiers' salary, and even melted down church vessels. But this time history played out differently. Herakleios gained success. He defeated the Persians, pushed back the Avars, and restored the Roman Empire. In ancient sources and modern scholarship Herakleios is treated as a shining light of Roman history. But how could the same strategy lead to both a disastrous failure and a glorious success? Was it simply because of the outer circumstances' worsening that the Roman population accepted the new policy? Surely, this played an important role. But to perceive a crisis is one thing, to agree about the crisis management another. How was this agreement achieved, and how was acceptance created? We must assume some kind of communicative interaction between the emperor and the Roman population. To motivate people and to enhance their support, this public discourse must be styled in a specific manner: it names a concrete source of threat, it is characterized by strong emotions, argues with the

urgency of time, and superimposes other topics entirely. Such a public discourse is called threat discourse.[1] The aim of the following analysis is to outline the threat discourse in the early seventh century[2] and to show how successful coping depends on the way in which crisis and crisis management are communicated. Therefore it will be necessary to describe the context briefly before a closer look can be taken at the evidence of the discourse in the works of three contemporary authors: Georgios Pisides, Theophylaktos Simokates, and Theodoros Synkellos.

Context

If we look at the circumstances of this threat discourse we can observe an empire's struggle for survival. Shortly after Justinian's reconquest, the Roman Empire had once again lost large parts of its western territories. In the Italian peninsula, the Lombards quickly pushed forward and made significant territorial gains, while the Iberian provinces, initially kept under Roman control, were soon lost to the Visigoths. In the north, the Avars and the Slavs invaded and attacked the Balkan region. The Danube no longer served as a frontier but was continuously overrun. Without any noteworthy resistance, those "barbaric" tribes advanced into the Constantinopolitan hinterland, thereby raiding and devastating the countryside. The Empire was not able to stop their advances until 626 when they came to a halt right in front of the walls of the capital (Pohl 1988, Louth 2008). Moreover, after the violent usurpation of Phokas and the murder of Emperor Maurikios the Persians broke their peace treaty and renewed their offensive against the Roman Empire. Year after year, they occupied new territories, ultimately ending with the sack of Jerusalem in 614 and the capture of Alexandria in 619.[3] The loss of Jerusalem particularly struck the Roman population since it was the attack into the heart of Christianity. The churches were destroyed, the patriarch was captured and brought as a hostage to Mesopotamia, and the venerable relic of the True Cross

1 The importance of a threat discourse for the initiation of crisis management is part of a larger sociological concept, which deals with threatened orders and their responses to those threats; see further in the text below and Frie and Meier 2014.

2 Being part of a wider research project this analysis can only present results from work in progress and must therefore remain sketchy.

3 A good overview of the events is given in Morrisson 2004.

was stolen.[4] While this can be seen as an attack on the ideological basis of the Roman Empire, the occupation of Alexandria was one on the Roman existential basis. Egypt has been the granary of the Empire for centuries; its fertile fields along the Nile provided the mass of the capital's grain. Due to its loss, the public grain supply in Constantinople needed to be reduced, and in August 618 it was totally suspended (see Chronicon Paschale, 711). The Constantinopolitan hinterland was not able to fill this supply gap. As new evidence confirm, the late antique Mediterranean world was haunted by long cold periods, which reduced the harvests (Büntgen et al. 2016; Haldon 2016). As a consequence, the population of the capital suffered from famine and hardship, and the mood was getting tense.

