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Sirmium in Justinian I's Politics

Sirmium w polityce Justyniana I

Abstract

In Late Antiquity, Sirmium on the Sava River in Pannonia was undoubtedly the most important and famous city of the Roman Empire in the Danubian territories. An analysis of the Emperor's novels devoted to Justiniana Prima (XI and CXXXI, 3), the works of Procopius of Caesarea, Cassiodorus and Hierocles' geographical work provides a lot of important information about the functioning of this centre and the situation in the Danubian region, but not about Sirmium's great significance to Justinian. There is no basis in the sources for crediting the Emperor with plans or actual political and military actions dictated solely by the desire to capture this city.

Abstrakt

W późnym antyku Sirmium nad Sawą w Panonii było niewątpliwie najważniejszym i najśłynniejszym miastem cesarstwa rzymskiego na obszarach naddunajskich. Analiza nowel cesarza Justyniana poświęconych Justynianie Primie (XI i CXXXI, 3), twórczości Prokopiusza z Cezarei, Kasjodora oraz dzieła geograficznego Hieroklesa dostarcza wielu ważnych informacji o funkcjonowaniu tego ośrodka i sytuacji w regionie naddunajskim, lecz nie o wielkim

znaczeniu Sirmium dla Justyniana. Nie ma podstaw źródłowych, by przypisywać cesarzowi plany bądź realne działania polityczne i militarne podyktowane wyłącznie chęcią zajęcia tego miasta.

Keywords: Sirmium, Pannonia, Justiniana Prima, Justinian I, Procopius of Caesarea, Cassiodor, Hierocles

Słowa kluczowe: Sirmium, Panonia, Justynian I, Justyniana Prima, Prokopiusz z Cezarei, Kasjodor, Hierokles

In the 6th century there were many military conflicts related to a city which was important in late antiquity – Sirmium on the Sava River in Pannonia¹. An analysis of their course may be of significance in reconstructing the situation in the Danubian region during a period when epoch-making political and ethnical transformations took place in the areas of South-Eastern Europe, related to the appearance of Slavs and the migration of Pannonian Avars². The research is made difficult not only by the scarcity of sources, but also the existence of

¹ In late antiquity Sirmium was an important administrative centre and residential capital. The peak of the city's prosperity fell in the period from the end of the 3rd century to the middle of the 4th century. A summary of the most important source mentions devoted to Sirmium – M. Fluss *Sirmium*, [in:] *Realencyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, III A2, Stuttgart 1927, col. 351-353 (hereinafter: *RE*). Location of the city: M. Jeremić, *Sirmium, "Town – Island" and its two Islands*, [in:] *Niš & Byzantium V*, ed. M. Rakocija, Niš 2007, pp. 227–241; *idem*, *Sirmium, grad na vodi. Razvoj urbanizma i arhitekture od I do VI veka*, Beograd 2016, pp. 144-185. A comprehensive elaboration of the history of Sirmium under the rule of Rome – M. Mirković, *Sirmium its history from the I century A. D. to 582 A.D.*, *Sirmium I: Archaeological Investigations in Syrmian Pannonia*, ed. V. Popović, Belgrad 1971, pp. 5-90; B. Bavant, *La Ville dans le nord de l'Illyricum (Pannonie, Mésie I, Dacie et Dardanie)*, [in:] *Villes et peuplement dans l'Illyricum Protobyzantin, Actes du colloque organisé par l'École française de Rome (Rome, 12-14 mai 1982)*, Rome 1984, pp. 250-264; K. Vössing, *Sirmium, Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, 28 (2005), pp. 499-502 (hereinafter *RGA*); S. Turlej, *Sirmium w późnym antyku*, [in:] *Florilegium. Studia ofiarowane Profesorowi Aleksandrowi Krawczukowi z okazji dziewięćdziesiątej piątej rocznicy urodzin*, ed. E. Dąbrowa et alii, Kraków 2017, pp. 445-460.

² The situation in the Danubian region and the politics of the empire in this area were the subject of numerous works: M. Whitby, *The Balkans and Greece 420-602*, [in:] *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. XIV, ed. A. Cameron, M. Whitby, Cambridge 2000, pp. 701-730; F. Curta, *The Making of the Slavs. History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, c. 500-700*, Cambridge 2001. For Justinian times: M. Pillion, *Armée et défense de l'Illyricum byzantin de Justinien à Héraclius (527-641). De la réorganisation justinienne à l'émergence des armées de cité*,

diverse hypotheses, which were not based on a deeper source analysis, because it obscures the need for more detailed findings concerning the Byzantium's policy towards the territories of the northern part of Illyricum Orientale. On the basis of an analysis of the existing studies, it can be noticed that a deeper reflection is particularly missing on the actions undertaken in the region by emperor Justinian, who is attributed, without a proper justification, such initiatives as undertaking intensive political and military actions dictated by the desire to take control of Sirmium³.

The primary point of departure for reconstructing Justinian's policy towards Sirmium should be a more precise definition of deliberations. The point is to determine whether there are any source-based premises to emphasise the role of this city in the emperor's politics and whether taking control over it was one of his objectives, which he tried to achieve by undertaking specific actions. Definitely, most misunderstandings in the evaluation of Justinian's policy towards Sirmium are caused by the records included in Justinian's 11th Novel of 535, devoted to the creation of the archbishopric of Justiniana Prima and the information from the works by Cassiodorus, Procopius of Caesarea and Hierocles. The special importance of Novel 11 lies in the fact that emperor Justinian himself speaks about changes in the ecclesiastical organisation of Illyricum Orientale and uses this opportunity to mention the importance of Sirmium in the context of the functioning of the local prefecture⁴. Without

"Erytheia" 2005, vol. 26, pp. 7-85; A. Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars. Campaigning, Diplomacy and Development in Illyricum, Thrace and the Northern World A.D. 527-565*, Prenton 2016.

