

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE SILK ROAD IN THE
6th CENTURY AD



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BY

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PLAGIARISM

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ABSTRACT

With the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen coining a new word, *Silk Road*, into the world language in 1877, studies on the history of the Silk Road began. The studies showed that the Silk Road is an Afro-Eurasian history. In other words, the Silk Road is world history. For this reason, it has been understood that it is necessary to write the history of an era instead of the history of some civilizations or states on the Silk Road. The most important factor in determining the subject of our thesis has been the Covid-19 pandemic. It has allowed historical research to observe how an epidemic spreads and what socio-economic consequences it entails, and even what political results it creates. The following are the questions we are looking for answers to in our study; where and why did the Justinian plague appear in the sixth century? How did it spread? What are the socio-economic and political consequences? To answer these questions, we utilized the disciplines of medicine, archaeology, climatology and economics in our dissertation. According to our results, among the factors which affected the Justinian plague is the Late Antique Little Ice Age that occurred in the sixth century. The origin of the Justinian plague is the plague foci in the Tian Shan in Kyrgyzstan. We also determined that in the sixth century, which Peter Brown described as “Archaic Globalization”, the Silk Road trade became global enough to spread the pandemic. The consequences of the epidemic were the decline of Indian Maritime trade and the increase of trade wars on the Silk Road. Thus, the Byzantine Empire allied with the Türk Khaganate to use the Caucasian branch of the Overland Silk Road as an alternative route due to the breaking of the Sasanian monopoly and the falling of the Maritime Silk Road.

Keywords: *Justinian plague, Silk Road, Overland and Maritime Silk Road, Türk Khaganate, Byzantine Empire*

ÖZET

1877 yılında Alman coğrafyacı Ferdinand von Richthofen’ın İpek Yolu kavramını üretmesiyle beraber İpek Yolu’nun tarihine dair çalışmalar başlamıştır. Yapılan çalışmalar, İpek Yolu’nun bir Afro-Avrasya tarihi olduğunu göstermiştir. Başka bir deyişle İpek Yolu, bir dünya tarihidir. Bu yüzden İpek Yolu üzerindeki belli başlı medeniyetlerin veya devletlerin tarihini yerine bir dönemin tarihi yazmak gerektiği anlaşılmıştır. Tezimizin konusunu belirlememizde en önemli etken Covid-19 salgını olmuştur. Covid-19, tarih araştırmalarına, bir hastalığın nasıl yayıldığını ve ne gibi sosyo-ekonomik sonuçlar doğurduğunu ve hatta ne tür politik sonuçlar yarattığını gözlemlene imkanı vermiştir. Çalışmamızda cevap aradığımız soruları şunlardır; Jüstinyen vebası nerede ve neden altıncı yüzyılda ortaya çıktı? Nasıl yayıldı? Sosyo-ekonomik ve politik sonuçları nelerdir? Bu sorulara cevap vermek için çalışmamızda tıp, arkeoloji, klimatoloji ve iktisat disiplinlerinden faydalandık. Ulaştığımız sonuçlar göre; Justinyen vebasına etki eden unsurlar arasında 6. yüzyılda meydana gelen Geç Antik Çağ Küçük Buzul Çağı yer almaktadır. Vebanın kaynağı, Kırgızistan’daki Tanrı Dağlarında mevcut olan veba odaklarıdır. Ayrıca Peter Brown’un “Arkaik Globalleşme” olarak tanımladığı altıncı yüzyılda İpek Yolu ticaretinin pandeminin yayılmasını sağlayacak kadar küreselleştiğini tespit ettik. Salgının sonuçları ise Hint Deniz ticaretinin düşüşe geçmesi ve İpek Yolu’nda ticaret savaşlarının artması olmuştur. Böylece, Bizans İmparatorluğu, hem Sasani tekelini kırma hem de Deniz İpek Yolu’nun işlevsizleşmesinden dolayı Kara İpek Yolu’nun Kafkasya rotasını alternatif bir güzergah olarak kullanabilmek için Türk Kağanlığı ile ittifak kurmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Jüstinyen vebası, İpek Yolu, Türk Kağanlığı, Bizans*

İmparatorluğu, Kara ve Deniz İpek Yolu

PREFACE

In 1877, after the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen denominated the Silk Road to its, European researchers entered the race to explore the Silk Road with great dedication. This race was not only an academic ambition among scientists, but also a prestige struggle of the significant empires of the nineteenth century. The discoveries and work of the French Sinologist Paul Pelliot and the English archaeologist Sir Marc Aurel Stein quickly drew the gaze of Eurocentrism to Inner Eurasia. With the influence of the desire of Indo-Europeans to find their ancestors, enormous work was done for the history of the Silk Road throughout the twentieth century. Excavations conducted by Soviet archaeologists throughout Eurasia shed light on the history of the ancient communities of the Silk Road. In the twentieth century, Silk Road research, carried out mainly through archaeology and philology, but it has evolved to the study of cultural history since the end of the century.

It was seen that not only commodities were transported on the Silk Road, but also cultures traveled. This complex picture, which came before the researchers, showed that the Silk Road is a world history. In order to understand the Silk Road, it became clear that any of the rings that make up it should not be otherised. This situation made it necessary to write a holistic history of the period, and not write the history of major civilizations or states. In this way, a multi-center historiography was born instead of the center and the wall in the historical writing of the Silk Road. In our study, we evaluated the Silk Road as a multi-part puzzle based on the multicentric understanding of cultural history that developed especially in the twenty-first century.

Our study entitled *Socio-Economic and Political History of the Silk Road in the Sixth Century AD* is an attempt not only to write the history of contemporary states or nations, but also to explore a magnificent scene of the Silk Road using the disciplines

of medicine, archaeology, climatology and economics. What makes the sixth century of the Silk Road important is that it has similarities with the first quarter of the twenty-first century. The pandemic that occurred in 2020 was the factor that determined our thesis topic. We had the opportunity to observe how people reacted and how socio-economic history was affected by pandemics in ancient centuries. Climatic factors and globalization played a major role in the emergence of the pandemic case in 2020. Using these factors as mirrors and keeping them to the sixth century, we found significant similarities. We have discovered that there is a close relationship between the Late Antique Little Ice Age and the Justinian Plague.

On the other hand, we have found that the Silk Road trade has become global enough to create a pandemic in the sixth century, which Peter Brown describes as “Archaic Globalization”. Instead of cultural studies, based on relations between center and periphery, we aimed framework which is a centre of each of the Byzantine Empire, the Sasanian Empire, Axum Kingdom, Türk Khaganate, Rouran Khaganate, Northern Wei, Eastern Wei, Western Wei, Northern Qi, Northern Zhou and Sui.

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I dedicate my dissertation to the heroic Turkish army and its eternal Commander-in-Chief Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

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INTRODUCTION

Silk Road research began at first with activities to decipher the origins of Indo-Europeanism in the interior of Asia. In the process of time, these searches have been replaced by a desire to explore the east, an exotic place. With the many archaeological and anthropological discoveries, an enormous cultural history has emerged. The concept of the Silk Road was introduced when discoveries occurred successively in the nineteenth century. Studies have begun to take shape around this concept. As time passed by, it became that the Silk Road is not only political history but a channel that has provided interaction between the east and the west. Within the framework of this developing new view, there has been a significant change in the course of the Silk Road studies. The studies have begun to move away from chronological historiography and have evolved into the construction of history and culture mainly through concrete archaeological finds.

With this paradigm shift, Asian historical writing centred on the Silk Road has begun to develop. By the 2000s, the writing of Asian history began to be gradually replaced by the history of Eurasia. At this point, it has proceeded as a kind of writing of the history of the known world, meaning Asia, Africa and Europe. A world history writing Asia-centric has started to develop under the title of the Silk Road. In addition, the lower branches of the Silk Road concept have also emerged. The Silk Road has been a network of land routes running along the Asian continent that usually has come alive in readers' minds' eyes. Along with modern studies, the Silk Road has become an abstract concept. Because the pathways used by Buddhist pilgrims when they travelled to Central Asia and China for missionary work eventually turned into trade routes, a sub-research area called Buddhist Routes was formed.

With the trade that started between Rome and the West Indian coast in the early part of the era, the maritime silk road was born. Nowadays, Maritime Silk Road studies are being researched under the title of the Silk Road. Unesco and the People's Republic of China influence the rise of silk road research today. The globalization and trade network developing in the twenty-first century is based on the Silk Road as a historical argument. It affects the joint archaeological and historical studies of modern countries in the places where the Silk Road passed in the past. Unesco supports these activities of researchers with great seriousness. All these increase the curiosity about the Silk Road. In the coming years, the amount of archaeological, chronological and cultural studies on the Silk Road will swell. In addition to these, natural sciences, which are in contact with the field of history more and more every day, seem to open a new door into Silk Road studies in the future.

Studies of the Silk Road, such as *The New Silk Roads: The Present and Future of the World* by Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World* by Peter Frankopan and *Traveling the Silk Road: Ancient Pathway to the Modern World* by Mark Norell, Denise Patry Leidy and Laura Ross, are generally discussed in the form of a reading of world history. With the emphasis on the name of their books, it is possible to say that the Silk Road developed in the form of a world history reading. As an alternative to the European centrist understanding of history, it is possible to construct Silk Road historiography as an alternative history reading. Silk Road historiography should not only be chronological historiography but also be a world history, which was created by expanding its scope with various natural and human sciences. One of the issues that we should pay attention to when building an alternative history here is that the nomenclatures of the periods that apply to Europe should also be changed.

Onomathesias such as Antiquity and the Middle Ages are essentially consistent concepts for European history. However, the issues that can be considered as the Middle Ages of Asian societies do not coincide with Europe in terms of chronology. Since our main field of study is the steppe khaganates, it would be more correct to make a statement using this example. It would be more appropriate to say that the Middle Age began in Central Asian history with the Muslim Turkish States established in Central Asia after the Uyghur Khaganate withdrew from the historical scene in 840 AD. This, in turn, roughly coincides with the period called the High Middle Ages in Europe. However, the Middle Ages in the history of Inner Asia began only after the ninth-century AD. There is no difference in terms of lifestyle and organization of the Xiongnu, Rouran, Türk and Uyghur Khaganates, except for a few organizational differences. However, the Sogdian, Turkic-Mongolian and Chinese societies located in the centre also had their religious understandings.

Considering these issues, it is necessary to produce alternative term names for the Silk Road and to conduct discussions on them. Peter Frankopan and Richard Foltz classified it according to the dates of the spread of religions. However, we disapprove of this kind of period nomenclature correct. The reason for this is that Buddhism, Manichaeism, Islam and Christianity show a feature that expands from the walls of the Silk Road to its centre. By ignoring these parts, Frankopan and Foltz have shifted to a certain amount of eurocentrism, using religions from the walls as a term. It should be sought in the history of the societies that formed the main base, which should be adopted as a criterion for dividing the Silk Road into periods. On the other hand, contrary to the main argument (Zhang Qian's journey) that is considered the starting date of the Silk Road, in our opinion, it began with the arrival of the Scythians on the historical stage.

However, the beginning of the Silk Road in the classical sense in the process after the Scythian disintegration is the military expansion of Alexander the Great towards the Asian interior. As a result of the union established by Alexander, an interaction of culture, art and religion began between the east and west. Therefore, in dividing the Silk Road into historical periods, our chronological propositions are as follows; the Scythian Age, the Age of Alexander the Great and his successors, the Xiongnu Age or Hun Age, the Turks Age and the Islamic Age as well as the Genghis Khan and His Successors. The nomenclatures in this proposal can be revised repeatedly. In addition, it is necessary to discuss the start and end dates covered by the names of this era. Drawing chronology boundaries for period classification is not very accurate at the moment, and it is also not in the main scope of our study.

In this study, we examined the political, economic and social situation of the Silk Road in the sixth century. According to Peter Brown's reading of European centrist history, this period is included in Late Antiquity. Peter Brown introduces the Türk Khaganate, the Wei States, the Sui Dynasty and the early Tang history into Antiquity and analysis this period through Byzantine history (Brown, 2021, pp. 511-516; Kaçar, 2018, p. 5). However, this reading style contradicts the Silk Road-based history that we claim. Considering the historical dynamics of the Silk Road, the sixth century AD is a period when there was a change of era. As we suggest above, the period between the second half of the sixth century and the first half of the ninth century should be called the Türk Age. In our opinion, the equivalent of the Late Antiquity of Byzantium for Asia is the Türk Age. The sixth century is a process in the history of the Silk Road in which socio-economic and political dynamics have undergone changes. In our dissertation, we tried to observe this alteration from different standpoints. Comparing the studies of nature and humanities, we investigated this

variance, which took place on the Silk Road in the sixth century, its causes and consequences.

In the research methods section of our study, we evaluated the studies related to the main humanities and natural sciences that we used. In order to be able to understand the changes that took place on the Silk Road in the sixth century, we used the studies on archaeological materials, in particular numismatics. In the title of written resources and research works, we discussed Byzantine sources that touched on Türk Khaganate and Byzantine relations as well as described the Plague, besides some research works. In the bacteriological studies section, we scrutinize the studies of the natural sciences, which is one of the bases of our views on how the plague spread. Thanks to the technology developed since the 2000s, the findings revealed by the studies on the *Yersinia Pestis* genomes have led to the questioning of existing historical theses. The current opinions about the plague epidemic that occurred in the Byzantine Empire are based on contemporary Byzantine sources. These sources state that the starting point of the plague was Ethiopia. Because of this, it has been accepted for a very long time that the plague came from inside Africa. However, as I mentioned, this opinion has been refuted by recent bacteriology studies.

In the second chapter, we discussed the Silk Road in general terms. We examined what the Silk Road is, and the maritime and overland routes that make up it. Historically, we have described the Silk Road routes. In the third chapter, a chronologically general picture of the political situation of East Asia, Central Asia and Northern India as well as Western Asia in the sixth century is presented. These regions also reveal the physical boundaries of the Silk Road in the sixth century. In the fourth chapter, the political, social, and economic events that took place during the sixth century as well as the natural disasters that affected them are examined. In this

chapter, the parallels between the Late Antique Little Ice Age and the Justinian Plague have been exhibited. In addition, the role played by commerce in the spread of the Plague has been revealed. In our dissertation, the share of globalization caused by the Silk Road in the sixth century, as well as climate disasters in the occurrence of the plague epidemic was emphasized. It has been evaluated that the influence of the silk trade on the wars between Byzantine Empire and the Sasanian Empire spread to the entire Silk Road with globalization in the sixth century. Given the contribution of all these factors, the idea arises that the world experienced an early globular period in the sixth century, as we have argued.

This argument is also the basis of a silk road-based history reading against a European centrist history reading. As far as Moses Finley is considered, the existence of common economic space between Rome and India, as well as China besides the notion of the world market of Antiquity were a figment of imagination (1985, pp. 177-178). However, the main argument for a Silk Road-based understanding of world history is the idea that the regions where the Silk Road trade network extends form a commerce space. As we explained in the details in the third chapter, contrary to his idea, there is a commerce space in the world both in Antiquity and in the sixth century AD. Moreover, Peter Brown stated that the sixth century AD is *pre-modern globalization* and *archaic globalization* (Brown, 2021, pp. 514-515). This view not only makes sense of what happened on the Silk Road in the sixth century AD, but also sheds light on the flourishing Silk Road trade during the Mongol Epoch. I conclude my words here by saying that the factors that affect the occurrence of a plague epidemic in the fourteenth century and the factors in a plague epidemic that lasted from the sixth to the eighth century are similar.

1. RESEARCH METHODS

In this chapter, the main studies that constitute the arguments of our thesis have been explained and evaluated. These studies have been examined in three headings below. In our thesis, it has been benefited from archaeological studies, written sources and research works, as well as bacteriological studies. A scientific comparison and criticism of these studies have been chosen as a method.