The situation was serious. Herakleios needed to navigate the Roman ship of state through turbulent waters and take care that he himself would not go overboard. Since Herakleios came to power through a bloody usurpation, he was not a legitimate successor. Although his predecessor Phokas was extremely unpopular during the last days of his reign, Herakleios nevertheless was a putschist and needed to prove himself. This can best be illustrated by an anecdote dealing with the final phase of Herakleios' coup. After Phokas had been captured by the conspirators he was stripped of the imperial robes and brought to Herakleios with his arms tied behind his back. After seeing him, Herakleios said: "Is it thus, o wretch, that you have governed the state?" And Phokas maliciously answered: "No doubt, you will govern it better." Thereupon Herakleios decreed that he be cruelly mutilated.[5] This reaction shows clearly that Phokas had touched a sore point. Herakleios

4 The Chronicon Paschale describes the sack of Jerusalem as a „calamity which deserves unceasing lamentations" ("θρήνων ἀπαύστων ἄξιον ἡμῖν συνέβη πάθος"; *Chronicon paschale*. vol. 1., 704) (Translation: Whitby and Whitby 1989, 156). Although archaeological evidence does not confirm the extent of destruction described in the written sources there can be no doubt that the sack of Jerusalem was a traumatic event. The exaggeration of the suffering found in the sources may thus be regarded as a way of coping with the trauma. For the archaeological evidence see: Russell 2001.

5 "Φώτιος δέ τις τοὔνομα, ὃς παρ' αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν σύζυγον ἐπιβουλευθείς ποτε καθυβρίζετο, εἰς τὰ βασίλεια σὺν πλήθει στρατιωτῶν ἐπιὼν Φωκᾶν αὐτίκα κατέσχε, καὶ τῆς βασιλικῆς αὐτὸν ἀπαμφιέσας ἐσθῆτος, περίζωμα μέλαν αὐτῷ περιθέμενος, τὰς χεῖρας περιηγμένας εἰς τοὐπίσω ἀποδεσμήσας καὶ πλοίῳ ἐμβαλὼν πρὸς Ἡράκλειον δεσμώτην ἀπήγαγεν. ὃν ἰδὼν Ἡράκλειος ἔφη "οὕτως, ἄθλιε, τὴν πολιτείαν διῴκησας;" ὁ δὲ "σὺ μᾶλλον" εἶπε "κάλλιον διοικεῖν μέλλεις" Nikephoros, *Short history*, ch. 1. Although Nikephoros wrote in the late eight century his source of this anecdote is likely to have been either John of Antioch or a mid-seventh-century chronicle, see preface to the edition 12–15. Thus, the story was contemporary and – what makes it interesting – probably circulating in public.

legitimacy was fragile and only based on the promise that he will put an end to the misfortunes of the Roman Empire. To support this image it was all the more necessary to have a good PR agency. And Herakleios had one: Georgios Pisides.

Material

Georgios Pisides[6] was of provincial origin and probably came to Constantinople at the same time as Herakleios. He was ordained and lived as a deacon of the Great Church, where he pursued an administrative career. There he got to know Patriarch Sergios, one of the most important political actors of the time and a close confidant of the emperor. From the beginning of Herakleios' reign Georgios served as his court poet. But to see him just as Herakleios' mouthpiece of propaganda writing poems of "fulsome flattery" (Howard-Johnston 1999, 8) would mean to underestimate Pisides. At the same time, he was able to capture the emotional atmosphere on the streets of the capital and to make the voices of the people heard at the court. As Mary Whitby puts it, he was "the intermediary between [the population of Constantinople] and the emperor" (Whitby 1998, 250). His first work *In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem* dates from 611, and in the following years he produced a considerable amount of poems. In his style he followed the tradition of ancient panegyrists, introducing new Christian elements and thus providing an excellent example of the high artistry of the so-called Dark Ages. Most of his panegyrics are dedicated either to Herakleios himself or to some of the leading men in Constantinople (Frendo 1984).

Another contemporary author with close connections to the court was Theophylaktos Simokates.[7] He came from Egypt to Constantinople and worked there as a jurist and high official under Herakleios. His main work was a *History*, approximately covering the time from the reign of Tiberius II to the end of Phokas' rule. Although it was probably written in the middle of Herakleios' reign, Theophylaktos did not explicitly go on to treat his own time but contented himself with allusions to his perception of current events. Nevertheless, the view of history embedded in his work both mirrored and influenced the common opinion during Herakleios'

6 The poems of Georgios are further cited after the edition: *Giorgio di Pisidia Poemi,* Vol. 1*: panegirici epici*. edited by Agostino Pertusi. 1959. Ettal: Buch-Kunstverlag.