³ Perfect examples of emphasising the importance of Sirmium for the empire, Ostrogoths and Gepids: F. E. Wozniak, *East Rome, Ravenna and Western Illyricum: 454-536*, „Historia" 1981, vol. 30, p. 355; T.S. Burns, *A History of the Ostrogoths*, Bloomington 1984, p. 175; M. Pańdura, *Ardarici gladius. Historia Królestwa Gepidów*, „Slavia Antiqua" 2004, vol. 45, p. 66; W. Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, Philadelphia 2006, p. 208; A. Sarantis, *War and Diplomacy in Pannonia and the Northwest Balkans during the reign of Justinian. The Gepid Threat and Imperial Responses*, „Dumbarton Oaks Papers" 2009, vol. 63, pp. 26, 32; *idem*, *Military Encounters & Diplomatic Affairs in the Northern Balkans*, [in:] *War and warfare in Late Antiquity*, vol. II, ed. A. Sarantis, N. Christie, Leiden–Boston, 2013, 765; *idem*, *Justinian's Balkan Wars...*, pp. 61, 153, 94-95. Apart from the importance of Sirmium itself, the role of Pannonia is also stressed: A. Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars...*, pp. 89, 151-154, 269-270.

⁴ Edition: *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, vol. III. Novellae, rev. R. Schoell, ab. G. Kroll, Berlin 1895, p. 94 (hereinafter *CIC*). Basic discussion and commentaries: *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des Oströmischen Reiches von 476 bis 565*, bearbeitet von T. C. Lounghis, B. Blysidu, St. Lampakes,

doubt, in this constitution the motif of outstanding role of this city as the seat of the highest superiors of state and church administration in Illyricum was greatly highlighted, which is indicated by two fragments. The first one, referring directly to indefinite past from before the incursion of Huns: *Cum enim in antiquis temporibus Sirmii praefectura fuerat constituta, ibique omne fuerat Illyrici fastigium tam in civilibus quam in episcopalibus causis*⁵, and the second, with contemporary meaning, indicating that the emperor considered the previous order in the administration of Illyricum to be appropriate: *necessarium duximus ipsam gloriosissimam praefecturam, quae in Pannonia fuerat constituta, iuxta Pannoniam in nostra felicissima patria collocare, cum nihil quidem magni distat a Dacia mediterranea secunda Pannonia, multis autem spatiis separatur prima Macedonia a Pannonia secunda*⁶.

This kind of interpretation of the subject matter related to the operation of administration in Illyricum with the leading role of Sirmium has been noticed by scholars⁷. However, the assumption that, when mentioning this centre, emperor Justinian was suggesting that he remembered about it and its importance within the context of his current and future actions and that he had some specific plans related to it, does not seem to be justified under closer scrutiny⁸.

Nicosia 2005, (*Zyprisches Forschungszentrum. Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte Zyperns* – LII), p. 263 no. 1056 (hereinafter *Regesten*). A very modest commentary: D. Miller and P. Sarris, *The novels of Justinian: a complete annotated English translation*, Cambridge 2018, pp. 163-167. A comprehensive discussion: S. Turlej, *Justiniana Prima: An Underestimated Aspect of Justinian's Church Policy*, Kraków 2017.

⁵ *CIC* III, pp. 94, 8-10. As a source for the 5th century, Novel 11 was deemed as unreliable: E. Stein, *Untersuchungen zur spätromische Verwaltungsgeschichte*, "Rheinisches Museum für Philologie" 1925, vol. 74, p. 359. It is unjustified: J. Prostko-Prostyński, *Utræque Res Publicae. The Emperor Anastasius I's Gothic Policy (491-518)*, Poznań 1994, p. 218. The novel is an important source, quoted generally when discussing the situation in Illyricum during late antiquity: M. Whitby, *The Late Roman Army and the Defense of the Balkans*, [in:] *The Transition to Late Antiquity. On Danube and Beyond*, ed. A. G. Poulter, (Proceedings of the British Academy 141), Oxford 2007, pp. 140, 147; A. Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars...*, pp. 150-154.

⁶ *CIC* III, pp. 94, 15-18.

⁷ The motif of Sirmium in Novel 11 has been mentioned in the literature for a long time. However, this issue has not been analysed against the background of the current objectives, which Justinian wanted to achieve thanks to this document. Discussion: S. Turlej, *Justiniana Prima...*, p. 66 footnote 77. Recently on this topic: A. Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars...*, p. 151.

⁸ Justinian reportedly indicated the unlawfulness of the fact that Ostrogoths owned Sirmium: E. Stein, *Untersuchungen...*, p. 359. The propaganda meaning of the information on Sirmium and Pannonia against the background of the situation at that time, or rather Justinian's plans:

Referring to the analysis of Novel 11, it is clearly visible that the motif devoted to Sirmium is secondary in meaning to the fundamental thread of this source, which is the establishment of archbishopric of Justiniana Prima⁹. According to the records of this constitution, devoted to reconstructing the organisation of Church in Illyricum, which elevated the city established by the emperor, it can be noticed that the ruler does not count on regaining control of Sirmium and does not take it into account in his plans. Creating an ecclesiastical province in the northern part of the region for the archbishop of Justiniana Prima meant that even if Sirmium were to be regained, its previous position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy could not be recreated, as it was shown in Novel 11. Additionally, it must be taken into account that the simultaneous actions of Justinian to provide Thessalonica with an important position in state administration even further limited the emperor's possibilities to introduce more changes to the administration of Illyricum Orientale in the future. On the one hand, Justinian did not deprive the latter centre of its importance in the ecclesiastical administration of the region, which follows directly from the contents of Novel 11, while on the other, he probably legally guaranteed its former position in the state and, to some extent, also ecclesiastical administration soon after establishing the archbishopric of Justiniana Prima, which is indicated by information included in *Life of St. David*¹⁰. While Justiniana Prima was supposed to honour the emperor's birthplace and its importance was primarily of prestigious character, Thessalonica was the largest urban centre of Illyricum Orientale, with splendid past and excellent location, which almost automatically ensured its exceptional position in the administration of the region¹¹.

A. Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars...*, pp. 152-153, is not acceptable within the context of the entirety of the emperor's policy at that time.

⁹ The story of the Illyricum Prefecture constitutes the background for the emperor's principal decisions concerning Justiniana Prima and should not be interpreted literally in the realities of his rule: S. Turlej, *Justiniana Prima...*, pp. 71, 181.

¹⁰ V. Rose, *Leben des heiligen David von Thessalonike*, Berlin 1887, pp. 12-13 (cap. 17, 33-2); A. Vasiliev, *Life of David of Thessalonica*, "Traditio" 1946, vol. 4, pp. 115-147. Analysis of the text: S. Turlej, *Justiniana Prima...*, pp. 196-202. The importance of Thessalonica in late antiquity: A. Bor, *Tesalonika, Encyklopedia Katolicka*, vol. XIX, Lublin 2013, col. 739-740; R. Szlązak, *Saloniki w okresie wczesnobizantyńskim (IV-VI wiek)*, Rzeszów 2013; S. Turlej, *Justiniana Prima...*, pp. 160-161.

¹¹ Regaining control over Sirmium as such did not mean, on the ground of the functioning of state administration, that the centre could automatically play an important role. Justinian

On the basis of a comprehensive analysis of changes to ecclesiastical organisation of Illyricum Orientale in late antiquity, the most probable hypothesis to assume is that the records referring to Sirmium in Justinian's Novel 11 came from an earlier imperial document which regulated these issues. Mentions of the role of Thessalonica seem to indicate that Justinian used emperor Anastasius's document for the local Church. By introducing modifications to administrative structures of the Church in the region to the benefit of Justiniana Prima, Justinian referred to it not only in terms of legal stipulations, but he also took over the information on Illyricum's past related to Sirmium, which he adapted to his own aims related to elevating the city he founded at his birthplace¹².

In Justinian's legislative activity there are no traces which might confirm the existence of any plans related to restoring Sirmium to its former importance in administration. In 545 the emperor introduced changes into the legal status and shape of the ecclesiastical province given to Justiniana Prima, devoting an entry in Novel 131 to this issue¹³. Pannonia appears among ecclesiastical provinces subordinated to the local archbishop: *Per tempus autem beatissimum archiepiscopum Primae Iustinianae nostrae patriae habere semper sub sua iurisdictione episcopos provinciarum Daciae mediterraneae et Daciae ripensis, Privalis*

took into consideration his subjects' opinion, who did not want to travel for official business to remote areas, threatened by barbarians. It is clearly visible in the example of the emperor's decision to modify the operating principles of appellate judiciary in areas managed by *quaestor Iustinianus exercitus*: Novel 50 of 1st September 537. *CIC III*: 293-294. Discussion of issues related to *quaestura exercitus*: J. Wiewiorowski, *Quaestor Iustinianus exercitus i jego kompetencje wobec wojska*, [in:] *Współczesna romanistyka prawnicza w Polsce*, ed. A. Dębiński, M. Wójcik, Lublin 2004, pp. 301-322. J. Wiewiorowski, *Quaestor Iustinianus exercitus' - a Late Roman Military Commander?*, "Eos" 2006, vol. 93, pp. 317-340.

¹² Justinian was not the first ruler to regulate the ecclesiastical relations in Illyricum using the state law. In 421 the first imperial constitution related to this topic appeared: *Theodosiani libri XVI cum Constitutionibus Sirmondianis et leges novellae ad Theodosianum pertinentes*, ed. Th. Mommsen, P.M. Meyer, vol. I 2, Berlin 1954, p. 852 (XVI 2, 45). Justinian included it in his code: *CIC* vol. II, *Codex Iustinianus*, ed. P. Krueger, Berolini 1954, p. 12 (II. 6). On the basis of the analysis of changes in the situation of the Illyricum Church, the most probable hypothesis is that in Novel 11, Justinian used the records from an earlier document concerning this issue: Emperor Anastasius's privilege for the Church in Thessalonica. It was at the end of this ruler's reign that the question of Sirmium became important again, owing to the problem that this ruler had with the papacy and Theodoric the Great: S. Turlej, *Justiniana Prima...*, pp. 172-173.

¹³ Justinian's Novel 131 of 18th March 545 *De Ecclesiasticis titulis*, Caput III: *CIC III*, pp. 655, 16-656, 1-3. *Regesten...*, p. 319 no. 1305; S. Turlej, *Justiniana Prima...*, pp. 81-86.

*et Dardaniae et Mysiae superioris atque Pannoniae*¹⁴. An expression of this type means that even if Sirmium, as the capital of Pannonia, was regained by the empire, it would be subjected on ecclesiastical ground to Justiniana Prima¹⁵.

In his letter to the Roman Senate, written after 1st September 533, Cassiodorus mentioned an attack on the eastern frontiers of the Ostrogoth country after the death of Theodoric the Great¹⁶: *in ipsis quoque primordiis, quando semper novitas incerta temptatur, contra Orientis principis votum Romanum fecit esse Danuvium. Notum est quae pertulerint invasores: quae ideo praetermittenda diiudico, ne genius socialis principis verecundiam sustineat perditoris*¹⁷.