1.1. Archaeological Findings and Research Resources

In this section, first of all, the archaeological finds belonging to Byzantine discovered in Southeast Asia, Eastern Asia and Inner Asia are mentioned. Then, numismatic coins and archaeological finds of Hephthalites, Türks, Sasanians and Sogdians have been analysed.

Thanks to archaeological researches, in the 1980s, Byzantine jewels were unearthed in China. For instance, in the tomb of Princess Li Jingxun, who was buried in the early seventh century AD, was found a golden necklace. This Byzantine gold necklace is significant as it shows the trade and relationships between China and Byzantine. In *A Byzantine Jewel From the 6th- 7th Century in China*, Attila Kiss deduced that this find is part of the Silk Road trade (1984, pp. 33-39). Victor Cunrui Xiong and Ellen Johnston Laing commented on foreign jewellery discovered in China in their study. The grave of Li Xian (569 AD) was excavated by archaeologists. There are exciting foreign goods in the tomb, such as a ring, a Greco-Roman silver ewer and a Sasanian glass bowl. Another archaeological finding is that the ring which was discovered in the tomb of Li Xizong (540 AD) and his wife has a deer design on the top. It has known that this deer pattern emerged in Taxila, Pakistan. As a result, there were strong cultural ties between Eastern Asia and Western Asia in the 6th century AD (Xiong & Laing, 1991, pp. 165, 171; Marshak B. I., 2004, p. 51).

The grave of Dugu Luo (534-599) was excavated in 1953. A Byzantine coin, the solidus of Justin II, was revealed in this tomb. Byzantine gold coins (solidus) have been unearthed in China since the excavation of that solidus of Justin II. Those coins were discovered in the provinces of Liaoning, Inner Mongolia, Henan, Shanxi, Hebei and Eastern Turkestan. Many of these coins date back the late 6th century to the first half of the 8th century. In addition, thousands of Sasanian silver coins were discovered in China. (Ying, 2005, p. 16). During the excavation in Boma in 1997, cups were found. One of these vessels was made of gold with tiger handle. Most likely, this cup belonged to a khan or chieftain. According to Ying, the gold vessel reminds of the drinking cups carved on the Türk Khaganate era stone images. In addition, he has noted that this cup with a tiger handle is closer to the examples in the Byzantine Empire than the Sassanid models (Ying, 2008, pp. 20-22).

Five solidi, Justin I and Justinian II, were uncovered in the grave of Tian Hong (d. 575) Lin Ying asserts that the Khagans of the Rouran and Türks derived these solidi as diplomatic gifts from Byzantine Emperors. Subsequently, they sent them to Chinese Huangdi to show their strength (Ying, 2005, p. 17). In contrast to the assertion of Ying, the relationship between the Rouran Khaganate and Byzantine has substantially not been proved so far. On the other hand, it is unequivocally known that there is a relationship between Byzantine and Türk Khaganate. As stated by Gaybulla Babayarov and Andrey Kubatin, the geopolitical position of the Türk Khaganate contributed to the establishment of connections among Asia Minor, Central Asia and East Asia. Within these connections, the Türk Khaganate-Byzantine Empire relationship came to the forefront because this relationship impacted the Türk Khaganate from a point of view of culture. They agree with M. E. Masson and O. I.

Smirnova's opinion that Western Türk Khaganate coins were modelled from Byzantine coins. (Babayarov & Kubatin, 2013, p. 48).

M. E. Masson shed light on that Western Türk Khaganate imitated Byzantine copper coins of Justin II. Türk's coins appeared after they established close contact with Byzantine. There is an image of Justin II and his wife Sofia on the obverse of copper coins of Justin II. Similarly, there is an image of khan and his wife Khatun on the obverse of Western Türk coins (Babayarov & Kubatin, 2013, pp. 48, 56). As far as Babayarov and Kubatin are concerned (2013), the depicted governor on the obverse of Türk coins tangibly represents *Khagan*, whereas abstractly, the governor represents the *Teyri*. Like this, the depicted governor wife also represents *Khatun*, wife of *Khagan*. Abstractly, he refers to (goddess) *Umay* (pp. 53-54). In the Shoroon Bumbagar tomb in Mongolia, the materials belonging to early Türk culture were discovered. Moreover, in this tomb, the influences of Chine culture were dominants. Among the materials discovered in the tomb are more than 15 Byzantine coins. It has been identified three of these coins. These are the *solidi* of Phokas (602-610) and Heraclius (date back to 616-625), and the imitation of the solidus of Tiberius II Constantinus (578-582) (Yatsenko, 2014, pp. 13-18, 24).

The coin of Tiberius II Constantinus shows that in the East Türk Khaganate, Byzantine coins circulated in the 6th century AD. Sergey A. Yatsenko alleged that Byzantine coins got used as costume decorations and medallions in East Türk Khaganate (2014, p. 24). In the study of *Archaeology of Trade in the Western Indian Ocean, 300 BC - AD 700*, Eivind Heldaas Seland examined the trade in the Indian Ocean in detail. For this reason, he divided the Ocean into geographical parts, such as South Asia, the Persian Gulf, Southern Arabia, East Africa and the Red Sea. Since the Indian Ocean trade that existed in the 6th century and before is examined in this study,

it is of great importance from the point of view of our thesis. He analysed each of the ancient trading ports in India. In South India, it was found a massive amount of bronze and copper coins of Byzantine. Firstly, scholars thought that Sri Lanka is not a significant value in the Indian Ocean trade. However, the ship cargo that dates back first or second century AD was unearthed on the island in 2008 (Seland, 2014, p. 373).

Southern Arabia took an active role in the ancient Indian Ocean trade. Its location was vital as a junction point for maritime routes interconnecting the Red Sea, East Africa, the Persian Gulf and Western India. In the Khor Rori site (ancient name's Sumhuram) in Oman was discovered much pottery which is associated with India and the Mediterranean. Qana (ancient port and settlement) in Yemen probably was founded in the 1st century AD. This settlement sustained its importance, which was based on monsoon trade, under Himyarite rule before it was abandoned in the 7th century AD (Seland, 2014, p. 376). This commercial city made cultural progress in a short period. Both Greek language and culture, also Judaism, spread into the city (Seland, 2014, p. 377). This situation is significant for political events. We will in depth announce its political importance in chapter **2.3** (Political Situation in West Asia) and **3**. (Trade on the Silk Road between Eastern and Western in the sixth century).

Moreover, it sheds light on that the Indian Ocean tradership is multicultural. Berenike was established on the Red Sea coast in the third century BC. It appears that this important settlement was abandoned in the middle of the sixth century AD (Seland, 2014, p. 381). We relate abandonment of the settlement to the emergence of the plague in the 6th century else. According to us, the plague was carried from Western Indian ports to Egypt via ships. The Red Sea ports have a drastic distribution

role in this route. The occurrence of the plague outbreak brought about the dramatic shrinkage of the international Indian Ocean commerce. Therefore, the forsaking of Berenike elucidates socio-economic changes in Western Asia in the sixth century. Although one of the major ports on the Red Sea was Myos Hormos (Quseir al-Qadim) where trade was conducted between the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, it was deserted in the third century AD (Seland, 2014, pp. 382-383).

Eurasian nomads used the *tamgha* (seal or stamp) as an emblem for *urug* (family), *bod* (tribe), and *bodun* (tribes). They stamped their possessions with their seals. Moreover, they imprinted *tamgha* onto their coins. As mentioned above, in Western Türk Khaganate, we are sure that the coins were produced and used. Western Türks printed their seals on the reverse of their coins. In Western Türk Khaganate, there were client states such as Chach, Ferghana, Otrar, Ustrushana, Sogd, Bukhara, Tokhara, and Harezm. These states had their coins. As claimed by Babayarov, the political history of the Western Türk Khaganate might be interpreted because of the *tamgha* on the reverse of coins (2014, pp. 11-12, 14). The political alternations in the Khaganete are in historical harmony with the seals on the coins. The historical development of the tamghas seen on the coins is as follows: .

The Western Türks were ruled by Eastern Türks as a directly connected *Yabghu* state in the 560-580 years AD. Their rulers' title was *Yabghu* and they used their tamgha in the form of . In the second period of the state (582-630 AD), they were less dependent on Eastern Khaganate than before. Babayarov defines this period as “*Yabghu-Khaganate*”. In this term, the sovereigns were called *Yabghu-Khagan* on the coins. Moreover,  was imprinted on the coins. When Eastern Türk Khaganate was destroyed by Tang Dynasty, Western Türk Khaganate inherited its heritage. After 630 AD, the sovereigns of the Western Khaganate called themselves Khagan. They

chose  as tamgha (Babayar, 2014, p. 14). As far as François Thierry is concerned, trade-in steppe, in which sheep are exchanged for grain, horses for silk, is not a monetary exchange system as the currency does not use in these interchanges. He claims in his Eurocentric perspective that the *use of the currency is the mark of ...an advanced society* (Thierry, 2010, p. 59).

He notes there were four varieties of trades in the steppe. The first of these was trade within the executive tribe (*Türk Bodun*). The second was federal trade between the tribes in the Khaganate (*Türk, Uygur, Kirghiz Bodun...*). The third commerce was between the Khaganate and vassal states (Chach, Ferghana, Otrar, Ustrushana, Sogd, Bukhara). The last was the Silk Road trade. In the western part of the Khaganate, the currency was used in two forms. The copper coins were used in everyday essentials. On the other hand, in international trade, Sasanian silver drachms were used. In the western part, Tegins, Tuduns and Yabghus issued their currency. These coins resembled Sogdian coins. The inscriptions were engraved onto coins in Sogd letter. In the eastern part, Chinese coins circulated (Thierry, 2010, p. 61).

A golden signet ring was found in kurgan no.3 in Üç Tepe in Azerbaijan. This tomb dates back to the 6th century AD. As stated by the first assumptions, this tomb belonged to the Khazar, Sabir or Avar warrior. There is an inscription on this golden ring, inscribed with a Middle Persian. Janos Harmatta commented on this writing as follows: *Silig the abarzēnīgānbed* (2002, pp. 153-155). According to his interpretation, *Silig* seems a Turkish proper name, whereas *abarzēnīgānbed* is an official title. He noted that *Silig* means the pure in Turkish. *Abarzēnīgānbed* means the *commander of the guards of the royal tent*. It clearly appears that a Türk nobleman entered the Sasanian Shanshan's service (Harmatta, 2002, p. 156). This nobleman shows us the greatness of the imperial goals of the Sasanians in the Caucasus, Eastern

Anatolia, the Arabian peninsula and Tokharistan in the 6th century AD. This subject will be discussed in detail in the third chapter.

The article by Michael Alram consists of the following headings: *Sasanians and Kushano-Sasanians, Kidarites and Alkhan, Hephthalites, Nezak, From the Alkhan-Nezak to Turks*. In this study, numismatic data were examined. Although many researchers consider Kidarites and Alkhan to Hephthalites, Michael Alram runs counter to this. As claimed by Alram, the *Kidarites* known as the Hunnic group struck their coins. After the fall of the *Kushan* Empire, the *Kidarites* sustained the *Kushan* culture. They used the title of “King of the Kushan” on coins. Therefore, there is confusing information about their in the Byzantine and Chinese records. According to a discovery in northwest Pakistan, an unknown *Kidarite* ruler was called “the king of the Huns, the great Kushan-shah, the *afshiyān* of Samarkand” (Alram, 2014, p. 270). Alram drew attention to the Kidarite gold coins unearthed in Hungary and Poland (2014, p. 271). These coins give us clues about the Avar migration. After the destruction of the Hephthalites by the Türks, the Avars initiated to migrate to Europe. We argue that the Avars were likely to depend on the *Hephthalites*. These coins underpinned our argument. Numismatic evidence of the Kidarites was discovered in Bactria, Gandhara, Uddiyana and Taxila (Alram, 2014, p. 272). These settlements are substantial commercial centres on the Silk Road. The part of the Silk Road extending to India begins Balkh. Then it passes through Uddiyana, Gandhara and Taxila and spreads into the interior of India.

The Alkhans were the second Hunnic group to strike their coins. Their names are known thanks to coins and seals. The name of the first Alkhan king(?) appeared Khangila on the coins in the 5th century (Alram, 2014, p. 273). King Toramana of Alkhan was mentioned not only in Brahmi Inscriptions but also on copper coins.

However, his name has yet been unearthed on silver drachms. Toramana and his son, Mihirakula, were the best-known Hun kings in India. The Hephthalites emerged in Balkh at the end of the fifth century. With establishing the state, they started to use imitation of Sasanian coins (Afram, 2014, p. 278). When the Sasanian force was defeated by Hephthalites, *Nezak*, which is a local kingdom, came into sight in Zabulistan in the last quarter of the 5th century. Their local political power came to a stopping point in the 560s inasmuch as Sasanians went through with bringing to an end Hephthalites by an ally with Türks, and then Sasanian domineered the Bactria (Afram, 2014, pp. 280-281).

Chinese sources have mentioned the King of Kapisa (Nezaks). According to Afram, they might be descended from the Alkhan king Khingila because of mentioned the last king of this dynasty as Ghar-ilchi in Chinese sources. Therefore, the Nezak is likely to have originated from the tribal group of Alkhan (Afram, 2014, p. 281). At the site of Eran, there is an inscription belonging to Toramana. It is provided information about his campaign in India (Ghose, 2003, p. 145; Çeliktas, 2019, p. 41). Thus, we have knowledge about the size of Hunnic control in both North India and Pakistan. Archaeological objects also support these data. Archaeological excavations in India have shown that the influence of the Hun is obvious in scenes of everyday life. Ghose (2003) draws attention to not only hunting scenes, but also courtly dalliance scenes. These finds are unique (p. 154). Hunting scenes are a wonderful reflection of steppe art

During the excavation, a tomb was brought to light in Xi'an in 2003. The walls of this tomb were adorned with reliefs depicting scenes of ceremonial dinners, hunts, and caravans. These scenes point out a close touch with the Central Asian and Iranian worlds. Two inscriptions were found in the grave. These were written in Sogdian and

experienced the plague, which broke out in 542. He began writing his books, whose names are *The Wars* and the *Secret History*, in the capital. *The Wars*, is vital for the studies of Byzantine history inasmuch as he eyewitnessed Persian Wars, Vandal Wars and Got Wars. Most of all, he wrote the Nika Riots and the plague in this work (Prokopios, 2014, p. ix). He experienced the plague of Justinian and wrote about it. That is the part that concerns our thesis. His book has provided us with information about the beginning date of the plague, the starting point and how disaster reached Constantinople. This information, written by Procopius, is one of the points that compose of arguments for our thesis. We used *The Wars of Justinianus*, which was translated into English by H. B. Dewing and revised by Anthony Kaldellis.

Another of his works is *Secret History*. He sharply criticized the reign of Justinian in *Secret History* (Prokopios, 2001, p. 9). He expressed that he did not write many events in the *Wars* because Theodora and the regime pressed upon everyone in that period (Prokopios, 2014, p. ix). Because the plague is mentioned in *Secret History*, it is as important to us as the other one. We preferred using *Secret History*, which was translated into Turkish by Orhan Duru.

Our information about the life of Agathias is based on his writings. It is anticipated that he was born in Myrina in Anatolia. Although his birthday cannot be detected with certainty, Joseph D. Frendo estimated Agathias' date of birth to be around the year 532 (Agathias, 1975, p. ix). It is known that he studied rhetoric in Alexandria and law in Constantinople. He commenced practising as a lawyer in the capital. Thanks to the information in his work, researchers attribute that the date of his death was between 579-582 AD (Mangaltepe, 2009; Agathias, 1975, p. ix). He saw Justinian, Justin II and a part of the reign of Tiberius I Constantine. He gave information to us about various events in *The Histories*. The information about the

Hephthalites-Sassanian wars, Sabir-Byzantine and Sabir-Sassanian relations is obtained from this source. The relevant part of our research is the relationship between the Sabirs and the Sassanians. We predicated on Joseph D. Frendo's translation, which is *Agathias The Histories*, in our thesis.