7 Cited after the edition: *Theophylacti Simocattae historiae,* edited by Carl De Boor. 1887. Leipzig: Teubner. (Translation: Whitby and Whitby 1988).

reign. Like Georgios Pisides he committed himself to ancient literary traditions, wrote in a highly rhetorical style and was influenced by classical Greek models (Whitby 1988. 39–51, 353–358).

The third contemporary Constantinopolitan writer was Theodoros Synkellos.[8] We know very little about his origin and his life, save that he was a senior churchman. What makes him important in this context is his *Homily of the Siege of Constantinople in 626*. We know from the *Chronicon Paschale* and his own statements that he was part of a delegation to the Avars at the beginning of the siege and thus that he stayed in the capital during those dramatic days.[9] As an eyewitness, he delivers important details about the events in his report and, more interestingly, gives us an idea about the atmosphere in the besieged city. In sum, those three authors wrote in very different literary genres, but what they have in common is the fact that they stayed in Constantinople during the early years of Herakleios' reign and had close connections to high-ranking men. It is therefore assumed that shared motives in their works do not only represent a contribution to genre-specific conventions but a reflection of themes and topics of the contemporary discourse in the capital. Although their perspective might have been influenced by their status as members of the elite, the statements offered in their works must also be seen as a response to the population's claims and fears. Thus, they played a two-fold role in this threat discourse: they had an active part in creating and propagating the official viewpoint and thereby influencing the people, and a passive part in being influenced by the public opinion shaped through the discourse.

Rhetoric of threat and threat discourse

What kind of picture do these three authors draw of their present situation? First of all, and at first glance this seems to be quite trivial, they recognized the troubles of their time. They did not keep their thoughts and worries for themselves, but put them into words and wrote them down. Furthermore, they named

8 Cited after the edition: Sternbach, Leo. 1975. "Analecta Avarica." In *Traduction et commentaire de l'homélie écrite probablement par Théodore le Syncelle sur le siège de Constantinople en 626,* edited by Ferenc Makk. 74–96. Szeged: Universitas de Attila Jozsef nominata.

9 Chronicon Paschale, 721; Theodoros Synkellos, *Homily* 20 (82).

the same factors for the current crisis that we do. In his poem *In Bonum patricium* Georgios lists the threats as follows:

"In fact, for us you always devote yourself entirely to the labours, you bear for us all our weaknesses, the danger of barbarians, the fear for hostility, the enmities of the exterior, the worries for the interior, the toils on earth, the storms of the sea, the struggle with tyrants, the petitions of the subjects, the rigors of winter, the summer heat and tiresome vigils in the middle of the night."[10]

When even the court poet made no efforts to conceal the crisis, then the topic was of some relevance to the public, which indicates that the Romans were completely aware of their threatened situation. This marks an important difference to the reign of Maurikios when that consciousness of crisis was obviously lacking.[11] This general awareness, however, encouraged the people to talk about current affairs and was essential to the establishment of a public threat discourse, which in its turn again influenced the perception of the people. Due to the existence of this threat discourse the Roman population was permanently confronted with the crisis: The passage from Georgios' *In Bonum patricium* is just one example that shows that the contemporary literature was so preoccupied with this subject, that no retreat to pleasant apolitical art was possible. In the church, a new chant was introduced stressing the desire for divine help. After the communion, the whole congregation now prayed for heavenly protection: "Preserve us in your holiness as we rehearse your justice throughout the whole day. Alleluia!"[12] The omnipresence of threat in the everyday life of the Constantinopolitans can also be seen from an inscription on a small silver coin. This coin, called hexagram, was struck since 615

