
The influence of the Avar Khanate on the ethno-political situation in South-Eastern Europe

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Abstract: This article provides an in-depth examination of the ethno-political impact of the Avar Khanate in Southeast Europe from the 7th to the 10th centuries. The Avars, through their military prowess and strategic settlement practices, brought about significant changes in the political and cultural landscape of the region. Their influence extended beyond warfare, as they played a crucial role in reshaping the ethnic composition and political equilibrium of Southeast Europe. The article delves into various aspects of Avar life, including their war economy, settlements, and agricultural and craft activities, highlighting how these factors influenced neighboring peoples and cultures. The Avars' interactions with the Byzantine Empire and other neighboring entities are also explored, emphasizing their role in shaping the region's long-term historical trajectory. By analyzing these multifaceted influences, the study provides valuable insights into the ethno-political legacy of the Avar Khanate, offering a nuanced understanding of their lasting impact on the region. The research underscores the importance of the Avars in the broader context of Southeast European history, contributing to a deeper comprehension of the historical forces that have shaped the region's development over the centuries. This comprehensive analysis not only enhances our knowledge of the Avar Khanate but also sheds light on the broader ethno-political processes at play during this critical period in Southeast European history.

Keywords: ethno-political impact, nomadic economy, archaeological findings, settlement strategies, craftsmanship.

1. Introduction.

The Avar Khanate, which left a deep mark on the political and cultural life of Southeast Europe between the 7th and 10th centuries, had a profound effect on the ethno-political balances in the region. Arriving on the scene almost a century after the influence of the European Huns in the region, the Avars shaped the political structure of the region for two centuries thanks to their military and political superiority. Although the primary sources about the Avars are sometimes contradictory and open to different interpretations, archaeological research in recent years has allowed a deeper understanding of this period [1:471–472; 2:1–2). Since they did not have a written culture, archaeological research conducted on settlements and burial places play a key role in clarifying the history of Avars and especially their ethno-political influence in the region.



Figure 1. Geographical map of Avar Khaganate.

2. Object and subject of research

Studies focusing on the ethno-political effects of the Avar Khanate in the region are limited. However, archeological finds and chronicles provide important clues about the interactions of the Avars with ethnic groups in the region and the effects of these interactions on the political structure of the region. The Avars established close relations with peoples such as Slavs, Gepids, and Bulgarians in the region, and deeply influenced the political structures, settlement patterns, and cultural identities of these peoples. In this study, the ethno-political influence of the Avars in South-Eastern Europe and the role of these influences in the historical development of the region are evaluated, considering the chronicles of the Avar period and the results of archaeological research.

3. Purpose of the study

As a result of the archaeological excavations carried out so far, many settlements belonging to the Avars and more than 60 thousand graves have been discovered, and the findings obtained because of these excavations have helped to understand how the Avars formed social and ethno-political structures in the region. Findings from Avar graves provide important clues about Avar social class distinctions and the relationship of these classes to ethno-political dynamics in the region [3:13-46]. If the graves of the elite reflect the political and military power of this class in the region, the graves of the lower classes show the political structure relations of different classes of the Avar society with other peoples in the region and the influence of these relations on the ethnos. – [4:207-229]. In this context, Avar graves and burial methods provide important information about the social structure and economic dynamics of the period, as well as the ethno-political effects of the Avar Khanate in Southeast Europe. In this study, the ethno-political transformations caused by the Avars in the region and the effects of these changes on the long-term historical development of the region will be discussed [8:226].

4. Literature analysis

The study of the ethno-political situation in South-Eastern Europe during the existence of the Avar Khanate (VII-X centuries) is based on a variety of archaeological, historical and anthropological works,

which allows for a deeper understanding of the influence of the Avars on regions such as Pannonia, Transylvania, Banat and Crisana .

One of the key areas of research is archeology, which allows us to reconstruct the features of the Avar culture and their influence on local peoples. Works by authors such as Dime (2003) and Cosma (2015, 2016) focus on archaeological sites that demonstrate the social and political aspects of the Avar presence in various regions of South-Eastern Europe. These studies highlight the importance of material culture in understanding the political structure and interaction of Avars with other ethnic groups.

Historical sources such as the works of Blockley (1985) and Einhard-Garrod and Mowat (1915) provide valuable information about the political and military interactions of the Avars with Byzantium and other neighboring states. These sources help to understand the strategic significance of the Avar campaigns and their impact on the political stability of the region.

Modern genetic studies, such as the work of Chaka and colleagues (2020), are opening new horizons in understanding the social structure and ethnic composition of the Avar elite. These data make it possible to reconstruct population dynamics and changes in the social organization of Avar society, which significantly expands the understanding of their role in the ethno-political processes of that time.