On the basis of this source, Justinian is seen as a hidden initiator of the incursion, which in turn seems to indicate his interest in the region of Sirmium¹⁸.

¹⁴ Jurisdiction of the archbishop of Justiniana Prima after 545 according to Novel 131: *CIC* III: 655, 16-20.

¹⁵ J. Zeiller, *Sur l'ancien évêché de Sirmium*, "Orientalia Christiana Periodica" 1947, vol. 13, p. 674; S. Turlej, *Justiniana Prima...*, pp. 81-86. Bishopric of Sirmium in late antiquity: V. Popović, *Le dernier évêque de Sirmium*, "Revue des études augustinienes et patristiques" 1975, vol. 21, pp. 103-104.

¹⁶ About Cassiodorus as a politician: M.S. Bjornlie, *Politics and Tradition between Rom, Ravenna and Constantinople. A Study of Cassiodorus and the Variae, 527-554*, Cambridge 2013, pp. 11-33. S. Turlej, *Konflikty o Sirmium w dobie upadku państwa Ostrogotów (526-535)*, "ZNUJ Prace Historyczne" 2018, vol. 145, book 3, p. 491. Letter panegyric for queen Amalasuintha is dated to the period soon after 1st September 533, when Cassiodorus became the prefect for Italy: H. Gračanin, *Late Antique Dalmatia and Pannonia in Cassiodorus' Variae*, "Millennium" 2016, vol. 13, p. 220.

¹⁷ *Senatui Urbis Romae Senator PPO* [in:] *Cassiodori senatoris variae*, ed. Th. Mommsen, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Auctores Antiquissimi* XII, Berolini 1894, pp. 328, 6-9 (herein-after Cassiodorus, *Variae*). This text was translated and commented numerous times: Cassiodorus Senator, *Variae* (I-XII), transl. A. Kołtunowska, R. Sawa. Translation revised and elaborated by M. Ożóg, H. Pietras, Kraków 2017, 409*. A comprehensive commentary for the letter: V. Fauvinet-Ranson, *Portrait d'une regente: un panegyrique d'Amalaswinthe (Cassiodorus, Variae XI.1)*, "Cassiodorus" 1998, vol. 4, pp. 267-308; *Cassiodoro Variae. Volume 5: Libri XI, XII*, ed. A. Gardina. A cura di A. Gardina, G. Ceconi e I. Tantillo, Roma 2015, pp. 127-152. Cassiodorus's information concerning the situation in the Eastern frontier of the Ostrogoth country, which appeared in letters, were discussed by H. Gračanin, *Late Antique Dalmatia...*, pp. 211-273.

¹⁸ Various interpretations appear in literature. This might have been an attack of Gepids and Heruli or Gepids alone on Sirmium, inspired by Justinian: F.E. Wozniak, *Byzantine Diplomacy and the Lombard – Gepidic Wars*, "Balkan Studies" 1979, vol. 20, pp. 144-145; *idem*, *East Rome...*, p. 377; A. Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars...*, pp. 61, 109; M. Vitiello, *Amalasuintha. The Transformation of Queenship in the Post – Roman World*, Philadelphia 2017, p. 104. Its

The only possible aggressors could be Gepids, who neighboured Ostrogoth on the Danube, and here is where a problem with the credibility of Cassiodorus's account appears¹⁹. Taking into account the political conditions at the time, it was not in the emperor's interest to support Gepids against Ostrogoths²⁰. It seems far more probable than Justinian's involvement on Gepid's side that Cassiodorus's account of this event differed from the reality. In 533 the position of Amalasuintha in the country was inferior, which is why a reminder of a victory from long before and presenting Justinian in the position of a loser was a perfect attempt at improving the queen's image, whose subjects were worried to observe the increasing power of the emperor and his influence on the queen's politics²¹.

Cassiodorus's account of the victorious battles of Ostrogoths on the Danube at the beginning of Amalasuintha's rule appears not to be a credible evidence to confirm Justinian's involvement in the conflict over Sirmium between Ostrogoths and Gepids, at the same time remaining an important and still underappreciated testimony of how multifaceted and complicated the relationships between Ostrogoths and Constantinople were, especially when it came to the question of the course of the boundary line between both countries in Il-

dating varies: from 526 to 530. Sometimes it is connected with the participation of the famous commander Mundus, and in battles with Gepids, their prospective king Vitiges reportedly participated as the commander of the Ostrogothic army: E. Stein, *Histoire ...*, p. 307; H. Wolfram, *Historia Gotów*, transl. R. Darda-Staab, I. Dębek, K. Berger, Warszawa-Gdańsk 2003, pp. 366, 380. Reconstructions of this type were compiled by A. Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars...*, pp. 60-65.

¹⁹ Cassiodorus's account constitutes a fragment of a panegyric for queen Amalasuintha and is full of oblique statements and mental shortcuts. Its use poses the problem with determining which of the information in it is credible, i.e. refers to facts from the past, and which are the fabrications of the author: S. Turlej, *Konflikty...*, pp. 492-494.

²⁰ On Gepids in this period: R. Steinacher, *Rom und die Barbaren. Völker im Alpen- und Donaauraum (300-600)*, Stuttgart 2017, pp. 162-163; A. Sarantis, *War and Diplomacy...*, pp. 20-24. Participation of Heruli in fight against Ostrogoths right after the death of Theodoric the Great, upon inspiration of the emperor is unlikely. Justinian's alliance with Heruli is later than the battles on the eastern border of the Ostrogoth country, which were described by Cassiodorus: S. Turlej, *Herulowie i Bizancjum na początku panowania Justyniana I*, [in:] *Hypomnemata Byzantina. Prace ofiarowane profesorowi Maciejowi Salamonowi*, ed. J. Bonarek, S. Turlej, Piotrków Trybunalski 2017, pp. 135-152.