10 Georgios Pisides, *In Bonum patricium* 91–98 (own translation): "ἀεὶ γὰρ ἡμῖν οὐσιώθης τοῖς πόνοις | τὰς ἀντὶ πάντων ἀσθενείας βαστάσας, | ἐκ βαρβάρων κίνδυνον, ἐξ ἐχθρῶν φόβον, | ἔξωθεν ἔχθρας, ἔνδοθεν τὰς φροντίδας, | ἱδρῶτας εἰς γῆν, ἐν θαλάττῃ συγχύσεις, | μάχας τυράννων, προσβολὰς ὑπηκόων, | χειμῶνα καὶ καύσωνα καὶ τὰς ἐν μέσῳ | παρεμπεσούσας φορτικὰς ἀγρυπνίας."

11 At least this is the impression gained through the extant sources. As mentioned in the introduction the situation of the late sixth century is comparable to that of Herakleios' early years. But unlike Herakleios, Maurikios was not able to convince the population, especially the soldiers, of the necessity of his measures. Against this background his deeds were misinterpreted and even the rumour arose that he betrayed the army to the enemy. See Theophanes, *Chronographia.* vol. 1., a. m. 6092 (278) and the interpretation of Kaegi 1981, 72ff.

12 Chronicon Paschale, 714 (Whitby 1989, 167): "τήρησον ἡμᾶς ἐν τῷ σῷ ἁγιασμῷ, ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν μελετῶντας τὴν δικαιοσύνην σου. ἀλληλούια."

and had the telling inscription "Deus adiuta Romanis".[13] This type of coin usually passed through the hands of the better-off people. Thus not only the gossiping people on the streets of Constantinople were affected, but the topic of the crisis was also brought into the villas of the wealthy Roman elite. The threat had become part of the religious, cultural, and economic life of the entire Constantinopolitan population. The omnipresence of this topic further increased the people's desire to search for reasons as well as for solutions. This search was also based on and influenced by the contemporary literature.

The authors unanimously blamed the former emperor Phokas for that crisis. According to Theophylaktos Simokates the misery of the Roman Empire started with Phokas' usurpation. After a short digression, Theophylaktos returns to his account by using the following words: "But let us revert in regular order to the deeds of the tyranny, lest we repeat ourselves by digressions. For from that moment until our present times the Roman realm has had no respite from a variety of extraordinary and intolerably serious misfortunes."[14] Georgios relentlessly calls Phokas a tyrant and sometimes his verses almost turn into hate speeches, for example when he writes in the *Heraclias*: "Indeed, this fire of tyranny, Phocas, has already perished, this hurricane, this intemperance, this foremost artisan of our misfortune."[15] In both works Phokas is described as the incarnated evil, which destroyed the good old order. It has long been recognized[16] that there are at least two contradictions to this image: The reason for the new outbreak of the Persian War – the revenge of the murdered Maurikios – was obviously a pretext invented by the Persian king Chosroes II. We know that the contemporaries were aware of this trick, for Theophylaktos states: "And so Chosroes exploited the tyranny as a pretext for war, and mobilized that world-destroying trumpet (…) For Chosroes feigned a pretence of

13 Chronicon Paschale, 706; Grierson 1968, no. 65.1.

14 Theophylaktos Simokates, *History* VIII 12,14 (Whitby 1988, 230): "ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τὰς τῆς τυραννίδος πράξεις τακτικῶς ἀναδράμωμεν, ἵνα μὴ διλογῶμεν ταῖς παρεκβάσεσιν. οὐ διέλιπε γὰρ ἐξ ἐκείνου καιροῦ μέχρι τῶν χρόνων τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς τῇ Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῇ ἀποτεύγματα ποικίλα τε καὶ ἐξαίσια καὶ τῷ μεγέθει ἀνυπομόνητα." See also ibid. VIII 10,5.