Information about John Malalas is contained in the references of later authors. He was born about 490 AD. He was probably educated in Antioch in Anatolia. He died end of 570s (The Chronicle of John Malalas, 1986, pp. xxi-xxii). His chronicle consists of 18 books. In the 18th book, he told events that occurred during the reign of Justinian. This book is significant because he mentioned the Justinian Plague in it. We utilized *The Chronicle of John Malalas* which was translated into English by Elizabeth Jeffreys, Michael Jeffreys and Roger Scott.

Although it is not certain, John of Ephesos was born in Amida in 507 AD. He started educating at the church in childhood. He came to Constantinople in 535. He developed a relationship with Emperor Justinian with Theodore's support. Late in his life, he wrote *Ecclesiastical History* (Var, 2021, pp. 33-34). The part that interests us in the History of the Church is one where he tells about the embassy of Zemarchus. We used *Ecclesiastical History*, which was translated into Turkish by Umut Var.

Evagrius was born in around 535 AD in Epiphania in Syria. Our knowledge about Evagrius results from his writings. He had education in Antioch and Constantinople. In the recurring outbreaks of the plague, Evagrius lost a wife, daughter and grandson. He wrote *The Ecclesiastical History* at the end of the 6th century AD. As is also understood from his book, he completed the work in the twelfth year of Maurice (593/594) (2000, pp. xiii-xiv, xx). This work consists of six books. The book IV contained the information about the Justinian plague. He was indicative of Ethiopia as the origin of the plague (2000, p. 229). The information given by Evagrius is vital for

the origin of the Justinian plague, which is one of the main topics of discussion of our thesis.

There is not enough information in the sources about the life and family of Menander, who was born in Constantinople. He and his brother, Herodotus, began to study law. Whereas Herodotus failed to complete his education, Menander succeeded as a lawyer (Protector, 1985, p. 1; Mangaltepe, 2009, p.). When Maurice ascended the throne, he initiated a competition to complete the work of Agathias. Due to this competition, he wrote *The History*. He was promoted the *protector* (Ahmetbeyoğlu, 2009, p. 12; Mangaltepe, 2009, p.). The events in his history involves the years 558-582 AD. Making Menander's History important in our research is the information he gave about Zemarchus, who came from the Byzantine to Türk Khaganate, and Türk envoy, who came to Constantinople.

Roger C. Blockley translated *The History* of Menander into English in 1985 as follows: *The History of Menander The Guardsman*. Ismail Mangaltepe translated part of *The History* into Turkish in his book, *Bizans Kaynaklarında Türkler*, in 2009. Ali Ahmetbeyoglu translated the information given by Menander about the Turkish ambassador, who came to Constantinople, and Zemarchus into Turkish as follows: *Bizans Tarihçisi Menandros'un Türkler (Gök-Türkler) Hakkında Verdiği Bilgiler* (2009). Altay Tayfun Ozcan also translated the same parts into Turkish as follows: *Menander Protector'un Doğu Roma Elçisi Zemarcus'un Göktürk Kağanlığı'na Yaptığı Seyahate İlişkin Kaydı* (2014). We benefited from these four translations in our thesis.

It is estimated that Theophylact Simocatta was born in the 580s. He took his early education at Alexandria. The period included by his *History* is the reign of Maurice. His *History* consists of eight books (The History of Theophylact Simocatta, 1988, p.

xiii). What is significant for us is the letter from Türk Khaganate and the information he gives about the events in Khaganate (Özcan, 2019, p. 219). *The History of Theophylact Simocatta* was translated by Michael and Mary Whitby in 1988. The part covering the information about the letter sent by the Turk Khagan to Emperor Maurice was translated into Turkish by Altay Tayfun Ozcan in 2019. We used both these translations.

Bahman Yast is a religious text belonging to the Sasanians. It contains conversations between Ahura Mazda and Zoroaster. Moreover, it has been prophesied about the future of the Iranian nation and religion in the text (Sundermann, 2011). It has been said that the Turks will dominate Iran. In this passage, Eastern nations such as Tibetan, Turks, Hephthalites and China are mentioned (Bailey, 1932, pp. 945-948). The part of *Bahman Yast* that interested us was translated into English by H. W. Bailey. We utilized this translation in our research.

1.3. Bacteriological Studies

There are three varieties of plague disease. The most well-known of these is bubonic plague. People are infected with this contagion by fleas or black rats (*Rattus rattus*) (Benedictow, 2010, p. 4). Monica H. Green says that the most common of the plagues is bubonic plague, and it swiftly brings about death in 40 to 60 per cent of those infected. Other forms of plague are pneumonic plague and septicemic plague. Pneumonic plague is not transmitted to mammals by insect bites. It is spread from an infected human to the second human by cough, sneeze, and breathing. When it lodges in the lungs, it leads to death within two to three days of the launch of symptoms (2018, s. 11). On the other hand, once people have been gone down with the bubonic plague, the incubation period of infection keeps on average three to five days. As a result of this infection, illness breaks out (Benedictow, 2010, p. 6).

Bubonic plague is caused by black rats, there is an idea about these rats. As claimed by this idea, the geographic origination of black rats is confirmed as warm regions such as India, Burma, North Africa, and the eastern Mediterranean. According to Benedictow's citation, Twigg and David claim that the existence of black rats in Europe could be possible because of a trade by ship from the Mediterranean (Twigg and David as cited in Benedictow, *What Disease was Plague?* 2010, p. 98). Since it is within the scope of our thesis, we will conduct plague examinations in the framework of the Justinianic plague. It is commonly accepted that it originated in the Inner Asia borderlands between India and China and that the Justinianic plague was a bubonic plague (Kiple, 2008, p. 3). Recently, thanks to the development of bacteriological studies, our information has increased about infectious diseases, caused by *Yersinia Pestis*. These studies will be analyzed chronologically.

In 2010, *Yersinia pestis Genome Sequencing Identifies Patterns of Global Phylogenetic Diversity* was published by Giovanna Morelli, Yajun Song, Camila J. Mazzoni et al. In this study, they presented a report about entire genomes of *Y. Pestis* isolated from assorted in the world. The paper result was that *Y. Pestis* arose from China or Kyrgyzstan about 2600 years ago and spread into Southeast Asia, Europe, Africa, and South America. Researchers deduced that *Yersinia Pestis* on branch 0 sprawled time and again into Siberia, Mongolia and Central Asia (Morelli, et al., 2010, pp. 1140-1143).

Yersinia Pestis and the Plague of Justinian 541-543 AD: A Genomic Analysis was published in 2014 by David Wagner, Jennifer Klunk, Michaela Harbeck, et al. Researchers discovered that Justinian plague is associated with 0.ANT1 and 0.ANT2. These branches were identified as plague foci in Tenri Tagh (Tian Shan) in East Turkestan. Moreover, in this location, there are rodent and flea populations.

Therefore, they claimed that the plague of Justinian emerged in China and expanded east to Europe along Silk Road (See also figure 2.4 in article p. 5). They ascertained that the Justinian Plague was a disconnected occurrence, which did not contribute to later human pandemics. They fathomed out that the accruing of three plague pandemics are likely to be associated with climatic unsteadiness. All occurred concurrently with climate anomalies and finished up during periods when the climate was stable. (Wagner, Klunk, Harbeck, Devault, & Waglechner, 2014, p. 4-7).

In 2015, *Early Divergent Strains of Yersinia Pestis in Eurasia 5,000 Years Ago* was published by Simon Rasmussen, Morten Erik Allentoft, Kasper Nielsen, et al. In this research, they inquired into the origin of *Y. Pestis* by benefiting from ancient genomes in teeth of Bronze Age people in Eurasia. They demonstrated that *Y. Pestis* has existed in Eurasia since Bronze Age. It was discovered that the oldest ancestor of *Y. Pestis* was 5783 years ago. Moreover, thanks to findings, they deduced that the ancestor of existent *Y. Pestis* strains pervaded across Eurasia since at least the early 3rd millennium BC. They detected that it did not pave the way for the bubonic plague in Bronze Age (Rasmussen, et al., 2015, pp. 571-582).

Galina A. Eroshenko, Nikita Yu Nosov, Yaroslav M. Krasnov, et al. issued *Yersinia pestis strains of ancient phylogenetic branch 0. Ant are widely spread in the high mountain plague foci of Kyrgyzstan* in 2017. In this research, fifty-six *Y. Pestis* strains, insulated in the Tenri Tagh (also known as the Tian Shan, meaning the Heavenly Mountain), Alai and Talas mountain foci of Kyrgyzstan, have been identified experimentally. It was discovered that forty-two strains pertain to 0.ANT2, 0.ANT3 AND 0.ANT5 branches. Strains of 0.ANT2 and 0.ANT3 branches had been confirmed in China, whereas 0.ANT5 branch was detected for *Y. Pestis* for the first time. According to the result of the study, 0.ANT5 strains are one of the closest

associated with the *Y. Pestis* strain causing the Justinianic Plague. For this reason, it is likely to be said that 0.ANT branch origin is in the Tenri Tagh (Tian Shan) mountains (Eroshenko, et al., 2017, p. 1-2). This research is shown that the Tenri Tagh (Tian Shan) mountain is made up of three foci: Sarydzhaz, Upper-Naryn, and Aksai. In these locations, gray marmot, *Marmota baibacina*, is the main carrier of the plague. In Alai mountain, the carrier of plague is the long-tailed marmot, *M. caudata*. Talas mountain, is located in north-western Kyrgyzstan, is the third plague focus. *Y. pestis* strains were found here in the long-tailed marmots and mountain vole, *Alticola argentatus* (Eroshenko, et al., 2017, p. 3).

137 Ancient Human Genomes From Across the Eurasian Steppes was written by Peter de Barros Damgaard, Nina Marchi, Simon Rasmussen, et al. In this study, they investigated the bodies of 137 ancient humans. Researchers found the origin of the genetics of the Scythian groups. They discovered two individuals (*DA 101 and DA 147*), showing detectable *Y. Pestis* DNA. One of the two individuals (*DA 101*) is a Hun from Tenri Tagh, dating to nearly AD 180. Therefore, researchers claimed that the Huns, along with the westward migration, carried a plague, which became the basis for the Plague of Justinian. They point out that there is a close historical relationship between the Huns migration and the Justinian plague. They developed a hypothesis that *the pandemic was brought to Europe towards the end of the Hunnic period through the Silk Road along the southern fringes of the steppes* (Damgaard, et al., 2018, pp. 1-5).

In 2019, *Ancient Yersinia Pestis Genomes From Across Western Europe Reveal Early Diversification During the First Pandemic (541–750)* was published by Marcel Keller, Maria A. Spyrou, Christiana L. Scheib, et al. In this research, they aimed to elucidate the microevolution of the Justinian plague. For this, they screened human

remains from Germany, Britain, France, Spain, and Austria for *Y. Pestis* DNA. Thus, they procured significant knowledge about the Justinianic plague in Europe (Keller, et al., 2019, pp. 12363-12372). In this study, they criticized the claim that Huns might have carried the plague to Europe (See above: *137 Ancient Human Genomes From Across the Eurasian Steppes*). They said that there is a gap of about three centuries between the Hun migration and the onset of the plague. They analyzed also other theories. Angola genome was refused because it was not a satisfactory answer for the Justinianic plague. For an Asian origin, it was said that the theory of the sea route via the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean was more a satisfactory answer than the theory of Angola. Another theory is overland transport via Eurasian steppes. They refused this theory (Keller, et al., 2019, p. 12368).

Marmots and Yersinia Pestis Strains in Two Plague Endemic Areas of Tien Shan Mountains was written by Gulmira Sariyeva, Gulnara Bazarkanova, Ravshambek Maimulov, et al. in 2019. The goal of this research is to shed light on the role of gray marmots (*Marmota baicalina*) in the strains of *Y. Pestis* in the Tenri Tagh Mountains (Tian Shan) in Kyrgyzstan. In this study, researchers have presented data from observations of *M. Baicalina* in the Sari-Dzhas (east of Issyk-Kul Lake) and the Upper-Naryn (south of Issyk-Kul Lake) natural foci. They have discovered that the Upper-Naryn is a significantly higher number and diversity of ectoparasites (fleas and ticks) than in the Sari-Dzhas. Researchers highlights that hunting, agriculture, and degradation of natural habitats might directly affect plague outbreaks. It has been shown that Sari-Dzhas and Upper-Naryn are among the most vivid natural high-elevation foci of Central Asia. According to them, above mentioned locations, there are optimum situations for the long-term activity of *Yersinia Pestis* biovar Antiqua in hosts (Sariyeva, et al., 2019, pp. 1-14).

In 2020, *Paleolithic to Bronze Age Siberians Reveal Connections with First Americans and across Eurasia* was published by He Yu, Maria A. Spyrou, Marina Karapetian, et al. This research is not directly associated with our thesis, but the study includes a history of plague in Eurasia. We explain briefly the following:

Researchers discovered that there were Y. Pestis and human mobility across Eurasia in the Early Bronze Age. In this study, it was presented Y. Pestis infections in the Lake Baikal region in the Early Bronze Age (Yu, et al., 2020, p. 8). This research supports the study mentioned above (by Simon Rasmussen and et al. in 2015).

Although this information is beyond the scope of our study, their reconnaissances have shown that Upper Paleolithic Siberian was a profound connection with the First Peoples of the Americas (p. 4). The research we use in addition to these studies is as follows:

Plague Dynamics Are Driven by Climate Variation was published in 2006 by Nils Chr. Stenseth, Noelle I. Samia, Hildegunn Viljugrein, et al. They have shown that Y. pestis frequency enhances with warmer springs and wetter summers. Furthermore, they estimate that A 1°C rise in spring causes a >50% increase in prevalence. In this study, it is explored that fleas are active when the air temperature is above 10°C. Therefore, spring temperature is significant. In summer, dry and hot conditions are known to hurt the survival of fleas. In more humid conditions (more summer precipitation), there are more fleas, supporting the transmission of plague (Stenseth, et al., 2006, pp. 13110-13115).

In 2014, *Wet Climate and Transportation Routes Accelerate Spread of Human Plague* was written by Lei Xu, Leif Chr. Stige, Tamara Ben Ari, et al. Researchers present that the spread of the plague, as in the case of China, was caused by transport routes. They found that plague spread swiftness was positively associated with wet

conditions in China. This research has shown that there is a positive association between plague spread velocity and altitude because natural plague foci are found in mountainous regions where rodents and fleas are abundant (Xu, et al., 2014, pp. 1-9).

Michael McCormick wrote *Rats, Communications, and Plague: Toward an Ecological History* in 2003. In this research, McCormick exhibits among humans, rats and plagues the relationships. The data, is based on rats' bones and DNA, show that they migrated from Southeast Asia into the Roman Empire and Medieval Europe. As stated by McCormick, just as the rats' history matches up with the economic rise and fall of the ancient world, it also coincides with the expansion of the medieval economy (McCormick, *Rats, Communications, and Plague: Toward an Ecological History*, 2003, p. 1). This inference is vital to our research because maritime trade is needed for rodents to come to the land of the Roman Empire. That shows us the critical role of Indian Maritime trade. The Red Sea and Egypt provided the connection between the Mediterranean region and the Indian Ocean. Excavators discovered the Tamil texts at the Roman port of Quseir el-Qadim. This situation keynotes the size of the Egypt-Indian trade. McCormick puts forward that Myos Hormos' translation of the Greek name seems to be "Port of the Rat" (McCormick, 2003, p. 8).