²¹ The motif of emperor's humiliation: E. Stein, *Histoire...*, p. 329; M. Vitiello, *Amalasuintha*, p. 104. Overcoming the opposition: H. Wolfram, *Historia Gotów*, p. 382; M. Vitiello, *Amalasuintha*, pp. 112-115.

lyricum. Cassiodorus's use of the vague wording that the queen made the Danube a Roman river against the emperor's will in the account of Alamasuintha's actions: *contra Orientis principis votum Romanum fecit esse Danuvium*, needs a more precise interpretation and deeper research²². In order to understand this account, it is important to refer to other sources which provide more precise and certain information on the extent of the empire's and Ostrogoth's rule in the Balkans.

By creating an ecclesiastical province for the archbishop of Justiniana Prima on 14th April 535, Justinian listed the subordinated areas in Novel 11: *et certae provinciae sub eius sint auctoritate, id est tam ipsa mediterranea Dacia quam Dacia ripensis nec non Mysia prima et Dardania et Praevalitana provincia et secunda Macedonia et pars secundae Pannoniae, quae in Bacensi est civitate*²³.

Taking into account the fact that a part of the province Pannonia II with the city of Bassianae belonged to the empire on the one hand²⁴, and on the other – the lack of Sirmium, which got under the authority of Ostrogoths²⁵, it can be assumed that the course of the empire's border with Ostrogoths corresponds to the arrangements included in the agreement between emperor Anastasius and Theodoric the Great²⁶. The agreement between Constantinople and Ravenna ended the political and military conflict with a compromise, because neither

²² This expression is sometimes understood as taking over the lands as far as the Danube, which belonged to the empire: E. Stein, *Histoire...*, p. 308 footnote 1; H. Wolfram, *Historia Gotów*, p. 366.

²³ *CIC* III, p. 94, 6-8.

²⁴ The region of Bassianae: B. Dušanić, *Bassianae and its Territory*, "Archaeologia Iugoslavica" 1967, vol. 8, pp. 67–81; M. Milin, *Bassianae*, [in:]: *The Autonomous Towns of Noricum and Pannonia*, ed. M. Šašel Kos, P. Scherrer, Ljubljana 2004, pp. 253-268.

²⁵ The area under Ostrogothic rule was referred to as Pannonia Sirmiensis, which is confirmed by Cassiodorus, *Variae*, III 23, 2; IV 13, 1. E. Stein, *Untersuchungen...*, p. 363; J. Prostko-Prostyński, *Utraeque...*, p. 244; H. Gračanin, J. Škargulja, *The Ostrogoths in the Late Antique Southern Pannonia*, "Acta Archaeologica Carpathica" 2014, vol. 49, pp. 182-183; J. J. Arnold, *Ostrogothic Provinces: Administration and Ideology*, [in:]: *A Companion to Ostrogothic Italy*, ed. J. J. Arnold, M. S. Bjornlie, K. Sessa, Leiden, Boston 2016, pp. 79-84.

²⁶ Conclusion of peace is dated to the period between 1st August 509 and early 511: J. Prostko-Prostyński, *Utraeque...*, p. 241. Discussion and commentary: *Regesten*, p. 115 no. 326. It was probably one of the most important arrangements of the agreement: E. Stein, *Untersuchungen...*, pp. 362-363; *idem*, *Histoire ...*, p. 156; J. Prostko-Prostyński, *Utraeque...*, p. 241.

side was able to achieve their objectives²⁷. However, the very fact of making peace and settling a borderline allows important legal arrangements to be made²⁸. The extent of empire's rule in the Danubian regions at the beginning of Justinian's reign differed from the arrangements included in the peace treaty signed by Anastasius and Theodoric the Great. It was not only about the territories on the Danube which were mentioned by Cassiodorus²⁹, but also the areas taken by Grepes's Heruli³⁰ and the lands recovered by Justinian before 535 in the vicinity of Viminacium. Novel 11 includes a mention of the emperor's successes, which allowed him not only to regain control of the city and lay the border on the Danube, but also to win anchorage on the other bank of the river: *Cum igitur in praesenti deo autore ita nostra respublica aucta est, ut utraque ripa Danubii iam nostris civitatibus frequentaretur, et tam Viminacium quam Recidiva, et Litterata, quae trans Danubium sunt, nostrae iterum dicioni subactae sint*³¹.

Differences between the description of the extent of the empire's control in the western and northern part of Illyricum Orientale in the sources from the

²⁷ The course of the border in Pannonia was described as unnatural by E. Stein, *Untersuchungen...*, p. 363, who saw a manifestation of political compromise in it.

²⁸ Discussion of the entirety of issues related to the empire's borders: J-M. Carrié, *Aspetti della concettualizzazione Romana della Frontiera*, [in:] *Frontiere della Romanità nel Mondo Tardo Antico* (Atti dell'Accademia Romanistica Constantiniana XXI), Perugia 2016, pp. 11-38; A. Gandila, *Cultural encounters on Byzantium's Northern frontier, c. AD 500-700: coins, artifacts and history*, Cambridge 2018, pp. 10-20, (pp. 20-29 – further information concerning the border on the Danube).