15 Georgios Pisides, *Heraclias* II 5–7(own translation): "ἤδη μὲν οὖν ἔσβεστο τῆς τυραννίδος | τὸ πῦρ ὁ Φωκᾶς, ἡ καταιγίς, ἡ μέθη, | ὁ τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς συμφορῶν πρωτεργάτης"

16 The latest state of research is summarized in Meier 2014. Though Meier concentrates on the benefits of Phokas' demonization to the legitimacy of Herakleios, the effects it had on the population's attitude also need to be taken into account.

upholding the pious memory of the emperor Maurikios."[17] Furthermore, the deterioration of the situation did not stop after Herakleios' accession to the throne; the loss of Alexandria and Jerusalem only occurred during his reign. Nevertheless, it was Phokas who was scapegoated. Sociologists and philosophers like René Girard may provide an explanation. They have drawn attention to the importance of scapegoating for the formation and coherence of social groups. According to Girard, groups need a scapegoat when they feel torn and threatened. By projecting fears and threats onto this concrete scapegoat, the evil can be externalized and the group solidarity can be strengthened (Girard 1982). This model can be applied to the early seventh century: Phokas was made a scapegoat; the Romans identified themselves as victims of his tyranny and thus reinforced their social cohesion.

The tyrannical and inhuman Phokas also served as a counterpart to the caring and devoted Herakleios. The sources emphasize that although he might be on campaign far away in the east, his thoughts are with those left in Constantinople. Theodoros Synkellos reports that the fear of the mighty emperor and the instructions that he continuously wrote from afar encouraged the magister militum Bonos to protect the capital against the Avars, "because even in his absence the servant of God, the emperor held the command by leading and motivating his most faithful guardian to do the necessary."[18] And Georgios Pisides adds that "the emperor, this ingenuity, although being absent didn't neglect to stand by us in our sufferings, but was so close to our worries, as he was distant from us."[19] Both statements highlight Herakleios' presence. For the same purpose, war dispatches occasionally sent from the east by the emperor were also read out publicly in the Great Church.[20] Thus the

17 Theophylaktos Simokates, *History* VIII 15,7 (Whitby 1988, 234f.): "ὁ μὲν οὖν Χοσρόης ὑπόθεσιν πολέμου τὴν τυραννίδα πραγματευσάμενος τὴν κοσμοφθόρον ἐκείνην ἐστράτευσε σάλπιγγα·αὕτη γὰρ λυτήριος γέγονε τῆς Ῥωμαίων τε καὶ Περσῶν εὐπραγίας. ἐδόκει γὰρ κατειρωνευόμενος ὁ Χοσρόης ἀντέχεσθαι τῆς ὁσίας Μαυρικίου τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος μνήμης."

18 Theodoros Synkellos, *Homily* 14 (80) (own translation): "πρὸς τοῦτο γὰρ αὐτὸν ὁ τοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέως φόβος παρώτρυνε καὶ τὰ πόῤῥωθεν ἐν γράμμασι διαπαντὸς κελευόμενα· ἐστρατήγει γὰρ καὶ ἀπὼν ὁ τοῦ Θεοῦ θεράπων, ὁ βασιλεὺς ὁδηγῶν καὶ παρορμῶν πρὸς τὰ δέοντα τὸν ἑαυτοῦ πιστότατον φύλακα"

19 Georgios Pisides, *Bellum Avaricum* 246–249 (own translation): "οὐ μὴν παρεῖδεν ἡ τομωτάτη φύσις | ἀπὼν παρεῖναι τοῖς πόνοις ὁ δεσπότης, | ἀλλ' εἰς τοσοῦτον ἐγγὺς ἦν τῶν φροντίδων | ὅσον μεταξὺ τῶν τόπων ἀφίστατο·"

20 See *Chronicon Paschale*, 727; Theodoros Syncellos, *Homily* 51 (95).

connection to the emperor was kept alive.[21] This was all the more necessary since the capital's population was no longer used to being left alone while their emperor was on campaign. To prevent any feelings of being abandoned and to avoid the rise of defection, the people repeatedly needed to be reassured of Herakleios' care.