Works focusing on economic aspects, such as those by Batizi (2018) and Romhanya (2018), analyze the extraction and trade of resources such as salt and metals in Avar-controlled regions. This indicates the important role of the Avars in the development of the regional economy and the maintenance of interethnic interactions.

Thus, an analysis of the literature shows that the study of the Avar Khanate requires an integrated approach, which includes archaeological finds, historical documents and modern scientific methods. These studies emphasize the importance of the Avars in the formation of the ethno-political map of South-Eastern Europe, which makes them an important object for further scientific research.

5. Research results

Avar settlements and shelter typology: Herold [5:187-203] states that three main types of human shelters were identified in Avar settlements:

Kom: Shelters with the lower part underground and the upper part covered with mud, trees or bushes. 140 coals, 107 ovens, 4 wells and many ditches were discovered during the excavations in the Kölked Feketekapu area, located on the Roman harbor trade route.

Excavated Wood/Adobe Structures The many pile pits at Zillingtal, thought to be surface-built shelters and stables, are examples of such structures.

Tents (Lodging) These nomadic shelters, both in appearance and functionality, are shown in Maurice Strategikon as examples of Byzantine troops. In or near these shelters were stoves for heating or cooking, pits dug into the ground for storing food, water wells, pottery additional elements such as bowls and ditches surrounding these structures were built. Dormitories surrounded by ditches are believed to have been used during the transition to the first sedentary life. Over time, these dormitories were replaced by mud/brick houses buried in the ground. With the establishment of a sedentary culture and rising prosperity, log/brick houses built on pile foundations became widespread [5:188–191, 193; 28:6–667; 7:438–439]. However, there is no definitive archaeological evidence that these two shelter types follow each other chronologically. In addition, examples of these farm-style shelters, arranged like a street or scattered in different directions, have also been found.

When the geomorphological structure of the settlements and cemeteries in the Pannonian basin during the Avar period is examined, it appears that the Avars strategically settled on the borders of the regions where river floods occurred and, in the plains, and heights. [7:450]. This strategic choice helped the Avars maintain their ethnic and political advantage by taking advantage of the environmental conditions in the region.

Some of the Avar settlements concentrated in the south-east of Hungary were built on or near ancient Roman settlements. However, there is no evidence that the Avars used Roman buildings as shelters. Instead, it is understood that they preferred locations close to these ancient Roman settlements to use Roman and Byzantine infrastructure such as roads, canals, and farmland, but continued to live according to their cultural identity and traditions. This shows how the Avars consciously used settlement strategies to increase their ethno-political influence in the region.

Starting from the middle of the 7th-9th centuries, the Middle Period, which lasted for almost a century, witnessed important ethno-political changes in the Avar society. This period had a profound impact on the ethnic and political structures of the Avar khanate in Southeast Europe, with the influence of new waves of emigration and internal turmoil. Two important events that affected Avar society were the Slavic revolt led by Samon and the Bulgarian revolt led by Kuvrat. These uprisings not only changed the internal dynamics of the Avars, but also reshaped the ethnic balances in the region. Migrations of Slavic and Bulgarian tribes to Central Europe and the Balkans caused the Avars to reconsider their ethno-political strategies, the increase of newly arrived tribes and artists and the diversification of activities in various art fields led to radical changes in the economic field [8:210]. The increase in the number of settlements in the Middle and Late Periods, together with new migration waves and favorable climatic conditions, accelerated the process of transition of the Avars to a sedentary life. Szenthe (2019) states that during this period, the spread of settlements and the entry of new ethnic groups into the region increased the ethno-political influence of the Avars in Southeast Europe [9:228–229; 11:438–439, 453, 456].

Avars led a nomadic lifestyle between the middle of the 6th century and the first half of the 7th century, when they entered the Carpathians. Archaeological findings from this period show that the Avars had a nomadic social structure based on war economy. Zacharias Rhetor describes the Avars as warrior nomads who lived in tents and subsisted on cattle, fish, and wild animals ([10:449-451]. However, Corey argues that the Avar elite were not nomadic in the early period and suggests that the Avars also became sedentary during this period.