2. WHAT IS THE SILK ROAD?

The scheme that we will follow in this chapter is as follows; first, we will answer the question "What is the Silk Road". After then, we will tell you about the eponymist of the concept of the "Silk Road". We would examine the words "Road" and "Route" used for this trade route. In this section, the notion of a "commerce space" rather than a trade route is likely to be discussed. What is the Silk Road? The name of the Silk Road was created to conceptualize the commerce that started and developed between East and West. One of the reasons for this is that it has been the most expensive product among the traded products for centuries. The silk did double duty as money for nearly a thousand years in China, particularly the pre-Han Dynasty (Wang, 2013, p. 167; Rossabi, 1997, p. 7). Moreover, particularly in the sixth century, in Byzantine Empire, silk was utilized as a currency among aristocrats and courtiers. Additionally, it was paid to troops as wages (Onay, 2019, p. 7). This information shows its value on the Silk Road trade. Although the unique name of the Silk Road firstly brings to silk trade mind, it only was one of the carried goods in this transportation network. Besides silk, many goods, such as glass products, mirrors, linen, cotton, jewellery, ceramics, spices, fruits (Yılmaz E. , 2017, p. 680), and sometimes animals (Schafer, 2020, p. 136), were transported on the Silk Road. Not only did merchants use the Silk Road, but also pilgrims and individuals used it. Buddhists, Manichaeans, Zoroastrians, Nestorians, and Muslims engaged in missionary activities to spread the religion through trade routes (Hansen, 2012, p. 4; Liu, 2010, p. 60; Frankopan, 2018, pp. 30-31). Many Chinese Buddhist pilgrims travelled to India via the Silk Road. To summarize, the Silk Road means trade between the East and the West and the interaction of religions and cultures as well as art.

There are two good examples of interaction among societies on the Silk Road in the field of art and architecture (Frankopan, 2018, pp. 7-10). The first is an ivory figurine of an Indian female from India that went to Roman Empire. (See Appendix B) (Neelis, 2011, p. 220). The second is the Gandharan sculpture of the Buddha. It dates back to the first or second century (See Appendix C) (Darley, 2013, p. 51). It is a reflection of Western art on Indian art. If we say it in a literary style, the Silk Road is the epitome of history. The German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen created the words *Seidenstrasse* (Silk Road) and *Seidenstrassen* (Silk Roads) (Rossabi, 1997, p. 7) in 1877. He believed that the *Seidenstrasse* was a single route to the “Homeland of Silk”. On the other hand, he used the term of the *Seidenstrassen* to describe a lot of trade routes between the Rome Empire and the Han Dynasty. Most Anglophone researchers choose to use singular the “Silk Road.” French scholars also prefer non-plural form. Likewise, German historians favour a singular style (Andrea, 2014, p. 106-107). In this thesis, the term, *Silk Road*, has been preferred to use as an abstract notion. What we mean in an abstract sense is the commercial and cultural contact between East and West. For us, Silk Road is a concept that encapsulates the political and economic history of the Mediterranean basin, East Africa, and whole Asia. On the other part, we chose to use the term, route, meaning as the course. In other words, when mentioning trade routes, we will use the term silk road. We claim that Silk Road is a commerce space. Today, just as the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement and the European Economic Area are commerce spaces, the Silk Road trade in Antiquity was also a commerce space. Peter Brown defined this as *pre-modern globalization* and *archaic globalization* (Brown, 2021, pp. 514-515). In this subject, we share his opinion. Historical data shed light on that trade among the Mediterranean, Indian peninsula, and East Asia transcended primitive commerce at the beginning of the first

century AD. The first peak period of the Silk Road in the Middle Ages was in the sixth century. In the first quarter of the first century AD, the sea route of the Silk Road appeared. Initially, the maritime route included trade among the Red Sea ports of the Roman Empire, West Indian harbours and Sri Lanka seaports. After that, Han Dynasty in East Asia participated in the maritime commerce space, and the frontier of this tradership expanded. To study the history of the Silk Road, we need to divide it into two main parts. The first part is the Silk Road: Overland Routes. We would discuss the start date and routes of the overland silk routes. The second part is the Maritime Route. In this part, we are likely to analyse the beginning date and historical maritime route.

2.1. Silk Road: Overland Routes and Historical Progress

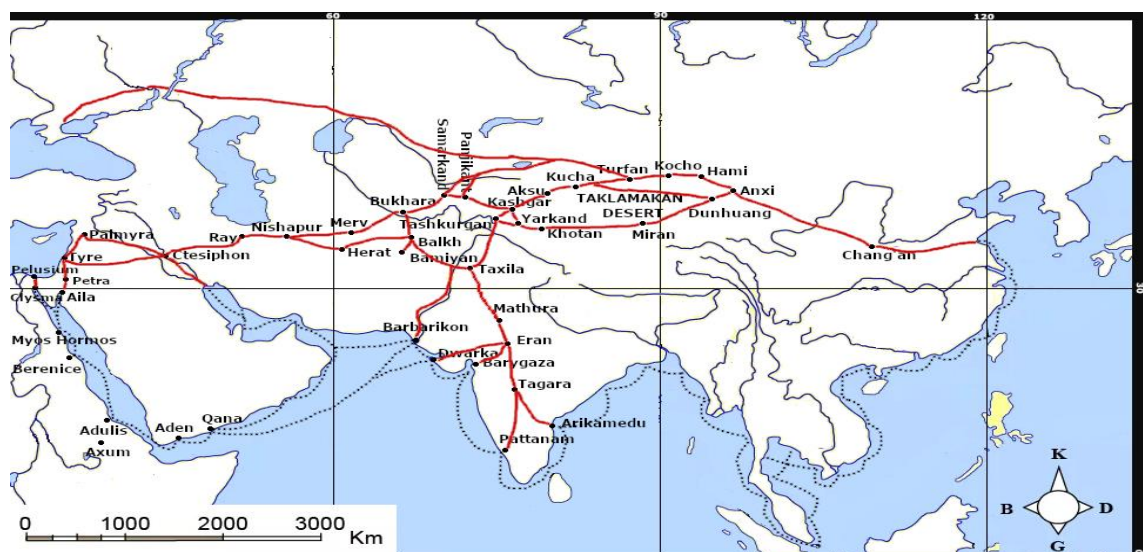
When the Silk Road is mentioned, what researchers and readers usually portray in their minds is a scene that is a network of overland routes stretching from East Asia to the Mediterranean. In fact, this is the land route, which is one of the two main parts of the Silk Road (Litvinsky & Guang-da, 1996, p. 35). The starting point of the Silk Road is Chang'an, which today is called Xi'an (Su-il, 2016, p. 157). There is a consensus among researchers that the Silk Road began in the 2th BC (Rong, 2020, pp. 2-3; Barisitz, 2017, p. 32; Litvinsky & Guang-da, 1996, p. 35; Liu, 2010, p. 6; Yılmaz E. , 2017, p. 673; Hansen, 2021, pp. 3-4; Hansen, 2012, p. 236). In reality, this opinion is based on the official history idea of the PRC. This argument rests on the history of the beginning of Zhang Qian's journey to the West (138 BC) (Rong, 2020, pp. 2-3). Recently archaeological studies suggest that the Silk Road embark before the Han Dynasty (Lü, Henderson, Wang, & Wang, 2021).

The Silk Overland Route launched with the arrival of the Scythians on the historical stage in the Eurasian steppes. Finds from Scythian kurgans have indicated

that trade began between Mesopotamia, Central Asia and East Asia (Su-ül, 2016, pp. 809-810; Rong, 2020, p. 2; Barisitz, 2017, p. 22). The discovery of Chinese-style mirrors and Middle Eastern-style rugs in Scythian kurgans have shown the dimensions of trade and contact. Although we point to the Scythian age for the beginning of the Silk Overland Route, it gained its functioning and original identity after the conquests of Alexander the Great because as a result of this spread, physical and abstract cultural united started among the Indian peninsula, East Asia and the Mediterranean basin (Frankopan, 2018, pp. 5-8). Hellenistic culture, introduced into Asia, was exchanged here with Indian and Far Eastern cultures (Sivrioğlu & Türkoğlu, 2017, pp. 49-53). Thanks to an excavation in 1979, a large number of objects were found in Bactria. In the same graveyard, archaeological finds of Han Dynasty, Roman, Indian, and Scythian were unearthed (Jiayao, 2004, p. 58). There had been not only an exchange of goods but also of culture between east and west. This identity of the Silk Road continued until the end of the Pax Mongolica. We will examine the overland routes shown on Map 1 below.

Figure 1

Silk Road: Overland Routes and Maritime Route

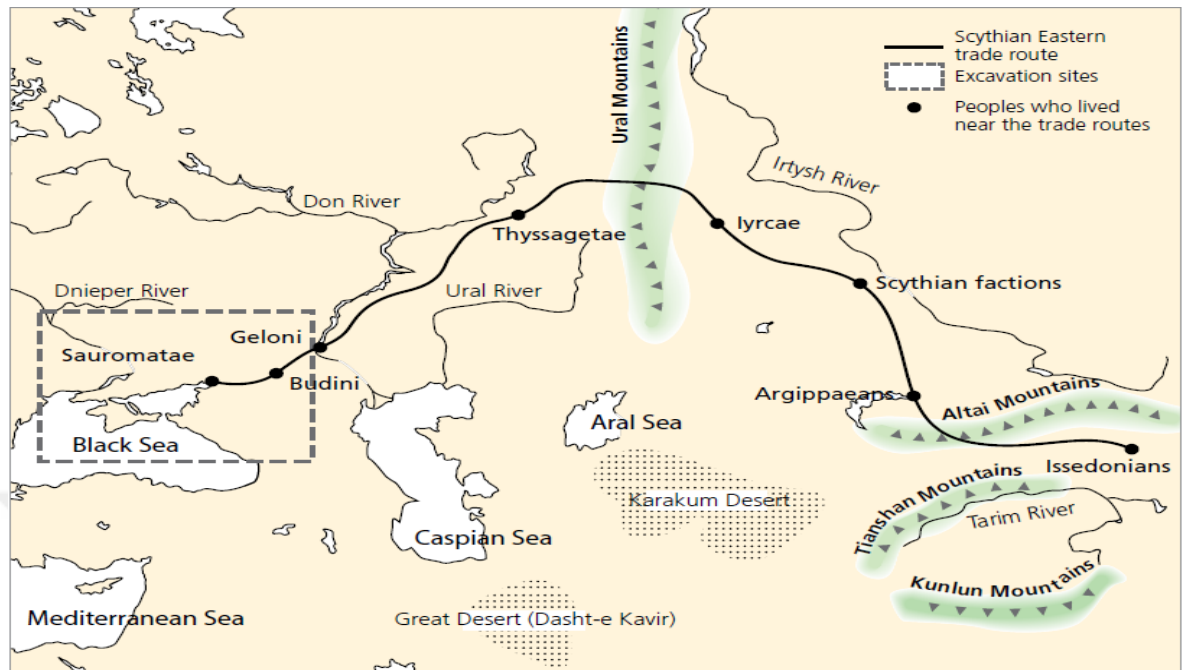


The oldest of the three main routes that make up the Overland Routes is the one that starts at the Yellow River (The north of Chang'an). After crossing the river, the pathway stretches away in the northwestern direction. Continuing in a northwestern direction, the route eventually reaches the Hexi Corridor, and the road along this corridor stops in Anxi. This city has provided the connection between Western Regions and Chang'an. It is located western end of the Hexi Corridor and east of Dunhuang (Su-ii, 2016, p. 51). Chinese accounts attribute to west of Anxi as Western Regions (Neelis, 2011, p. 292; Su-ii, 2016, pp. 938-939). The route splits in two in Anxi. The pathway winds around from the north of the Taklamakan Desert. It halts at such renowned cities as Hami, Kocho and Turfan. The route divides into two again in Turfan. One road runs to Kucha, while the other road heads for a northwestern towards Issyk Lake. The path to Issyk Lake enters the Eurasian steppes.

Heading west from Lake Issyk, the route heads north along the Syr Darya (Jaxartes). It passes through the Eurasian steppes and reaches the Caspian (McLaughlin, 2010, p. 90). This route has been utilised since Scythians (See Map 2) (Su-ii, 2016, p. 838). However, this historical pathway lost its function with the withdrawal of the Scythians from the historical scene. In the Caspian, the route connects to the Urals and the north of the Black Sea. This part of the Silk Route is called the Fur Road. This locution was produced by Thomas S. Noonan (Kovalev, 2005, p. 56). However, the steppe route of the Silk Road and its Caspian stems are ignored in the history of early medieval trade. This route started to obtain its former popularity in the sixth century AD but its rising was after Türk Khaganate dominated the Eurasian steppes in the second half of the sixth century AD.

Figure 2

Scythian's trade route



Note. by Su-il Jelong, 2016, p. 754.

One of the pieces of evidence that shows the importance of this northwestern end of the Silk Road at the beginning of the sixth century is the following; in Constantinople, there were furrier shops in Forum in nearly 532 (Kazhdan, 1991, p. 809; Kovalev, 2005, p. 59). Thanks to this pathway, a connection was established between Byzantium and the north of the Black Sea, naturally with Inner Asia. Later, this road was used for trade and diplomatic contacts between the Türk Khaganate and Byzantine Empire. With the collapse of the Türk Khaganate, this route entered a period of decline. However, during the Khazar Khaganate, the Fur Road would become highly operational and would expand its sphere of influence to Baghdad, the capital of the Caliphate, in the south; to the Baltic coast in the north and the Khwarezm region in the east (Usta, 2007, pp. 222-223). In the period of Türk Khaganate, the Fur Road combined with the Silk Road in the north of the Caspian Sea, while in the time of the Caspian Khaganate, it was connected to Silk Road in the

Khwarazm (Özcan, Hazarlar, 2021, pp. 91-95). The steppe route would again peak at the time of the Eurasian domination of the Mongols.

The other routes appeared and became operational thanks to the spread of Alexander the Great to Tokharistan. Both routes commence in Chang'an (Xi'an), the capital of the Han Dynasty. After passing the river, the pathway stretches away in the northwestern towards. Sustaining in a northwestern direction, the route eventually reaches the Hexi Corridor. It is continues as a single route as far as Dunhuang. At this junction, the road splits into two parts (See Map 1). When caravans come here, the Tarim Basin greets them. Tarim Basin spreads from the foothills of the Pamirs to An-xi (the western end of Hexi Corridor) nearly 1600 km (Guang-da, 1996, p. 282). Alfred Andrea (2014) states that Aurel Stein coined a new word, *Serindia*, into the world language. This vocable means as enourmous vast that it covered from Dunhuang to Pamir Mountains (p. 113). This word stems from *Seres*, which means the people of silk (Hildebrandt, 2021, p. 120). However, this word is translated as "Chinese" by investigators. The *Seres* was used for mystic East and India by Roman sources. They believed that silk was produced in *Seres* (Andrea, 2014, p. 113; Hildebrandt, 2021, p. 121).

Dunhuang is an oasis city in Gansu province, China. The city has become China's window to the outside world. It is famous for its Buddhist caves around it. The Dunhuang texts are one of the main topics of Silk Road studies. The ancient city bridged the Chinese, Iranian, Islamic, Indian and Tibetan worlds. The texts unearthed in Dunhuang were written in various languages, which include Mongolian, Tibetan, Khotense, Kuchean, old Uyghur, Chinese, Sogdian as well as Sanskrit (Hansen, 2012, p. 167). The Northern Route begins at Yumen Pass. It, also known as Jade Gate, is located northwest of Dunhuang. It was constructed at the end of the second century

BC (Su-ıl, 2016, pp. 613, 1006). This pathway winds around from the north of the Taklamakan Desert and keeps on to the Turfan. After it halted at such renowned oases as Turfan, Kucha, Aksu and Kashgar, it crossed Central Asia.