Furthermore, Herakleios is presented as a saviour. Theophylaktos and Georgios both say that the Roman fortunes had perished due to Phokas' raging madness and that the Roman Empire had already declined.[22] According to Georgios, Herakleios then selflessly set out to defeat the troubles and to rescue the Romans.[23] Due to this imagery, he was associated with various heroes. The similarity of names made a comparison to the mythical Herakles obvious and thus Herakleios' efforts to reorder the Roman Empire were compared to the labours of the ancient demigod. His deeds were even elevated above those of Herakles since they were not only a trial of strength but beneficial for the whole community.[24] Herakleios was also linked to biblical heroes like Moses or David and was depicted as a Messiah, who came to restore the world order. This aspect is especially reflected in the language of Georgios. He shaped the term κοσμορύστης, saviour of the world, a neologism specifically invented for Herakleios and with a clearly messianic connotation.[25] In strong contrast, the archenemy Chosroes II is named κοσμοφθόρος, destroyer of the world. This term is also very rare and mainly used by Theophylaktos and Georgios to designate the Persian king.[26] This sharp dichotomy between

21 This connection was also visualized through Herakleios Konstantinos, Herakleios' first born son, who remained in the capital and, though still a child, represented the emperor in public; cf. Theodoros Synkellos, *Homily* passim.

22 Cf. Theophylaktos Simokates, *History* VIII 7,11; Georgios Pisides, *In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem* 54ff.

23 See for example Georgios Pisides, *In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem* 39–43: "καὶ πρὶν γὰρ ἡμᾶς ἠθλιωμένους βλέπων, | ἡνίκα τὰ πικρὰ τοῦ τυράννου τραύματα | νομὴν λαβόντα τῶν μελῶν καθήπτετο, | καιρὸν μὲν εἶχες τοῦ μένειν χωρὶς πόνων, | ὡς μὴ πεφυκὼς τῶν κακῶν παραίτιος·"

24 See Georgios Pisides, *Heraclias* I 65–68: "Ὅμηρε, τὸν πρὶν μηδαμῶς Ἡρακλέα | θεὸν προσειπεῖν ἀξιώσης ἀσκόπως·| τί γὰρ τὸ κοινὸν ὠφέλησε τοῦ βίου | κάπρος φονευθεὶς ἢ λέων πεπνιγμένος;" The parallels between Theophylaktos Simokates, *History*, Dialogue 4–9, VIII 10,4 and Georgios Pisides, *Heraclias* I 65–74, II 34–40 regarding the Heracles topic are particularly interesting. See also Whitby 1988, 44f.

25 For example in Georgios Pisides, *In Bonum Patricium* 7, *Heraclias* I 70.

26 The term is used only once before by Joannes Lydos, *De magistratibus populi Romani*, 204 and was then exclusively applied to Chosroes II: Georgios Pisides, *Heraclias* I 77, Theophylaktos Simokates, *History* VIII 15,7. For Herakleios' image as Herakles and biblical hero see Meier 2015.

the saviour and the destroyer, κοσμορύστης and κοσμοφθόρος, was emotionally charged and had the effect of forcing people to choose sides. They could be for or against Herakleios, but neutrality was not an option.

Conclusion

The Roman population in the seventh century was very conscious about the current crisis and it publicly debated about it. The people realized that the situation had become increasingly bad since the end of the sixth century and could have withdrawn their loyalty to Herakleios, as they had done with Maurikios. This tendency was countered by the rhetoric of the three authors. They influenced the discourse by first affirming the group identity, then presenting a scapegoat and finally offering Herakleios as a saviour. Those rhetorical means were so effective that they prevented internal strife among the Roman population, created a sense of community and established a bond of trust between the people and the emperor. This is not to say that the authors or Herakleios consciously intended those effects and therefore strategically applied rhetorical techniques. They were not puppeteers, who simply needed to pull some strings. But while the "propaganda" of Herakleios was almost exclusively treated with respect to its usefulness for his legitimacy,[27] it is important to locate it in the broader context of the seventh-century public discourse as a response to the people's needs and to underline its motivational effects on the population. The threat discourse thus formed the Roman society in a manner which made successful crisis management possible. The people not only remained faithful to the emperor but actively concentrated all available forces, human, and material, to handle the crisis of the seventh century. Thus the literary efforts of the contemporary authors should not be dismissed as simple propaganda, but re-evaluated as an incitement to collective action.