²⁹ The history of the city of Singidunum at the mouth of the Sava into the Danube deserve special attention: F. Barišić, *Vizantiski Singidunum*, "Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta" 1953, vol. 3, pp. 1-14; V. Dintchev, *Classification of the Late Antique cities in the dioceses of Thracia and Dacia*, "Archaeologia Bulgarica" 1999, vol. 3, p. 47; M. Milinković, *Singidunum*, *RGA* 2005, vol. 28, pp. 458-461. It is usually quoted only in connection with Heruli settlement around it in Justinian's times, e.g.: A. Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars...*, pp. 46, 89, 92, 256, 300.

³⁰ The situation in Moesia requires a detailed discussion owing to the inconsistency in the studies to date: E. Stein, *Untersuchungen...*, p. 363; *idem*, *Histoire ...*, pp. 156, 308 footnote 1. Discussion of information on Grepes: S. Turlej, *Herulowie...*, p. 147. The general statement that the western Illyricum was beyond the empire's control: D. Roques, *Procopé de Césarée. Constructions de Justinien Ier (Peri ktismátwn/ De aedificiis). Introduction, traduction, commentaire, cartes et index par D. Roques*, publication posthume par E. Amato e J. Schamp, Alessandria 2011, p. 318 footnote 116; A. Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars...*, p. 152.

³¹ *CIC* III, p. 94, 13-15. S. Turlej, *Justiniana Prima...*, p. 53.

initial period of Justinian's rule, and the arrangements made by Anastasius with Theodoric are evident and seem to be intentional. They resulted from the fact that the course of the border given in Novel 11, which can be referred to as the legal state, did not correspond to the one functioning in reality, which could be called the actual state. The latter was shaped after the agreement between Anastasius I and Theodoric had been concluded and lasted in some areas, according to Cassiodorus, until the times of Amalasuintha³². On the other hand, Justinian's reference of 14th April 535 in Novel 11 to the course of the border in accordance with the legal state, which differed from reality, undoubtedly resulted from the use of the previous imperial constitution concerning the organisation of the Church in Illyricum Orientale, issued – as mentioned above – probably by emperor Anastasius³³. Realising how big Justinian's problems were with restoring the border of the empire in Illyricum in accordance with the state of 510, makes it possible to avoid overestimation of the role of Sirmium in his politics.

Reference to the works of Procopius of Caesarea plays an important role in the reconstruction of the situation in the Danubian region during Justinian's rule, but it does not contribute much to supporting the hypothesis about his aspiration to take over Sirmium³⁴. On the one hand, this author does not provide any information that would directly indicate the role of this city in the area, its importance for Justinian or the empire. On the other, we can learn a lot about this centre and events which influenced its history. In his works, Procopius mentions Sirmium several times, but they are short, trite mentions mainly

³² It seems necessary to put the source data on the extent of the rule of Ostrogoths, the empire and Gepids in the Danubian region during the reign of Anastasius and Justinian in order, taking into consideration the time when changes occurred. The need for such a determination was seen already by E. Stein, *Untersuchungen...*, pp. 357, 363.

³³ Revealed in a previous imperial constitution concerning these issues, published, as mentioned before, probably by emperor Anastasius: S. Turlej, *Justiniana Prima...*, pp. 74, 172.

³⁴ A basic discussion of Procopius's works: D. Brodka, *Wstęp*, [in:] Prokopiusz z Cezarei, *Historia Wojen*, ed. D. Brodka, vol. 1, Kraków 2013, pp. XX-CVI; M.R. Cataudella, *Historiography in the East*, [in:] *Greek & Roman Historiography. Fourth to Sixth Century A.D.*, ed. G. Marasco, Leiden-Boston 2003, pp. 391-447; W. Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians*, Basingstake 2007, pp. 176-226; G. Greatrex, *Perceptions of Procopius in recent scholarship*, "Histos" 2014, vol. 8, pp. 76-121. Recent collective studies devoted to this author: *Reinventing Procopius: New Readings on Late Antique Historiography*, ed. C. Lillington-Martin, E. Turquois, London–New York 2017; *Le Monde de Procope/ The World of Procopius*, ed. G. Greatrex, S. Janniard, Paris 2018.

confirming its existence, indicating who it belonged to or who fought for it³⁵. However, he does not write anything more detailed about Sirmium itself, only directly referring to it as a city twice³⁶, without explaining why he mentioned it nor specifying where he drew knowledge about it from. In fact, he clearly concentrates his attention on a single issue: occupation of Sirmium by Gepids, to which he refers especially in his mentions about the fall of the reign of Ostrogoths on the Danube and the conflict between Lombards and Gepids. It is worth noting that, according to Procopius, the latter reportedly only took over Sirmium after Justinian drove Ostrogoths away from their dominion³⁷. It took place at an indefinite moment during the empire's conflict with this people, and does not prove Justinian's ambition to capture this centre in the sense of implementing a premeditated objective, because the city was taken over by the imperial army in the course of the war with Ostrogoths, which took place on several fronts³⁸. On the other hand, the account of the conflict between Lombards and Gepids does not include any mention whatsoever about Justinian's desire to occupy Sirmium, given the importance played by the thread devoted to the history of the city in the account³⁹. When the envoys of both peoples appeared

³⁵ Index for Procopius's works: Procopii Caesariensis, *Opera omnia, De Aedificiis*, vol. IV, reviewed by J. Haury, add. et corr. G. Wirth, Lipsiae 1964 (hereinafter Procopius *Aed*), p. 310 skips the mention in *Secret history*: Procopii Caesariensis, *Opera omnia, Arcana Historia*, vol. III, reviewed by J. Haury, add. et corr. G. Wirth, Lipsiae 1963, XVIII 16-18 (hereinafter: Procopius *HS*), where Sirmium appears twice: as a city in the eastern frontier of the Ostrogoth country before the war with Justinian, which is later in the hands of Gepids.