A lot of substantial archaeological sites on this silk route are aggregated between Turfan and Kucha (Neelis, 2011, pp. 292, 300). “One of the oldest commercial Chinese contracts for the Turfan region dates back to 273 AD. In that record, twenty rolls of silk were mentioned, given in exchange for one material” (Onay, 2019, p. 7). The city of Turfan has tied the Chinese and Iranian worlds throughout history.

Archaeological studies have shown that silk textiles produced in Byzantium, Sassanid and India were exported to Turfan (Liu, 2010, p. 80). There have been migrations to the city from Sogdiana and China throughout history. In this city, the Kuchean language was spoken under the shadow of Chinese and Sogdian. Therefore, Turfan and Kucha were among the famous cities of the northern route (Hansen, 2012, p. 83).

The Kingdom of Gaochang was founded by Qu Jia at the beginning of the sixth century AD. The kingdom has survived for about 140 years. With the strengthening of the Türk Khaganate, it became a vassal of it. It was destroyed by the Tang Empire in 640 (Guang-da, 1996, p. 302; Su-ıl, 2016, p. 900; Xiong, 2009, p. 175; Chavannes, 2013, pp. 140-141; Ekrem, 2007, pp. 16-17, 27). This kingdom ruled the cities of Turfan, Kucha and Gaochang. It played an important role in the Silk Road trade until its destruction. The name of Aksu city means white water in Turkic languages. Aksu had a vital role in the north silk route. Caravans from Kucha stopped by the city and continued to Kashgar. The starting point of the road leading to Issyk Lake and connecting to the Chuy valley was Aksu (Su-ıl, 2016, p.22).

The southern silk route of the overland road, which splits into two in Dunhuang, begins at Yang Pass. The northern silk route winds around from the north of the

Taklamakan Desert, while the other winds around the south of it. This route sustained kept on to the town of Miran. The southern route followed westward to Khotan and Yarkand and Kashgar. The southern route, which runs to Kashgar, merged again with the northern silk route in this city (Neelis, 2011, pp. 292-293). Miran, located east of the Khotan, was the capital of the Shanshan Kingdom (Su-ıl, 2016, p.558).

Archaeological studies in the twentieth century show that the Shanshan Kingdom was the centre of Buddhist art and architecture in the third and fourth centuries AD. In addition, it has been revealed through documents that the language spoken in the Kingdom is the Niya Prakrit dialectic of Gandhari (Neelis, 2011, p. 297). Gandhari language firstly appeared in Gandhara (See Map 3, its location).

Aurel Stein unearthed Buddhist structures around Miran. One of the Buddhist architectural and artistic structures that he found in Miran is quite interesting. What he found was a Roman-style winged figure (See APPENDIX D) (Hansen, 2012, p. 53). Gandharan Buddhist styles mixed with Iranian, Hellenistic and Bactrian pieces. This multiculturalism has been seen in the paintings of Miran (Guang-da, 1996, p. 297). Shanshan was defeated by Tuyuhun in the fifth century AD, and the ancient city of Miran vanished (Su-ıl, 2016, p.558). Khotan, today known as Hotan, is one of the most considerable cities of the southern silk route. From India, the first Buddhist missionaries reached Khotan in roughly 200 AD. From 200 AD to 1006 AD, the city has been one of the prominent centres of Buddhism (Chavannes, 2013, pp. 153-154). In addition, religious and economic relations existed between Khotan and Gandhara (Neelis, 2011, p. 295). Karakhanids conquered the Kingdom of Khotan about 1006 AD (Hansen, 2012, p. 199; Su-ıl, 2016, pp. 457-458; Whitfield, 2018, p. 138).

Throughout history, the city of Khotan has been an important exporter of jade stones. One of the exporters of Khotan jade stones was China. Jade jewellery

discovered in the tombs of their rulers is mainly goods from Khotan (Liu, 2010, p. 3; Chavannes, 2013, p. 154). Khotan has a vital role in the movement of silkworms and silk weaving to the west. The request of the Khotan King to buy silkworms was refused. So they decided that King should marry a princess from the neighbouring kingdom. However, they demanded that the princess bring them silkworms. She carried the silkworms to Khotan by hiding them. Thus, silkworms and silk weaving moved to the west for the first time (Chavannes, 2013, p. 154; Feng, 2004, p. 76). The city of Yarkand is located west of Khotan. The city is located at the intersection of two trade courses. These routes are the southern silk route, which runs in an east-west direction, and the Kashmir road from Tashkurgan (Su-ıl, 2016, p. 995).

The city of Kashgar, located at the westernmost tip of the Tarim Basin, is the point where the northern and southern branches of the Silk Road, which split into two in Dunhuang, meet again. Throughout history, it has served a bridge between China and Central Asia (Neelis, 2011, p. 294). There is a distance of more than 9000 li (9000 li are approximately 3327 km) between the ancient city of Kashgar and the capital of China, Chang'an (Chavannes, 2013, p. 151). The Silk Routes, circumventing the Taklamakan Desert and reaching the Kashgar, divide into two parts in this location (Rossabi, 1997, p. 7). One branch of the Silk Road runs to Tashkurgan, and the other branch runs to Panjikant. The road that starts in Tashkurgan crosses the Pamirs and reaches Taxila. The name of the road here is called Uttarapatha (Northern Route in India, See Map 3). We will describe this path in detail below.

Caravans setting out from Kashgar pass through the Naryn, Osh and Batken regions of Krygyzstan and reach the Fergana Valley and the Zeravshan River. And thus, the Central Asia part of the Silk Route is entered. These regions are relevant to

the content of our dissertation because there are considerable plague foci in these regions. The strains that caused the Justinian plague have been identified in these regions (Eroshenko, et al., 2017, pp. 1-9; Sariyeva, et al., 2019, pp. 1-14). According to our argument, the catastrophes of the sixth century paved the way for the damage of rodents in these plague foci. The rodents living in high mountainous areas have come into contact with caravans by landing on these Silk routes, where various food supplies, especially grain, are also transported. The rodents that came into contact with grain crops likely contributed to infected fleas to carry with goods. Due to this, infected fleas were transported along the routes followed by caravans.

Passing through Kyrgyzstan and heading for the Fergana Valley, the road reaches Tashkent (also known as Chach). Arriving at the point where the Zeravshan River originates, caravans voyage the bends of the Zeravshan valley and reach Panjikant. The ancient city of Panjikant can be considered the starting point of the Sogdiana region. The Sogdiana covers from the Syr Darya to the Amu Darya. The language spoken in the region was Sogdian, a branch of the Iranian Language. The region has been dominated by many states throughout history (Özkan, 2021, p. 17). It has been the meeting point of cultures on the Silk Road. The ruins of Panjikant are in what today is Tajikistan (Su-ıl, 2016, pp. 637, 821-822). From Panjikant, caravans depart for cities and towns in Sogdiana. Camel trains following the river arrive in Samarkand. From this ancient city, the road leads to Bukhara. The caravans leaving Bukhara and Samarkand for Balkh pass through Iron Gate (Tämir Kapıg) and reach Tirmiz.

The Iron Gate is a vital defile connecting Balkh and Samarkand on the Silk Road. Tämir Kapıg means as iron gate in Orkhon Turkic Language. The Iron Gate is located near the village of Derbent in Uzbekistan, west of the Syr Darya River. The defile is

about 18 meters wide and 3 kilometers long in the Boysun Mountain range (Aliev, 1994, p. 154; Baskı, 2007, p. 74; Şirin, 2019, p. 82; Aydın, 2019, p. 142; Haug, 2019, p. 24). There is information about the Iron Gate in the Orkhon Inscriptions belonging to the Second Türk Khaganate. These data shed light on both our understanding of the location of the iron gate and our understanding of its strategic location. The Kül Tigin Inscription was built by Bilge Khagan after his death (Aydın, 2018, pp. 74,76; Kuzakçı, 2018, p. 7) This inscription provides information about their expedition to the Iron Gate.

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(Western Front 3th-4th Lines) Kırıgaru Yinçü ögüz keçe Temir Kapıgka tegi süledim. That means that *I crossed the Syr Darya River in the West and sent an army to the Iron Gate* (Ergin, 2017, pp. 35-37; Ercilasun, 2016, pp. 500-501). As described by Bilge Kagan in the Kül Tegin Inscription, the Iron Gate is located to the west of Syr Darya. This defile is the most important passage that opens beyond the Amu Darya River on the Silk Road.

They cross the Amu Darya River, which they encounter in Tirmiz, and proceed to Balkh. In this city, the road divides into three main routes. These pathways lead to Herat in the West, Bamyan in the Southwest and Taxila in the South. Bamyan is a Silk Road city famous for two of the greatest statues of the Buddha. Salsal and Shahnama, the renowned Buddhist statues are likely to have been built in the sixth century AD. The city was a centre of Buddhism until the seventh century (Su-ıl, 2016, p. 93). The caravans going from Balkh to Taxila are divided into two when they arrive at the Indus River. Some of the merchants follow the river, heading to the southwest, where they reach the port city of Barbarikon. Other commercial men cross the Indus

River and head for Taxila. The part of the road after crossing the river is referred to in Indian literature as the Northern Indian Overland Silk Routes (Uttarāpatha) (Neelis, 2011, p. 184-186) (see Map 3).

Caravans coming to Taxila merge with others from Tashkurgan in this city (Neelis, 2011, p. 202). The Khotan has been one of the prominent centres of Buddhism (Chavannes, 2013, pp. 153-154). In addition, between Khotan and Gandhara were religious and economic relations (Neelis, 2011, p. 295; Dani, Litvinsky, & Safi, 1996, p. 176). As a result, after the arrival of silkworms and weaving in Khotan, silk production began to spread to the west. After 300 AD, workings associated with silk were transferred westward, and sericulture was established in India. It is said that the production of silk fabrics happened in the Gupta era (4-6 centuries AD) in India (Onay, 2019, p. 6).

However, in the light of archaeological evidence in the Indian Subcontinent, it seems that silk production began long before the Gupta period. These substantial archaeological discoveries have shed light that silk production in the Indian subcontinent is contemporary with silk manufacturing in China (2500-2000 BCE) (Dayalan, 2021, p. 98; Good, Kenoyer, & Meadow, 2009, p. 458; Hildebrandt, 2021, p. 122). Indian merchants imported silk from China and sold it to Byzantium (Çeliktaş, 2019b, p. 132). The pathway runs south from the Taxila. It heads for Mathura and Eran.

The merchants travelling south from this ancient city reach the cities of Mathura and Eran (Neelis, 2011, p. 198; Ghose, 2003, p. 145). The ancient city of Eran, located in northern India, houses a significant inscription that sheds light on the history of Hephthalite Empire. This inscription, written in Brahmi script, tells about the years of the reign of the Hephthalite ruler Toraman (Savaş, 2021, p. 21). Caravans

from Eran to the coast of Western India reach the port cities of Dwarka and Barygaza. On the other hand, merchants move toward the south direction called the Southern Route in Indian literature (Neelis, 2011, pp. 184, 205). Camel trains reaching Tagara travel to Pattanam in the southwestern, and the port city of Arikamedu in the southeast. The Arikamedu was one of the centres of Indo-Roman trade. In addition, the muslins that were to be exported from this city were being dyed (Dayalan, 2021, p. 104; Dayalan, 2019, pp. 38-42). The merchants arriving on the coast of Western India, such as Barbarikon, Dwarka, Barygaza and Pattanam, contact traders from the Red Sea, South Arabia and the Persian Gulf here (Neelis, 2011, p. 185, 221-222; Seland, 2014, pp. 372-373, 375). The goods from the Silk Road and various parts of the Indian subcontinent are transported to the territory of the Kingdom of Axum, Roman-Byzantine Empire and Sasanian Empire via the Indian Ocean Maritime Silk Road.

The western part of the Silk Route from Balkh reaches Herat. The Silk Road continues west from this city and reaches Nishapur. The caravans, which head west from Bukhara, cross the Amu Darya and reach the Merv. Camel trains entering the Sassanid lands continue along the Silk Route in a westerly direction, reaching Nishapur. Thus, the goods coming from Balkh and Herat and the commodity from Bukhara and Merv gather in Nishapur. The Silk Route, which runs through the Sasanian lands, reaches Ray. After that, the route stretches to Ctesiphon, the capital of the Sasanian Empire. Reaching the city, the Silk Route merges in this capital with the Maritime Silk Route, which arrives at the ports of the Persian Gulf and is transported to the city by caravans. The pathway leads to Roman and Byzantine cities such as Tyre and Palmyra.

In addition, goods arriving by the Indian Maritime Route are also transported by caravans from the port of Aila to Petra, Tyre and Palmyra. Arriving at the port of Clysma, the ships sail to the port of Pelusium via the Trajan canal (Tsiamis, Poulakou-Rebelakou, & Petridou, 2008, pp. 210-215). Commodity leaving the ports of Pelusium, Alexandria and Tyre are transported to all the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The Tyre is one of the most renowned cities in the Levant. The fact that the city is mentioned in the Bible shows its importance. The Tyre was conquered in 332 BC by Alexander the Great. Thus, it entered the cultural sphere of the Western world (Katzenstein, 1992, pp. 686-690). The Tyre was one of the cities where weaving is done in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially silk weaving (Antoninus, 1885, p. 3; Fleming, 1915, p. 79).

In addition, the city was an important place of paint production of Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The city even gave its name to a shade of Purple colour as the Tyrian Purple (Adigüzel & Kolancı, 2017, p. 267). This purple assumed the title of a royal colour and became as valuable as gold (Elliott, 2008, p. 178). The value of silk fabrics dyed with the Royal Purple of Tyre colour was increasing even more. The demand of the Roman and Byzantine people for silk products had increased. For these reasons, it was very vital for the Byzantine Empire that caravans carrying raw or woven silk arrived in the city of Tyre. The Sasanian Empire wanted to establish diplomatic and economic hegemony over Byzantine Empire by monopolizing the Silk trade. This situation has also paved the way wars between the parties throughout history. The Tyre and Palmyra became important cities that witnessed these wars.

Transportation on the Silk Overland Routes was carried out by camel caravans. There are various reasons for choosing camels over other bovine animals. Since the Silk Road route passes through high mountainous areas, such as the Pamirs and Tenri

Tagh range in Kyrgyzstan and long deserts, such as Taklamakan, Karakum and Kyzylkum, it is inconvenient to transport by horse in these places. In addition, it is easier to manage camel caravans than it is to manage horse herds. Another factor in choosing camels for transportation is that camels can carry more load than horses. Along the routes from East Asia to the Middle East and the Caspian, the double-humped *Camelus Bactrianus* was preferred as a camel (Kovalev, 2005, p. 88; Barfield, 1993, p. 59).

Archaeological finds have shed light that *Camelus Bactrianus* was domesticated in the region of Khorasan (Bulliet, 1990, p. 148). It has been known that when the two-humped camels ride 30-40 km daily, they might carry a weight of 220-270 kg. They are resistant to temperature differences up to 70°C (Potts, 2004, s. 147). These animals, which constitute the lifeblood of trade, have taken their place in all kinds of art. The double-humped camel figure is included in limitless coins belonging to the Kushans. These camels were also used in northern India, such as Peshawar (Bulliet, 1990, p. 169). In contrast to Central Asia, the single-humped camel was used for transportation in the deserts of the Middle East.