27 See for example Howard-Johnston 1999, 36.

References

Primary sources:

Chronicon Paschale: *Chronicon paschale*. Vol. 1, edited by Ludwig A. Dindorf 1832. Bonn: Weber.

Georgios Pisides, *Bellum Avaricum*: *Giorgio di Pisidia Poemi,* edited by Agostino Pertusi. 1959. Vol. 1*: panegirici epici*. 176–200. Ettal: Buch-Kunstverlag.

Georgios Pisides *Heraclias*: *Giorgio di Pisidia Poemi,* edited by Agostino Pertusi. 1959. Vol. 1*: panegirici epici*. 240–261. Ettal: Buch-Kunstverlag.

Georgios Pisides, *In Bonum Patricium*: *Giorgio di Pisidia Poemi,* edited by Agostino Pertusi. 1959. Vol. 1*: panegirici epici*. 163–170. Ettal: Buch-Kunstverlag.

Georgios Pisides*, In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem*: *Giorgio di Pisidia Poemi,* edited by Agostino Pertusi. 1959. Vol. 1*: panegirici epici*. 77–81. Ettal: Buch-Kunstverlag.

Joannes Lydos, *De magistratibus populi Romani: Ioannes Lydus on powers or The magistracies of the Roman state,* edited and translated by Anastasius C. Bandy 1983. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society.

Nikephoros, *Short history: Patriarch Nikephoros, Short history,* edited and translated by Cyril Mango 1990. Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks.

Theodoros Synkellos, Homily of the Siege of Constantinople in 626: Sternbach, Leo. 1975. "Analecta Avarica." In Traduction et commentaire de l'homélie écrite probablement par Théodore le Syncelle sur le siège de Constantinople en 626, edited by Ferenc Makk. 74–96. Szeged: Universitas de Attila Jozsef nominata.

Theophanes, *Chronographia*: *Theophanis Chronographia*. Vol. 1., edited by Carl De Boor. 1883. Leipzig: Teubner.

Theophylaktos Simokates, *History: Theophylacti Simocattae historiae,* edited by Carl De Boor. 1887. Leipzig: Teubner.

Modern scholarship:

Büntgen, Ulf et al. 2016. „Cooling and societal change during the Late Antique Little Ice Age from 536 to around 660 AD." *Nature Geoscience* 9: 231–236.

Frendo, Joseph David C. 1984. "The poetic achievement of George of Pisidia: a literary and historical study." In *Maistor. Classical, Byzantine and Renaissance Studies for Robert Browning*, edited by Ann Moffatt, 159–187. Canberra: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies.

Frie, Edward, and Mischa Meier. 2014. „Bedrohte Ordnungen. Gesellschaften unter Stress im Vergleich." In *Aufruhr – Katastrophe – Konkurrenz – Zerfall. Bedrohte Ordnungen als Thema der Kulturwissenschaften*, edited by Edward Frie and Mischa Meier, 1–27. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Girard, René. 1982. *Le bouc émissaire*. Paris: Grasset.

Grierson, Philip. 1968. Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection. Vol. 2, pt. 1. Washington: Dumbarton Oaks.

Haldon, John. 2016. "History: Cooling and societal change." *Nature Geoscience* 9: 191–192.

Howard-Johnston, James. 1999. "Heraclius' Persian Campaigns and the Revival of the Eastern Roman Empire, 622–630." *War in History* 6: 1–44.

Kaegi, Walter. 1981. Byzantine military unrest: 471–843. An Interpretation. Amsterdam: Hakkert.