In 566, the Avars defeated the Frankish army, captured the leader of the Franks, Sigibert, and released him in exchange for food supplies. This event reveals that the Avars did not engage in agriculture when they first arrived in the region and their food resources were insufficient [16]. In the work called *Strategikon*, written at the end of the 6th century, it was stated that Avars and Turks were superior in terms of fighting and military organization, but they were not inclined to humane fields such as craftsmanship and art. Although this assessment is exaggerated by the Byzantine bias, it sheds light on the initial economic conditions of the Avars. The economy of the Avars was based on taxes collected from neighboring states and tribes, especially from the Byzantine Empire, spoils of war, ransoms, and income from wars in which they participated as mercenaries. In 558, the Avar delegation, which came to Istanbul to meet the Byzantine emperor, demanded land and money from the Gepids, Slavs, and Kutrigurs, peoples from the steppes of Eastern Europe, in exchange for protecting the empire's borders in the Balkans. Taxes reaching 120,000 Solidi at the end of the 6th century led to the transfer of wealth of 6 million Solidi from the Byzantine Empire to the Avar Khanate between 574-626 [15:73; 1:155]. In addition, the Avars benefited from the campaigns of the Byzantine armies against the Slavic tribes, who constantly harassed the frontiers of the empire, taking a share of the booty.

Table 1. Byzantine payments to the Avars.

<i>Year</i>	Amount	Source
558–565	Annuities and gifts	Menander 5.1, 5.4
565–574	there is no agreement	Menander 8, 12.5-7
574/75–579	80.000 Solidi	Menander 15.5, 27.3

Continuation of Table 1

582–584	80,000 Solidi (delayed)	Menander 27.3
585–597	100.000 Solidi	Teofilakt 1.3, 1.6
598–603	120.000 Solidi	Teofilakt 7.15
604-?	140.000 Solidi?	Theophanes 6096
611-?	probably increased	—
618/19–622/23	180,000 Solidi?	Theophanes 6111; bax. 6112, 6113
623/24–626	200,000 Solidi (3000 pounds of gold)	Nicephorus 13

At the beginning of the 7th century, during the invasion of Italy by the Lombards under the rule of King Agilulf, the Avars provided significant military support and in return received a share of the plunder and booty (38:159).

After the failed siege of Constantinople in 626 by the Slavs and the Sassanids, tributes from the Byzantine Empire were cut off and the Avar economy stagnated. Archaeological excavations show that Byzantine coins entering the Avar lands decreased during this period [13:25–26, 30–31; 14:716,9–726]. However, with the emergence of the Onogur-Bulgarian Turks, who were defeated by the Khazars in the 670s, the Avar-Byzantine relations revived and the Avar khanate regained its former power and prosperity. During this period, there is a new increase in Byzantine coins and luxury goods entering the Avar lands .

There is no clear information about how the wealth and spoils that entered the Avar lands were distributed. However, it turns out that the khagan kept a significant part of the Avar treasure under his control. Taking advantage of the civil war that started as a result of the power struggle between the Avar princes in 794, the Franks attacked the Avars and captured the capital at the end of 795. The Avar treasury captured by the Frankish army consisted of 15 cartloads of valuables such as gold, silver, and silk, each drawn by four oxen (49:74; 14:15–16). reshaped its ethno-political influences and left permanent traces on the ethnic structures of other peoples in the region.

Ceramics and pottery among the Avars: within the framework of the ethno-political influence of the Avar khanate in Southeast Europe, ceramics and pottery can be considered not only as a branch of craftsmanship, but also as an important element of economic and cultural relations in the region. During the Avar period, pottery played a major role in the formation of the socio-economic structure with the spread of sedentary life. The fact that pottery is among the most frequently found remains in archaeological excavations shows how widespread and important pottery was during this period. Vessels such as pots, casseroles, jugs and glasses found in settlements and graves show that pottery played an important role in the daily life of Avar society and was produced in local workshops. Informs about production technologies and organizations. Herold Avar divided pottery into three main groups: lidded eating vessels, drinking vessels, and large vessels. These different groups show the diversity of the economic structure of Avar society and how this structure is organized. While hand-made pottery was widespread in the early period, the use of the slow-rotating potter's wheel in the middle period, and the fast-rotating "wheel-thrown" potter's wheel in the late period indicate the development of production technology. and the prosperity of Avar society increased. These developments in pottery strengthened the ethno-political influence of the Avar Khanate in Southeastern Europe. High-quality pottery from the Sekszard excavations shows that Avar society underwent a significant economic and cultural transformation during this period

Recent changes in pottery types reflect the increasing interaction of the Avars with other peoples of southeastern Europe. The spread of pottery in Central and Eastern Europe increased the ethno-political

influence of the Avars in these regions and allowed them to control trade routes. In particular, pottery produced in important trade centers such as the Kölked-Feketekapu settlement can be considered an indicator of the commercial activity and economic power of the Avars during this period. It shows that it has become the main source of food. In addition, the Byzantine gray pottery found at Kunbábony reveals that the Avars participated in foreign trade activities and were part of international trade networks. In this context, the settlement of Kölked-Feketekapu became an important junction point in the pottery trade and the distribution of amphorae produced in the Mediterranean region.