Figure 3

Northern Indian Overland Silk Routes or Buddhist Travel Routes

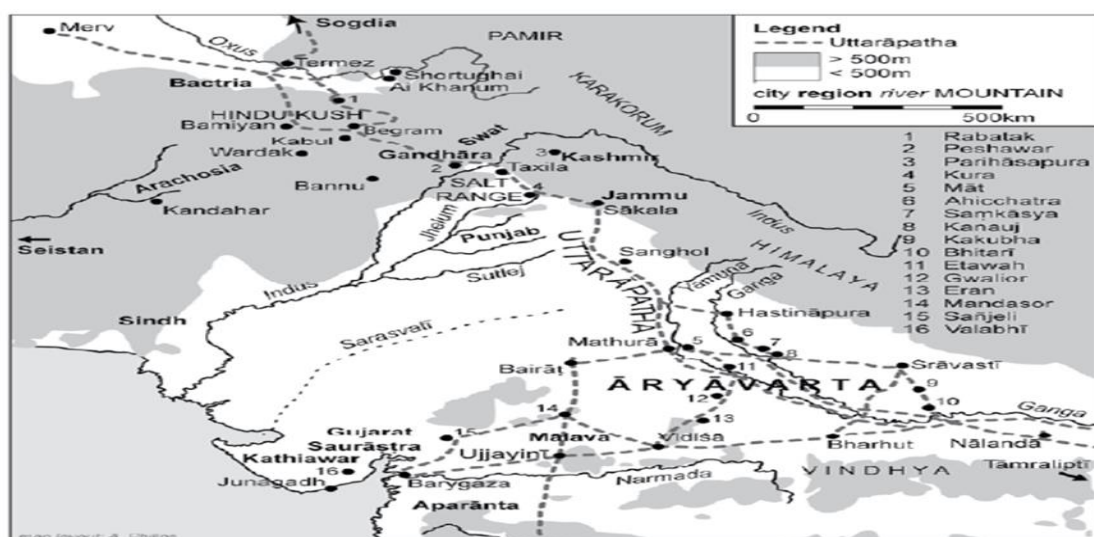
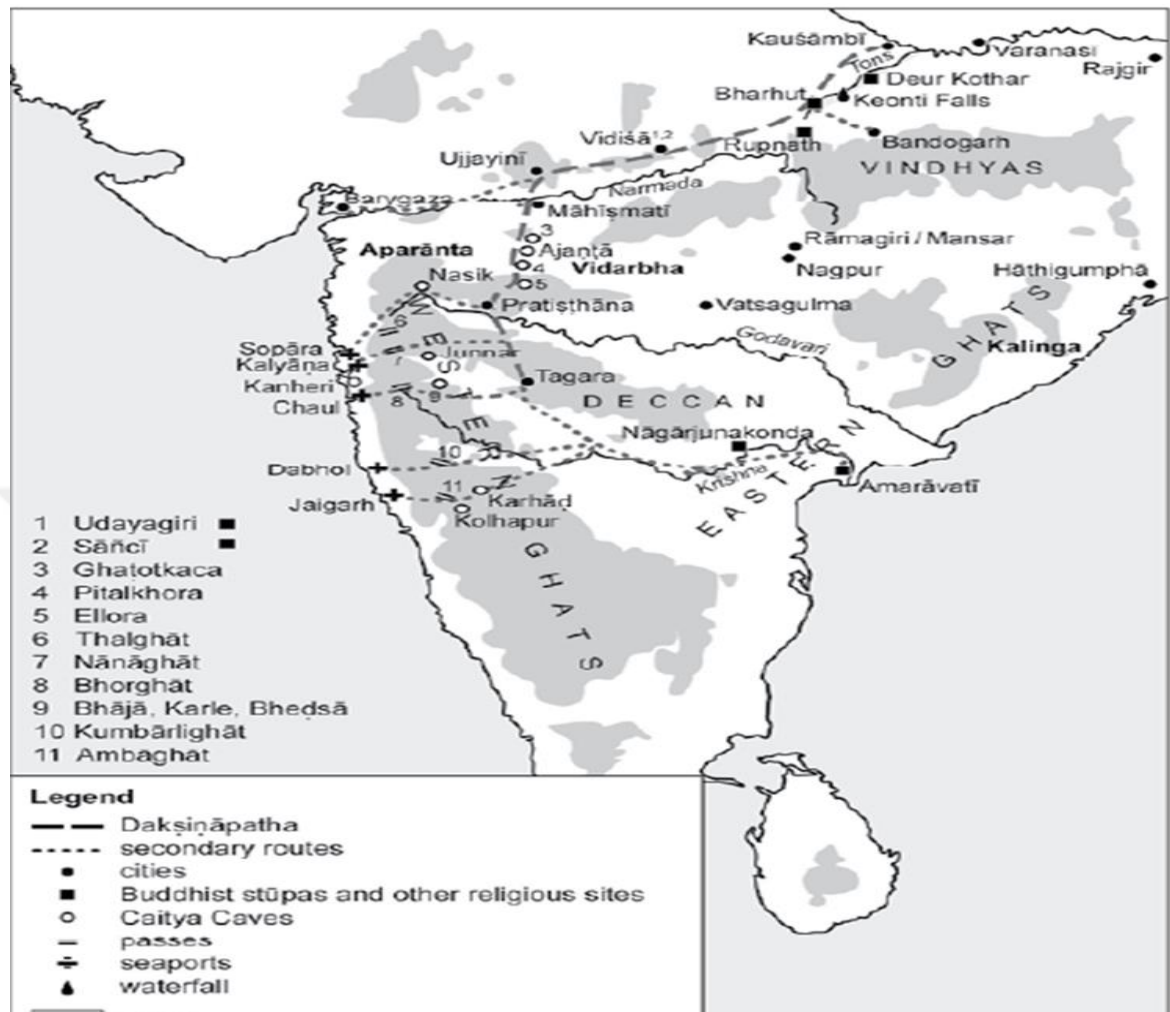


Figure 4

Southern Indian Overland Silk Routes or Buddhist Travel Route



2.2. Silk Road: Maritime Route and Historical Progress

The maritime silk route preemptorily arose in the Indian Ocean in the first century AD. Whereas information about Indian coasts and the trade was found in Ancient Greek sources, the maritime silk route exactly arose in the Indian Ocean in the first century AD (Darley, 2013, p. 52). With the annexation of Egypt into the imperial territories by Augustus in 30 BC, the Red Sea commerce initiated to advance. Soon afterwards, more than a hundred Roman trade ships set sail for Indian coasts (McLaughlin, 2014, p. xviii; Cobb, 2015, p. 364; Fitzpatrick, 2011, p. 36). With the imports of the silks, incense, cotton, spices and precious stones, the Mediterranean

markets swiftly were invaded by the Eastern goods (see Appendix A). McLaughlin expresses that by the first century CE, the tax on the import of eastern goods provided a third of the revenues of the Roman Empire (2014, pp. xix).

Fitzpatrick states that Roman Empire had a foreign trade deficit of about 100 million sesterces per year (2011, p. 31). Whereas Moses Finley asserted that the entity of a common commerce space between Rome, India and China and the concept of the globalization of antiquity were a figment of imagination (Finley, 1985, pp. 177-178), the information mentioned above refutes his opinions. Roman Empire exported gold and silver bullions to South Arabia, India and China. Half of the bullion went to India, and roughly 100 million sesterces worth of goods and bullion were exported to India (McLaughlin, 2014, pp. 226-227). Strabo mentioned (2.5.12) that the number of Roman Empire ships sailing from Egypt to India was 120 vessels (Strabo, 1917, p. 455). According to the knowledge mentioned by McLaughlin, the worth of Indian products carried aboard the ship was 9.2 million sesterces. In this case, the economic volume of Indian imports was more than a billion sesterces. This is enormous commerce. The Roman Empire collected more than 250 million sesterces in annual taxes on Indian imports (McLaughlin, 2014, p. 227).

As trading volume among the Red Sea ports, West Indian coasts and Sri Lanka harbours scaled up, the information as regards India in Roman sources, such as *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, *The Geography* by Strabo, *Peutinger Table*, Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* and *The Geography* by Claudius Ptolemy, in the same direction showed an increase (Roy, 2012, s. 31-32; Neelis, 2011, p. 219). After commerce between the Roman Empire and the Indian peninsula commenced, trade relation between Han Dynasty, located in China, and Eastern India coasts was established (Yingsheng, 2021, p. 22). Soon after, maritime trade was established

between the Roman Empire, the Indian Subcontinent and the Han Dynasty, of which the island of Sri Lanka and the Tamil were distributors. This booming trade paved the way for establishing diplomatic relations. The Western Satraps, called Indo-Scythian, initiated the first diplomatic intercourse with the Roman Empire. Their envoys came into Emperor Augustus' presence in roughly 26 BC (McLaughlin, 2010, pp. 111-112).

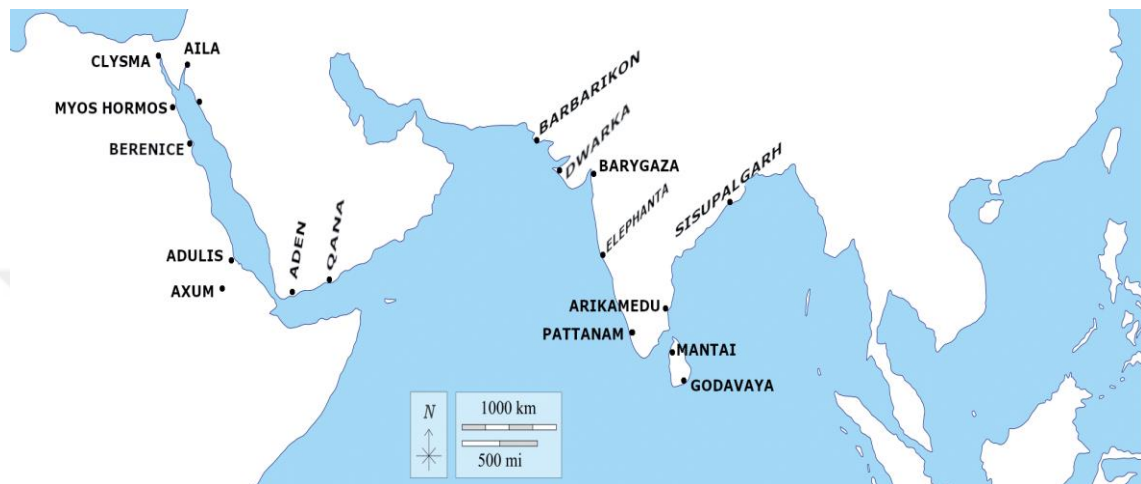
Another important diplomatic intercourse is that in 166 AD, Roman delegates who were merchants came into contact with Han Emperor Huan (Yingsheng, 2021, p. 18). Although this information mentioned in *Hou Hanshu*, there is no clear evidence that the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus sent them. This delegation probably consisted of profiteer merchants (McLaughlin, 2010, pp. 133-134). In the third century AD, Indian Ocean commerce declined. This situation was supported by archaeological evidence (Priestman, 2013, p. 13). We assert that the Antonine epidemic resulted in the dwindling of maritime trade. After Justinian, however, succeeded to the throne, he launched attempts to revitalize the maritime trade because Sasanian Empire monopolized in overland trade route.

Monsoon wind has a vital role in the Indian Maritime trade. This wind recirculates semi-annually over the Indian Ocean. Thus, sailing vessels both might sail from the Red Sea ports to Western Indian harbours, and they may get underway from Western Indian ports to the Red Sea. Summer monsoon winds blow from the southwest to northeastward from April to September. In the second semi-season, winds commence blowing from the northeast to the westward. This season keeps on from October to March (Tripathi & Raut, 2006, p. 864). The optimum months travelling to Western Indian ports are April-May and August-September because monsoon winds blow at a right angle to the coast of Western India in June and July (Seland, 2012, p. 74). Just as monsoon winds have a significant role in the Western Indian Ocean, these winds also

have a substantial for trade between East Indian ports and China. We might state that the monsoon winds assisted trade between the Han Dynasty and Rome, located in the Indian Ocean.

Figure 5

Important Maritime Silk Ports in Late Antiquity and Early Medieval



The most important ports of the Roman Empire which provided a commercial connection with the shores of the Indian Ocean were Aila, Clysma, Myos Hormos, Berenice and Adulis (Tsiamis, Poulakou-Rebelakou, & Petridou, 2008, pp. 212-213; Cobb, 2015, p. 375; Seland, 2014, p. 380). The port of Aila had a land route called the Nova Traiana that connected it with inland. Caravans carried commodities from this port to Syria and Palestine. Since the River of Trajan provided a connection between Clysma and Pelusium, one of the vital ports in the Red Sea was Clysma (Tsiamis, Poulakou-Rebelakou, & Petridou, 2008, pp. 210-215).

Clysma plays a key role in our assertion about the emergence of the plague in Pelusium. According to Tsiamis, Poulakou-Rebelakou, and Petridou, before the occurrence of plague in Pelusium, it highly likely appeared in Clysma because not only it was a vital commercial trade port of the Red Sea, but also it had a link to Pelusium via the River of Trajan (2008, pp. 216). Therefore, we assert that the plague is most likely to have been carried from India to the Red Sea via trade.

The port of Berenice was founded in third century BCE (Elder, 1938, s. 463-464). Research shows that the port continued to function until the middle of the sixth century, and then, it was abandoned (Cobb, 2015, p. 375; Seland, 2014, p. 381). This port reached its peak in Indian Maritime Trade in the first century AD with the import of silk from Kushan (Peters, 2019, p. 4). Another important harbour was Myos Hormos. In Islamic period, the name of this port was Quseir al-Qadim. The harbour is likely to have been founded in the Ptolemaic period (Seland, 2014, p. 382; Cobb, 2015, p. 376). The record that sheds light on the importance of the port belongs to Strabo. He announced (2.5.12) that the number of Roman Empire ships sailing from Myos Hormos to India was 120 vessels (Strabo, 1917, p. 455).

Although one of the major ports on the Red Sea was Myos Hormos (Quseir al-Qadim), which provided between the connection the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, it was deserted in the third century AD (Seland, 2014, pp. 382-383; McCormick, 2003, p. 8). After the abandonment of Myos Hormos, Berenice sustained its importance in the maritime trade. However, the abandonment of Berenice in the middle of the sixth century is critical because, in the same period, there was an epidemic of plague in the Byzantine Empire. Due to various factors, probably including the epidemic, the port was abandoned.

Adulis was a coastal settlement belonging Axum Kingdom (Seland, 2014, p. 380). This port historically was the window of the Kingdom of Axum to the world. With the development of the Indian Maritime trade, Roman and Arabian traders initiated dwelling at Adulis to conduct their commercial relations with the Axum kingdom (McLaughlin, 2010, p. 66). According to a legend narrative, Adulis was founded by runaway slaves and hence it was known as Freeman's Town (McLaughlin, 2014, p. 114). After the Kingdom arose in the third century AD (Darley, 2013, p. 162), the

importance of Adulis in the Indian maritime trade swiftly augmented. The role of the Kingdom of Axum and the port of Adulis in maritime trade reached their peak in the sixth century AD. And then, their roles embarked dwindling (Darley, 2013, pp. 167, 174).