³⁶ Sirmium as a city: Procopii Caesariensis, *Opera omnia*, vol. II. *De bellis libri V–VIII*, reviewed by J. Haury, add. et corr. G. Wirth, Lipsiae 1963, VII, 33, 8 (hereinafter Procopius *B*) and Procopius *HS* XVIII, 17. It follows twice from direct context that it is a city, because he mentioned them among other cities: Procopius *B* V 15, 27 and *B* VII 34, 35.

³⁷ In two fragments of his account, Procopius states that Gepids took Sirmium when Justinian had driven Ostrogoths away: Procopius *B* VII 33, 8, and when he writes about them occupying the entire area where he situated Sirmium: Procopius *B* VII 34, 15.

³⁸ War with Ostrogoths constituted the main theme of Procopius's deliberations and this is why the importance of information concerning the Danubian region, which appear in this context, must be appreciated: S. Turlej, *Balkany w cieniu wojen Justyniana? Znaczenie relacji Prokopiusza*, [in:] *Hortus Historiae. Księga pamiątkowa ku czci profesora Józefa Wolskiego w setną rocznicę urodzin*, ed. E. Dąbrowa et alii, Kraków 2010, pp. 707–722.

³⁹ Relationships of Lombards and Gepids within the context of their fights in the middle of the 6th century arouse considerable interest: E. Stein, *Histoire ...*, pp. 530–535; K.P. Christou, *Byzanz und die Langobarden*, Athen 1991, pp. 75–97; W. Pohl, *The Empire and the Lombards*,

before the emperor in Constantinople, with a view to winning his support, they were accepted and could present their arguments. The ruler heard them and decided to support Lombards. In Procopius's account, it was Lombards who were concerned with the fate of Sirmium and the borderland of the empire, which had been grabbed by Gepids, and there were no demands to return these lands from the Roman side. This kind of presentation of issues related to Sirmium can provide evidence for the importance of this centre for Procopius and his image of the situation in the Danubian region, and not for Justinian⁴⁰. As it may seem, for this ruler, owning Sirmium was not a priority on the political ground, because a favourable settlement of the conflict between Lombards and Gepids did not trigger any action on his part aimed at regaining the city⁴¹. Even the circumstance, which might have given a personal dimension to the emperor's attitude to this centre, that if he had taken Sirmium from Ostrogoths, he could have thought that he was entitled to rule over it, could not persuade him to attempt at its recovery from the hands of Gepids⁴².

On the basis of the mentions of Sirmium, present in Procopius's works, there are no grounds not only for ascribing Justinian the desire to recover Sirmium, but also for stressing the importance of this centre from the point of view of the empire's political objectives. On the basis of this historian's account, it is only possible to state that the city existed and belonged first to Ostrogoths, then to the empire and finally to Gepids, and with the lack of reference to its

[in:] *Kingdoms of the Empire: the integration of barbarians in late antiquity*, ed. W. Pohl, Leiden, New York, Köln 1997, pp. 87-98; A. Sarantis, *War and Diplomacy...*, pp. 27-35; *idem*, *Justinian's Balkan Wars...*, pp. 266-274.

⁴⁰ Procopius's account leaves a lot of room for interpretation. The emperor helped Lombards, because Gepids took Sirmium: F. Curta, *The Making of the Slavs*, p. 82. I. Bóna, *Die Langobarden in Ungarn: Die Gräberfelder von Várpalot und Bezenye*, "Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae" 1956, vol. 7, p. 237 p. 247. He thought that Lombards were supposed to recover Sirmium for Justinian.

⁴¹ Sirmium became Gepids' capital and it got under the rule of the empire only after their country had fallen – M. Mirković, *Sirmium ...*, pp. 51-52; M. Pańdura, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-79; A. Sarantis, *War and Diplomacy...*, p. 38.

⁴² Taking Sirmium as such by Justinian's army does not prove the outstanding importance of this centre for the emperor. It was a success in one of the fronts of the empire's war with Ostrogoths. A. Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars...*, p. 93 rejects Procopius's information about this success, assuming that it was probably Ostrogoths who gave the city up to Gepids, in order for it not to fall into Justinian's hands.

glorious past and its current strategic importance, the reader could associate it only with the situation of the Danubian areas of the empire, as presented by the author. It can be clearly seen how far Procopius was from recognising the role of Sirmium in the Danubian region in the recent past, in the description of Theodoric's expedition to Italy. In his account, Ostrogoths set off from Thrace and reached the Adriatic Sea, probably near Dyrrachium, which is indicated by the information on crossing the lands of Taulantians⁴³. Because they had no ships, they continued along the coast⁴⁴. His account did not reflect the reality, but it remains a valuable hint that from the perspective of the empire's fight with Ostrogoths, who ruled Italia, which he described, capturing Sirmium as such did not have strategic significance⁴⁵. Besides, this is confirmed by the choice of route by Narses, who set off from Constantinople and, after a stay in Philippopolis, reached Salona, whence he probably moved along the coast to Venice⁴⁶.

To sum up, on the basis of information devoted to Sirmium in Procopius's works, there are no grounds whatsoever for attributing Justinian with capturing the city as a strategic objective. It is by far the most probable hypothesis that the said author was interested in this centre owing to the current situation on the Danube, in the second half of the 540s and, as it seems, it was of considerable importance to him – and his vision of the political and military situation of the empire in connection with the war in Italy with Ostrogoths⁴⁷.

⁴³ Taulantians: M. Fluss, *Taulantii*, *RE* 2A VIII HBd 1932, c. 2526-2529; J.J. Wilkes, *The Illyrians*, Oxford 1992, p. 93.