Louth, Andrew. 2008. "Byzantium Transforming (600–700)." In *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire c. 500–1492*, edited by Jonathan Shepard, 221–248. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Meier, Mischa. 2014. "Kaiser Phokas (602–610) als Erinnerungsproblem." *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 107: 139–174.

Meier, Mischa. 2015. "Herakles – Herakleios – Christus. Georgios Pisides und der kosmorhýstes." In *Antike Mythologie in christlichen Kontexten der Spätantike*, edited by Hartmut Leppin, 167–178. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Morrisson, Cécile. 2004. "Les événements / perspective chronologique." In *Le monde byzantin,* edited by Cécile Morrisson. Vol. 1*: L'Empire romain d'Orient 330–64.* 3–47. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Pohl, Walter. 1988. Die Awaren. Ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa 567–822 n. Chr. Munich: Beck.

Russell, James. 2001. "The Persian Invasions of Syria/Palestine and Asia Minor in the reign of Heraclius: archaeological, numismatic and epigraphic evidence." In *The Dark Centuries of Byzantium (7th–9th c.)*, edited by Eleonora Kountoura-Galake, 41–71. Athens: The National Hellenic Research Foundation.

Stratos, Andreas Nikolaou. 1968. *Byzantium in the seventh century*. Vol. 1. 602–634. Amsterdam: Hakkert.

Whitby, Michael. 1988. The emperor Maurice and his historian: Theophylact Simocatta on Persian and Balkan warfare. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Whitby, Mary. 1998. "Defender of the cross: George of Pisidia on the emperor Heraclius and his deputies." In *The propaganda of power. The role of panegyric in late antiquity*, edited by Mary Whitby, 247–273. Leiden–Boston–Cologne: Brill.

Whitby, Mary, and Michael Whitby, translators 1988. *The History of Theophylact Simocatta: An English Translation with Introduction*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Whitby, Mary, and Michael Whitby, translators 1989. *Chronicon Paschale 284–628 AD*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Rezime:
Kada događaji, poput potoka, poplave zemlju – diskurs pretnje u Iraklijevoj vladavini

Široko je prihvaćeno da je sedmi vek vreme epohalnih promena u Istočnom Rimskom carstvu, i neki od proučavalaca perioda su skloni da govore o ovom vremenu kao dobu "krize". Ali šta "kriza" podrazumeva i da li je ovaj koncept od pomoći u objašnjavanju društvene dinamike? Društvena teorija posmatra ustanovljenje "diskursa pretnje" kao prvog koraka ka uspešnom kriznom menadžmentu i naglašava činjenicu da je suočavanje moguće tek nakon što je takav diskurs pretnje postao preovlađujući. Ovaj rad ispituje dokaze za stvaranje diskursa pretnje u vreme Iraklijeve vladavine. Tokom prvih decenija sedmog veka, Rimsko carstvo se suočilo sa velikim pretnjama spolja i iznutra: napadi Avara i Slovena, rat sa sasanidskom Persijom, uz probleme sa snabdevanjem žitom i nedostatak novca, vojne poraze i unutrašnje sukobe, doveli su do frustracija među stanovništvom. Te tenzije su se odrazile u savremenim književnim tekstovima: poemama Georgija Piside; homiliji o opsadi Carigrada 626. godine koja se pripisuje Teodoru Sinkelu; delu istoričara Teofilakta Simokate. Cilj ovog rada je da opiše kako su savremenici percipirali nadolazeću pretnju. Zaključeno je da su pojedini aspekti diskursa pretnje stvorili osećaj zajedništva među stanovništvom i poverenje između naroda i cara. Zahvaljujući ovom povezivanju, sve raspoložive snage su konačno koncentrisane da bi kriza bila prevaziđena, a Rimsko carstvo spašeno.

Ključne reči: Iraklije (610–641), strategije komunikacije, društvena teorija, krizni menadžment, diskurs, retorika pretnje

Paper received: 4. 10. 2016.
Paper accepted: 23. 10. 2016.