It shows how the Avars strengthened their ethno-political influence by controlling trade networks. The discovery of amphorae originating from the Western Black Sea region in the Tiszavasvari and Kunbabony settlements between the Tesa and Danube rivers shows that the Avars were not only regional but also shows that they are interested in international trade and what role this trade plays in increasing their economic power. These amphorae are thought to constitute a “luxury demand” by the Avar elite, reflecting prestige and economic power.

The ethno-political influence of the Avars in South-Eastern Europe was manifested not only in the military and political, but also in the economic and cultural spheres. Pottery is an important source of information for understanding this effect. Pottery production and trade strengthened the presence of the Avars in the region and played an important role in their relations with other peoples. This situation not only enriched the ethnic-cultural structure of the Avar Khanate, but also contributed to the formation of ethno-political dynamics in the region.

Mining and Metalworking among the Avars: Mining and metalworking activity is an important indicator for understanding the ethno-political effects of the Avar Khanate in Southeast Europe. The Avars made good use of the lands of Transylvania and Pannonia, which had rich mineral resources. Salt, iron, copper, silver and gold mines are distinguished in these regions. These minerals, obtained by primitive methods, have been one of the cornerstones of the Avar economy since the early Middle Ages. Regions such as the Goch River Valley, where gold and other precious metals were mined, show how the Avars controlled these mineral resources and integrated them into their economy. Blacksmithing and metalworking of the Avars became an important economic activity, especially in the 7th century. Archaeological finds have proven that iron castings were carried out in settlements south of Lake Balaton and that these activities played an important role in the Avar economy. In addition, the cemetery discovered in Kaposvar indicates the presence of Avars who controlled the iron resources in this region. Such activities reveal how skilled the Avars were in mining and metalworking and how they used these resources to increase their economic power. The Avars used more advanced methods in metalworking than the Germanic and Slavic tribes of the time but lagged behind the Byzantines. Nevertheless, the jewelry and jewelry produced by the Avars have survived to this day as one of the most valuable examples of cultural heritage. These products occupied an important place in the social structure of the Avars and were elements that emphasized the status of the elite class. In particular, a tomb with rich jewelry unearthed at Kunbabony shows the mastery of Avars in metalwork and the prestige of these products in society. The Nagyszentmiklos hoard is an important example that symbolizes the Avars' goldsmithing skills and the cultural heritage they created in this field. The development of metalworking technology increased the ethno-political influence of the Avars. Wide spread of pressing methods in the Early and Middle Ages, the prominence of molding and casting techniques in the Late Period indicates that the Avars demonstrated continuous development in metalworking technology and used this development to consolidate their economic and political power. Avar metal art can also be considered a reflection of the social structure. The production of metal products according to the income level of people in different socio-economic strata shows that the Avar society had a dynamic and innovative structure. It also shows how it was formed and the role of the Avar khanate in this process is emphasized. The Avars used their mineral resources and metalworking skills not only for economic gain, but also to expand their power

and influence in the region. This shows that the influence of the Avars on the ethno-political dynamics in South-Eastern Europe was multifaceted and deep.

6. Conclusion

The Avar khanate had a dynamic and changing economic structure depending on the conditions during its 250-year rule in Southeast Europe. Initially, they adopted a nomadic economic model based on food security, where animal husbandry and a war/plunder economy came to the fore. However, over time, this model has evolved into a semi-nomadic-semi-sedentary social structure, and activities such as agriculture, animal husbandry, and handicrafts have become the cornerstone of the economy. In the process, the social division of labor evolved, and crafts moved beyond the household and allowed for production on a larger scale. Archaeological finds also confirm that active trade was conducted with the Byzantine Empire and other neighboring states. This trade seems to have created an important technical and cultural interaction in the development of Avar craft.

The changes in the Avar economy can be divided into certain periods, as in the Roman economy. With the arrival of the Avars in Central Europe in the second half of the 6th century, nomadic and plundering economy prevailed. In the early period, wars aimed at raising cattle, collecting tribute from surrounding tribes, and providing food came to the fore. However, after the failed siege of Constantinople in 626, the Avar economy shifted from a sedentary lifestyle to agriculture and crafts. In the Middle Ages, under the influence of the Bulgarian and Slavic revolts, agricultural production and artisanal economy became stronger, and with the spread of sedentary life, nomadic economy gave way to more complex and diversified economic activity. In recent times, the Avar society further developed its economic structure under the influence of the peace environment, with the contraction of the war economy and the increase of non-agricultural economic activities.

This study fills an important gap in the field as a comprehensive study that examines in depth the extent of ethno-political influence of the Avars in Central and Southeastern Europe through archaeological finds and a limited number of written texts. By revealing the extent and diversity of Avar influence in the region, it contributes greatly to the understanding of historical and cultural interaction.

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