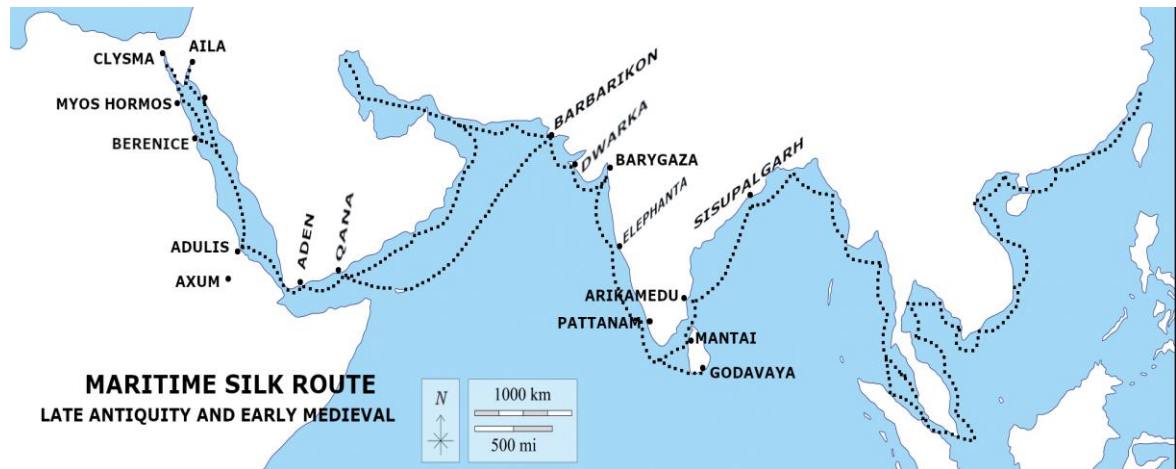
The coasts of Southern Arabia had vital as a touchpoint for maritime routes connecting the Red Sea, East Africa, India. As seen on *Map 4*, trade routes from Indian ports and the Persian Gulf converge at the ports of Qana and Aden. Ships departing from the Red Sea ports met in Aden and followed the coastline till Qana. From this place, they sailed to India (*Map 4*) (Altekar, 1987, s. 15). Persian, Indian and South Arabian goods such as cinnamon, peppers, spices, raw silk (McLaughlin, 2010, p. 181; McLaughlin, 2014, p. 88; Dayalan, 2018, p. 55; Howard-Johnston, 2017, p. 285), myrrh and frankincense (Seland, 2014, p. 376) were transported from the harbours of Aden and Qana to the ports of the Red Sea (See also Appendix A).

In the first century AD, 120 vessels sailing from India to the Red Sea carried cargo worth more than a billion sesterces every year (McLaughlin, 2014, p. 94). From the data, it is clear how vital the Roman Empire occupied a position in the Indian Ocean Maritime Trade, especially imports. Qana is assumed to have been founded in the first century AD. According to archaeologists, until it was abandoned in the seventh century AD, the ancient port maintained significance in the maritime trade (Seland, 2014, p. 376).

Indian Maritime Trade was not only a simple trade but also a cultural exchange. This cultural exchange manifests itself in goods that carried from India to Rome. The best example of this is the following; *an ivory statue of an Indian female fabricated in the Deccan plateau was founded at Pompeii* (See Appendix B) (Neelis, 2011, p. 220).

Figure 6

Maritime Silk Route in the Late Antiquity and Early Medieval



Such findings further increase the historical importance of ports and settlements on the Indian coast. In this part, we will consider the main Indian port settlements. Barbarikon, in present day Pakistan, was one of the important ports of Western India (Seland, 2014, p. 375). This harbour belonged to Western Satraps, Indo-Scythian rulers of Western India. They established the first diplomatic intercourse with the Roman Empire. Their envoys came into Emperor Augustus' presence in roughly 26 BC (McLaughlin, 2010, pp. 111-112).

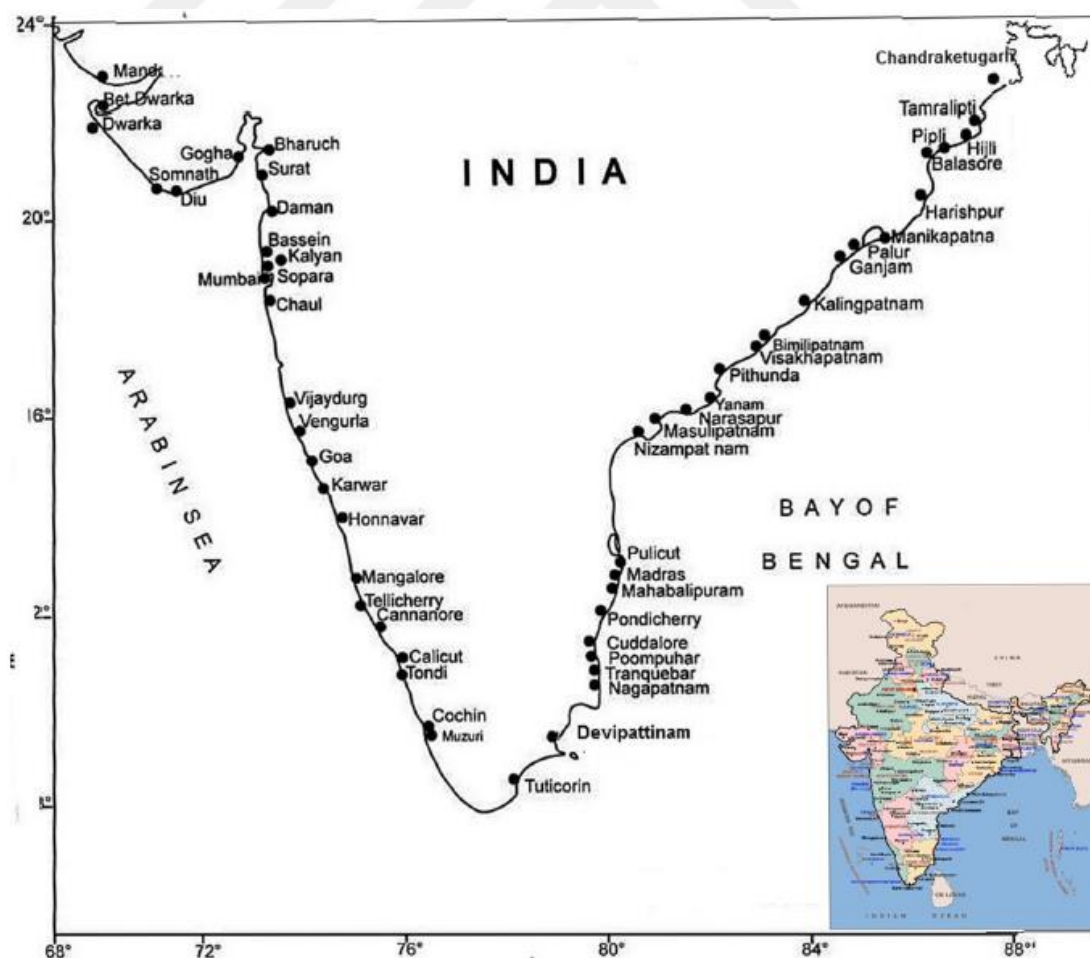
The settlement was utilized as an outward-looking gateway for northwestern India, Pakistan, Afghanistan as well as Kashmir. Barygaza is located around the Narmada River. This settlement also was controlled by Western Satraps. Contrary to Barbarikon, the settlement was both a considerable port and industrial base for the production and distribution of goods (Neelis, 2011, p. 221-222; Dayalan, 2018, pp. 58-59).

According to *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, Pattanam (Muziris) has been one of the most substantial ports in Indian maritime commerce. Recently an archaeologist named K. P. Shajan has discovered that this ancient port is located at the mouth of the Periyar River. (Neelis, 2011, p. 223; McLaughlin, 2010, p. 20). The

information in the early Tamil records is consistent with this archaeological discovery. Moreover, archaeologists have found Roman amphorae fragments (Seland, 2014, pp. 372-373). Another proof of the magnitude and importance of trade with the Indian coast for the Roman Empire is the Temple of Augustus located at Muziris in Tamil (McLaughlin, 2010, p. 20, 109). The fifth map shows other ports and settlements located on the West and East Indian coasts. These ancient seaports were the heart of the Sino-Indian (Thakur, 1987, p. 201), Sino-Roman and Roman-Indian trade in Antiquity. Travel between China and the Eastern Indian coast was very frequent. As an example of these travels, we can cite the Buddhist scholar Paramartha, who went to China by sea in 546 AD (Chakravarti A. , 1987, p. 161).

Figure 7

Ancient Seaports in India



3. POLITICAL VIEW OF ASIA IN THE SIXTH CENTURY AD

3.1. Political Situation in East Asia

In the sixth century, China was divided into two parts, the northern dynasties and the southern dynasties. In 502 AD, Xiao Yan founded the Liang dynasty in the south and took the name Emperor Wu. In 587 AD, the Sui dynasty ended Western Liang and unified China. (Chittick, 2019, pp. 259, 271). By the beginning of the sixth century, the Northern Wei state was located in the north. In 534 AD, it was divided into western and eastern (Balci, 2021, p. 171; Pearce, 2019, pp. 181-182; Grousset, 2017, p. 94; Taşağıl, 2018, p. 107). Both the Eastern Wei and the Western Wei contested with each other to make amicable contact with the Rouran Khaganate by matrimony. The rivalry brought about an economic dwindling, and these dynasties had lost their former strength. The Rourans gained the advantage of the situation of the Chinese but did not regard the interior situation in their empire (Ganiev & Kukarskih, 2018, p. 5).

The Western Wei Dynasty, in this desperation, sought a solution. They tended to the Turks for receiving help. Thus, an alternative political and military power, in which Türks played the leading role, emerged in Mongolia. The Eastern Wei dynasty in 550 AD was destroyed by Gao Yang and replaced by the Northern Qi state (Dien, 2019, p. 197). Political change in northern China has not been limited to Eastern Wei alone. In 557 AD, the Western Wei state was destroyed and the Northern Zhou state was established (Dien, 2019b, p. 224). Whereas the turmoil continued between the states in northern China, the Türk Khaganate dominated all of Eurasia (Graff, 2019, p. 283). In 581 AD, Sui Dynasty achieved to unit northern China. In 589 AD, Sui Wendi (Yang Jian) managed to unite all of China under one state after three hundred and

fifty years (Skaff, 2012, p.31). Such was the political framework of East Asia in the sixth century.

3.2. Political Situation in Inner Asia and North India

In the first half of the sixth century, there were two states in the steppes of Inner Asia. In the steppes of Mongolia, the Rouran Khaganate dominated. With Anagui becoming a khagan, the power of the state launched to rise. The most important factor in their strengthening is that the Northern Wei dynasty was divided into two and constantly fought with each other. However, the climate disaster that occurred in 536 AD and affected the entire northern hemisphere also caused damage to the Rourans. After a second climate disaster occurred in 540 AD, revolts initiated against the Rouran Khaganate. As a matter of fact, the Rourans were destroyed by Bumin in 552 AD (Yıldırım, 2015b, p. 49; Taşağıl, 2014, p. 22). The most powerful state of the steppes of Inner Asia and Northern India in the first half of the sixth century was the Hephthalites.

The eastern end of the empire began from the western half of the Tarim Basin (Kurbanov, 2010, p. 182). Sogdiana, Tokharistan, Khwarazm and Northern India were within the territory of the state (Litvinsky, 1996, p. 144). The Sogdians, who lived on the territory of the Hephthalite, began to establish colonies in the Tarim Basin. During this period, Gaochang state and Tuyuhuns were also located in the Tarim Basin (Holcombe, 2019, p. 306). The southern neighbors of the Hephthalites in India were the Gupta Empire. The date of the beginning of the general admission of the Gupta Empire is 319 AD. Chandragupta I is considered the founder of the state (Çeliktaş, 2019b, p. 19; Chakrabarti, 1996, p. 189). Most of the history of the empire has been spent fighting the Hephthalites. The fourth century and the first half of the fifth

century became the golden age of the state. In the sixth century, the Hephthalite Empire was engaged in activities in Northern India under the leadership of Toramana.

During the reign of Mihirakula, the Empire experienced the peaks of its power (Çeliktaş, 2019b, pp. 57, 67; Chakravarti R. , 2021, pp. 277-278). It is believed that the Gupta Empire ended during the reign of Vishnugupta (Çeliktaş, 2019b, p. 90). While the political image of Inner Asia was in this way in the first half of the sixth century, the Türk Khaganate entered the historical scene in the second half of the century. For the period when the Turkic Khaganate appeared on the stage of history, François Thierry has put forward a different point of view. He claims that had Turks been blacksmiths and weapons producers in the Rouran Khaganate, they would be not a strictly “nomadic” tribe because iron production and iron working necessitate the sedentary. For this reason, before Türk Khaganate was established, they had lived partway sedentary in the Rouran Khaganate (Thierry, 2010, p. 60).

Later, when the Türks destroyed the Rourans and established their khaganate, blacksmithing activities passed to the *Kirghiz Bodun*. Interestingly, *Kirghiz Bodun* lived semi-nomadic in the Türk Khaganate. Western Wei, which was fighting a great struggle against the Rouran Khaganate, was forced to cooperate with another power in the steppe due to the fact that Anagui was allied with Eastern Wei (Klyāstorniy, 2018, p.117). During this period, the Töles *bods* rebelled against the Rourans. However, this rebellion was prevented by Bumin. Because of this, Western Wei state sent a Sogdian envoy named An Nuopanto (had his origin in Bukhara) to Bumin, and thus an alliance was formed between the parties in 545 AD (Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 19-20). In the sixth century, the Turkic Khaganate had a role at the international level in the territories from the Caspian Sea to the shores of the Pacific Ocean. At that time, there were three important actors in Afro-Eurasia.

They were Byzantine Empire, Sasanian Empire and Türk Khaganate. The Khaganate consisted of nomadic tribes in the steppe and vassal city-states in central Asia. After Türk Khaganate was founded in Otuken in Mongolia, it swiftly expanded to all of Eurasia. In a short while, Tarim Basin, Issyk-Kul, Ili region, Ferghana valley, Transoxiana, Khwarazm (Nerazik & Bulgakov, 1996, p. 214; Twitchett, 1979, p. 37) and the upper part of the Caspian Sea were dominated in the 6th century AD by Türks. Since the sixth century, one of the most prominent peoples of Central Asia has been the Sogdians. They were engaged in agriculture and trade in the oasis cities that they founded in Sogdiana (Marshak & Negmatov, 1996, p. 238). The famous cities of Sogd are Shi史 (Shahr-i Sabz), An安 (Bukhara), Kang康 (Samarkand), Shi石 (Chach) (Xinjiang, 2019, p. 374). With the establishment of the Turkish Khaganate, Sogdian merchants began to play a vital role in the Silk Road trade.

Sogdian colonies were established on the Silk Road. Apart from Sogdiana, the most important Sogdian settlements were founded in the Tarim Basin. They have spread Buddhism, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism and Nestorism in Inner Asia and China. They ensured the exchange of cultures between the east and west. Due to the Arab conquests in the seventh and eighth centuries AD, a large Sogdian population migrated to the Tarim Basin (Watt, 2004, p. 36). With the fall of the Uyghur Khaganate in 840 AD, they merged with the Uyghurs who migrated to East Turkestan to create a high culture there. The history of the Türk Khaganate and the Uyghur Khaganate associated with the Sogdians. As we mentioned above, the first envoy sent to Bumin by the Western Wei state was a Sogdian. The ambassador named Maniakh, whom Istemi Yabgu sent to Constantinople in 568 AD, is also Sogd (Heyd, 1975, p. 18). On the return journey of Zemarchus, who came to the Turkic Khaganate, there

are also Sogdians in the delegation sent to Byzantium. In fact, one of them is the son of Maniakh (Vaissière, 2005, p. 235).

3.3.Political Situation in West Asia

In the sixth century, the Byzantine Empire and the Sassanid Empire were located in the west of Asia. The root of the Sassanid-Byzantine struggle is quite deep. During the Roman Empire, wars began immediately after the establishment of the Sasanian Empire (Fisher, 2011, pp. 30-31). In the sixth century, the Byzantine Empire entered into a large-scale struggle with the Sasanians. Kavadh I began attacks against the Byzantine Empire in 502 (Greatrex & Lieu, 2002, p. 62). They signed the peace in 506 AD (Whittow, 2011, p. 85). As a matter of fact, in 526-527 AD, conflicts began in the Caucasus and in Upper Mesopotamia (Dignas & Winter, 2007, p. 38). When Kavadh I died in 531 AD (Daryaee, 2009, p. 28), he was succeeded by his son Khosrow I, and peace talks began between the Byzantine and the Sasanian. As a result of the reconciliation of the parties, “Eternal Peace” was signed in 532 AD. Both states withdrew from the territories they occupied, and Byzantium agreed to pay 110 *kentenaria* for once (Prokopios, 2014, p. 57 (1.22.3); Whittow, 2011, p. 86).