⁴⁴ Ostrogoth's stay in Novae: J. Prostko-Prostyński, *Novae in the Times of Theodoric the Amal*, [in:] *Novae. Legionary Fortress and Late Antique Town*, vol. 1, ed. T. Derda et alii, Warszawa 2008, pp. 141-157. Theodoric's expedition from Thrace to Italy in Procopius *B* V 1, 9-13. In Procopius *B* III 2, 7-11 a mention appears about Taulantians in the account of Alaric, when he set off for Italy.

⁴⁵ Theodoric's expedition to Italy and its course: W. Ensslin, *Theoderich der Grosse*, München 1959, p. 63; J. Moorhaed, *Theoderic in Italy*, Oxford 1992, pp. 19-21; H. Wolfram, *Historia Gotów*, pp. 320-321; H.-U. Wiemer, *Theoderich der Grosse, König der Goten, Herrscher der Römer*, München 2018, pp. 180-182.

⁴⁶ About Narses's march to Italy in Procopius *B* VIII 21, 21 – VIII 26, 18. D. Brodka, *Narses, Politik, Krieg und Historiographie im 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr.*, Berlin 2018, pp. 129-131. The description is very sketchy, but the route of the last section reminds the one used by Theodoric on his way to Italy in his account. Narses's route along the coast from Salona on the map: H.-U. Wiemer, *Theoderich...*, p. 613

⁴⁷ This requires a separate discussion. In another study I describe how Procopius perceived the situation on the Danube in the northern part of Illyricum Orientale at that time.

Hierocles's geographical work *Travelling Companion* is considered as one of the most important sources in the field of historical geography of early Byzantium⁴⁸. In the preserved form, this text is dated to the beginning of Justinian I's rule⁴⁹. Among the provinces of Illyricum Orientale which were subject to Constantinople, he lists Pannonia with two cities: Sirmium and Bassianea⁵⁰, which does not mean that these centres belonged to the empire at that time. Hierocles's account devoted to Sirmium is not recognised as credible⁵¹, because it would require accepting the hypothesis that this centre was temporarily taken over by Justinian in 527/528, which is improbable in the light of other sources⁵². The earliest possible time when Sirmium could be under the emperor's rule was in 535, when the war with Ostrogoths began⁵³. It seems questionable that the entry in Hierocles's work devoted to Pannonia and Sirmium could be treated as a peculiar provocation from Constantinople towards Ostrogoths, consisting in reminding them that these lands had belonged and should belong to the empire⁵⁴. The hypothesis that outdated information was used is far more likely.

⁴⁸ It is very useful in discussing issues related to administration of the Danubian region: L. Maksimović, *L'administration de l'Illyricum Septentrional a l'époque de Justinien*, [in:] *Philadelphie et autres études*, Byzantina Sorboniensia 4, Paris 1984, p. 150; B. Bavant, *Illiria*, [in:] *Świat Bizancjum*, vol. I, *Cesarstwo wschodniorzymskie 330-641*, ed. C. Morrisson, Kraków 2007, p. 358; A. Sarantis, *Justinian's...*, p. 152 p. 219.

⁴⁹ Dating to the beginning of Justinian's rule: 527-528 seems well-justified: E. Honigmann, *Le Synekdēmos d'Hiérōklēs et l'Opuscule géographique de Georges de Chypre. Texte, introduction, commentaire et cartes*, (Corpus Bruxellense Historiae Byzantinae: Forma Imperii Byzantini, 1), Bruxelles 1939, p. 2; S. Turlej, *Hierokles*, [in:] *Encyklopedia Kultury Bizantyńskiej*, ed. O. Jurewicz, Warszawa 2002, p. 208; M. Salamon, *Novae in Ancient Sources – Hierocles, Synekdemōs*, [in:] *Novae. Legionary Fortress and Late Antique Town*, vol. 1, ed. T. Derda et alii, Warszawa 2008, pp. 106-107.

⁵⁰ Hierocles lists Pannonia generally: 657, 7 without specifying which province he means, and in it two cities: Sirmium: 657, 8 and Bassianea: 657, 9.

⁵¹ Explicitly J. Prostko-Prostyński, *Utraque...*, pp. 218-219. Noting Hierocles's information without a commentary: B. Milin, *Bassianae...*, p. 257.

⁵² Only theoretical deliberations as to the reliability of Hierocles's mention of Bassianea are possible: J. Zeiller, *Bassiana*, [in:] *Dictionnaire d'histoire et géographie ecclésiastique* 1932, 6, Paris 1932: 1272. Honigmann's deliberations about recovering Sirmium by commander Mundus: E. Honigmann, *Le Synekdēmos d'Hiérōklēs...*, p. 2 and footnote 7 are unacceptable. Yes Dušanić, *Bassianae...*, p. 81 footnote 157.

⁵³ The loss of Sirmium by Ostrogoths is dated differently: to 535 in M. Mirković, *Sirmium...*, p. 51, the latest to 537 in H. Wolfram, *Historia Gotów*, p. 366.

⁵⁴ M. Mirković, *Sirmium...*, p. 43.

To conclude, it is appropriate to state that reconstructions of the situation in the Danubian region in Justinian's times, which referred to Sirmium's great military importance for the empire and attributed Justinian with the intention of regaining it, do not deserve attention, because they are not supported by the analysis of the most important sources: Justinian's Novels devoted to Justiniana Prima, and the works of Procopius of Caeasarea and Hierocles. On the basis of information found in these accounts, there are no grounds not only for attributing Justinian with the ambition to regain control of Sirmium, but also for emphasising the importance of this centre from the point of view of the imperial politics at that time.

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