Khosrow I, who was worried about the successes of the Byzantine Empire in the western expeditions, went on the offensive before his enemy became even stronger and launched looting attacks on the cities of Syria and Mesopotamia in 540 AD (Morrisson, 2014, p. 49). The wars between the Byzantine and the Sasanian occurred in the form of direct battles on the territory of Lazika, Georgia, the Armenian Kingdom. In 545 AD, a five-year truce was signed between the two empires (Dignas & Winter, 2007, p. 40). Although the truce was concluded in 545 AD, the peacetime did not last very long. In 548 AD, Gubazes, King of Lazica, asked Justinian for support against the Sasanians. In 548-549, the Sasanian army suffered a series of

defeats against the Byzantine and Lazic army. The armistice of 545 AD was signed again to be valid for five years (Treadgold, 1997, pp. 204-209).

However, this peace period also did not last long, and in 554 AD, the Lazic wars launched again (Dignas & Winter, 2007, p. 40). Khosrow I accepted the truce in 557 AD (Daryaee, 2009, p. 31). In 562 AD, the Fifty-Year Peace Treaty was signed (Dignas & Winter, 2007, p. 147). When the Byzantine Emperor Justinian died in 565 AD, he was succeeded by his nephew Justin II (Morrisson, 2014, p. 53). When the emperor died, the state was very worn out financially and militarily (Haldon, 2007, p. 47). Justin II declared war on the Sasanian Empire in 572 AD and attacked Nisibis (Diehl, 2006, p. 48), but this siege was unsuccessful. After death of Khosrow I, civil war began in Sasanian Empire. Khosrow II, who ascended the throne again with support by Byzantine Empire, ceded Dara, the western half of Iberia and a significant part of Persian Armenia to Byzantine Empire in 591 AD (Ostrogorsky, 2019, p. 73; Whittow, 2011, p. 86).

During the sixth century, the two empires fought each other on the border extending from the Caucasus to Yemen on the North-South line. In order to protect the Sasanian borders, Khosrow I implemented a number of defensive measures. In order to protect the northern borders, he built walls and castles in Derbent (Lawrence & Wilkinson, 2017, pp. 109-118). Such was the political status in western Asia in the sixth century.

4. TRADE ON THE SILK ROAD BETWEEN EASTERN AND WESTERN IN THE SIXTH CENTURY

4.1. Political and Economic History in the Sixth Century

As a result of the military expeditions of Alexander the Great to Northern India, the Overland Silk Route, as we know it today, became operational. The Yuezhis demolished the Greco-Bactrian state, which became the successor state of Alexander the Great, in the second century BC. After the defeat of the Greco-Bactrian state, the Yuezhis founded the state called Kushan Kingdom in the first century AD. The Kingdom, which had the area covering northern India, Tokharistan and the territories west of Sogdiana as well as the Tarim Basin, was the dominant element on the Overland Silk Routes for ages (Abazov, 2008, p. 9; Strabo, 1917b, p. 261; Benjamin, 2018, pp. 176-177, 181-185; Millward, 2007, p. 15; Hansen, 2012, p. 32; Liu, 2010, pp. 41-42; Hansen, 2021, p. 2; Whitfield, 2018, p. 61; Rezakhani, 2017, pp. 49-51; Haug, 2019, p. 50). Under the Kushan rule, the Overland Routes took its classical form.

Since the second century BC, with the accession of the Han Dynasty to this land commerce (Rong, 2020, pp. 2-3; Barisitz, 2017, p. 32; Litvinsky & Guang-da, 1996, p. 35; Liu, 2010, p. 6; Yılmaz E. , 2017, p. 673; Hansen, 2021, pp. 3-4; Hansen, 2012, p. 236), the Silk Road has become an uninterrupted network throughout the Asian continent. As a result of the addition of the Sasanian Empire, which entered the historical scene in the third century AD (Chegini & Nikitin, 1996, p. 41; Altungök, 2015, pp. 47-52; Abazov, 2008, s. 9; Katouzian, 2010, pp. 44-45; Daryaei, 2012, pp. 2-3; Dignas & Winter, 2007, p. 9), to this trade network, the Silk Road reached the Middle Eastern. There are archaeological finds that glass produced on the territory of the Roman Empire was transported to Indian ports. These glasses, which reached the

Kushan capital from the Red Sea ports, were discovered thanks to excavations in 1937 and 1939 (Seland, 2014, p. 382).

With the expansion of the Roman Republic to the Levant in 64 BC (Fleming, 1915, p. 70), the Overland Silk Routes began from Chang'an, the capital of the Han Dynasty, and reached the cities of Tyre and Palmyra, located in the Eastern Mediterranean of Roman Empire, without interruption. With the annexation of Egypt to the Roman territory during the reign of Emperor Augustus (McLaughlin, 2014, p. 7), the Roman Empire was involved in the Red Sea commerce and the Maritime Silk Route. The empire began to trade with the Kingdom of Axum, South Arabia and the West Indian coast through the ports of the Red Sea. Monsoon winds are the most significant factor in trade with the Indian subcontinent. Because the monsoon wind blows semi-annually, the trade was carried out periodically. According to the information given by Strabo (2.5.12), it is known that 120 ships were carrying products imported from the coast of Western India (Strabo, 1917, p. 455). For the Roman Empire, this maritime trade became so vital that the size of imports was a billion sesterces. But the Empire's exports accounted for one hundred million sesterces (McLaughlin, 2014, p. 19; McLaughlin, 2010, p. 161).

The information in the papyrus records showed that the Roman Empire levied a customs duty of 250 million sesterces on these imports. This tax corresponds to more than half of the salaries of 30 legions that existed in the middle of the second century AD (McLaughlin, 2014, pp. 227, 231.). There is archaeological and written evidence of Roman commercial contacts with Western India. The information in the early Tamil records is consistent with this archaeological discovery. Moreover, archaeologists have found Roman amphorae fragments (Seland, 2014, pp. 372-373). Another proof of the magnitude and importance of trade with the Indian coast for the

Roman Empire is the Temple of Augustus, located at Muziris in Tamil (McLaughlin, 2010, p. 20, 109). The main products imported from eastern ports were cinnamon, nard, amomum, cassia, styrax, cardamom, myrrh, spices, raw silk and cotton (McLaughlin, 2010, p. 181; McLaughlin, 2014, p. 88; Dayalan, 2018, p. 55; Seland, 2014, p. 376). Pliny Elder stated that the cinnamon were a thousand denarii per pound while the nard were 100 denarii per pound (Pliny, 1960, pp. 33, 67).

With the attendance of the Han Dynasty to the Indian Maritime Trade, an uninterrupted Maritime Silk Road appeared, just like the land silk road. The Maritime Silk Road, which begins in the east at the port of Quanzhou, reaches the Bay of Bengal after passing the coast of South-East Asia. Here, depending on the direction in which the monsoon winds blow, it arrives at the coast of Eastern India. From these shores, it also reaches the island of Sri Lanka and the western coast of the Tamil region. The ships departing from the ports of Pattanam, Dwarka, and Barbarikon cross the Indian Ocean and reach the Persian Gulf or Qana in southern India. Entering the Persian Gulf, the trade route arrives at the ports on the Persian coast. From these ports, the goods are transported by camels to the Sasanian capital. The route to South Arabia arrives in the port of Qana. Merchant ships follow the coast of South Arabia, reaching the port of Aden. The goods from the Persian Gulf and Western India, as well as the goods from the interior of the Arabian Peninsula, are transported to the Red Sea by ships.

The ships departing from Aden cross the Bab-el-Mandeb strait and enter the Red Sea. They arrive at Adulis, the commercial port of the Axum Kingdom. Adulis was a coastal settlement belonging Axum Kingdom (Seland, 2014, p. 380). This port historically was the window of the Kingdom of Axum to the world. With the development of the Indian Maritime trade, Roman and Arabian traders initiated

dwelling at Adulis to conduct their commercial relations with the Axum kingdom (McLaughlin, 2010, p. 66). The most important ports of the Roman Empire which provided a commercial connection with the shores of the Indian Ocean were Aila, Clysma, Myos Hormos, Berenice and Adulis (Tsiamis, Poulakou-Rebelakou, & Petridou, 2008, pp. 212-213; Cobb, 2015, p. 375; Seland, 2014, p. 380). The cargo vessels departing from Adulis, reach the port of Berenice. The port of Berenice was founded in third century BCE (Elder, 1938, s. 463-464).

Research shows that the port continued to function until the middle of the sixth century, and then, it was abandoned (Cobb, 2015, p. 375; Seland, 2014, p. 381). This port reached its peak in Indian Maritime Trade in the first century AD with the import of silk from the Kushan Empire (Peters, 2019, p. 4). Leaving this port, the ships head north and reach Myos Hormos. In Islamic period, the name of this port was Quseir al-Qadim. The harbour is likely to have been founded in the Ptolemaic period (Seland, 2014, p. 382; Cobb, 2015, p. 376). The record that sheds light on the importance of the port belongs to Strabo. He announced (2.5.12) that the number of Roman Empire ships sailing from Myos Hormos to India was 120 vessels (Strabo, 1917, p. 455). Although one of the major ports on the Red Sea was Myos Hormos (Quseir al-Qadim), which provided between the connection the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, it was deserted in the third century AD (Seland, 2014, pp. 382-383; McCormick, 2003, p. 8).

After the abandonment of Myos Hormos, Berenice sustained its importance in the maritime trade. However, the abandonment of Berenice in the middle of the sixth century is critical because, in the same period, there was an epidemic of plague in the Byzantine Empire. Due to various factors, probably including the epidemic, the port was abandoned. From the port of Myos Hormos, the ships would have sailed to either

the Aila port or the Clysma harbour. The port of Aila had a land route called the Nova Traiana that connected it with inland. Caravans carried commodities from this port to Syria and Palestine. Since the River of Trajan provided a connection between Clysma and Pelusium, one of the vital ports in the Red Sea was Clysma (Tsiamis, Poulakou-Rebelakou, & Petridou, 2008, pp. 210-215). Clysma plays a key role in our assertion about the emergence of the plague in Pelusium. According to Tsiamis, Poulakou-Rebelakou, and Petridou, before the occurrence of plague in Pelusium, it highly likely appeared in Clysma because not only it was a vital commercial trade port of the Red Sea, but also it had a link to Pelusium via the River of Trajan (2008, pp. 216). Therefore, we assert that the plague is most likely to have been carried from India to the Red Sea via trade.

The goods arriving at the port of Clysma are transferred to other ships on the Trajan's canal. These ships also sail to Pelusium. Goods arriving at the port of Pelusium are transported by ships to important Mediterranean ports such as Alexandria and Tyre. Thus, a commercial connection is provided among the China Sea, the Pacific Ocean, the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. As we mentioned above, the continued existence of this trade network was vital for the Roman Empire. In the second and third centuries AD, merchants engaged in trade activities on the Maritime Silk Road on behalf of the Roman Empire were usually Christians, Jews and Axumites. Cosmas' journey in the sixth century AD shows that Christians lived in Sri Lanka, southern India, Socotra, Persia, Axum, and southern Arabia (Seland, 2012, p. 81). The Byzantine Empire, which had risen above its legacy in the territory of the Roman Empire, also took the path of maintaining this maritime commerce legacy.

Especially in the sixth century, in Byzantine Empire, silk was used as a currency among aristocrats and courtiers, as well as for exchanges with foreigners. In addition, it was paid to troops as wages. Byzantine received mercenaries, valuable goods, and slaves from Europe in exchange for silk. Thanks to this trade, Justinian I held nearly the entire Mediterranean, and as a result, silk is equivalent to gold and precious stones in Byzantine. Knowing the Byzantine weakness for silk, the Sasanians not only increased the prices of goods but also limited the quantity of silk exported (Onay, 2019, p. 7). The Byzantine are significant both importer and supplier in the Silk Road trade. There was no balance between its imports and exports. The Empire was mainly the party that imported the goods. Because the Byzantine needed silk and other Eastern products, it paid a large amount of gold to the East. Therefore, the Byzantine gold and copper coins were transported along the Silk Road to Eastern Asia and India (Kiss, 1984, pp. 38-39).

In the sixth century and subsequent centuries, the coins and valuables carried from the Byzantine Empire to East Asia were discovered in archaeological excavations. The grave of Li Xian (569 AD) was excavated by archaeologists. There are exciting foreign goods in the tomb, such as a ring, a Greco-Roman silver ewer and a Sasanian glass bowl (Xiong & Laing, 1991, p. 165). The grave of Dugu Luo (534-599) was excavated in 1953. A Byzantine coin, the solidus of Justin II, was revealed in this tomb. Byzantine gold coins (solidus) have been unearthed in China since the excavation of that solidus of Justin II. Those coins were discovered in the provinces of Liaoning, Inner Mongolia, Henan, Shanxi, Hebei and Eastern Turkestan. Many of these coins date back the late 6th century to the first half of the 8th century. (Ying, 2005, p. 16).

During the excavation in Boma in 1997, cups were found. One of these vessels was made of gold with tiger handle. Most likely, this cup belonged to a khan or chieftain. According to Ying, the gold vessel reminds of the drinking cups carved on the Turk Khaganate era stone images. In addition, he has noted that this cup with a tiger handle is closer to the examples in the Byzantine Empire than the Sasanian models (Ying, 2008, pp. 20-22). Five *solidi*, Justin I and Justinian II, were uncovered in the grave of Tian Hong (d. 575) Lin Ying asserts that the Khagans of the Rouran and Türks derived these *solidi* as diplomatic gifts from Byzantine Emperors. Subsequently, they sent them to Chinese Huangdi to show their strength (Ying, 2005, p. 17). In contrast to the assertion of Ying, the relationship between the Rouran Khaganate and Byzantine has substantially not been proved so far. On the other hand, it is unequivocally known that there is a relationship between Byzantine and Türk Khaganate.

In the Shoroon Bumbagar tomb in Mongolia, the materials belonging to early Türk culture were discovered. Among the materials discovered in the tomb are more than 15 Byzantine coins. It has been identified three of these coins. These are the *solidi* of Phokas (602-610) and Heraclius (date back to 616-625), and the imitation of the solidus of Tiberius II Constantinus (578-582) (Yatsenko, 2014, pp. 13-18, 24). The coin of Tiberius II Constantinus shows that in the East Türk Khaganate, Byzantine coins circulated in the 6th century AD. Sergey A. Yatsenko alleged that Byzantine coins got used as costume decorations and medallions in East Türk Khaganate (2014, p. 24). In South India, it was found a massive amount of bronze and copper coins of Byzantine. Firstly, scholars thought that Sri Lanka is not a significant value in the Indian Ocean trade. However, the ship cargo that dates back first or second century AD was unearthed on the island in 2008 (Seland, 2014, p. 373).

The Byzantine-Sasanian rivalry on the Silk Routes had spread to the entire Arabian Peninsula before Islam dominated the region. This struggle was multilateral. The wars occurred among the Byzantine Empire, the Sassanid Empire, the Axum Kingdom, the Kingdom of Himyarite, the city of Mecca, the Ghassanids and the Lakhmids. In addition, besides these political forces, Christianity, Judaism and the ancient Arab religions also struggled on the peninsula (Aktaş, 2020, p. 232). In this part, we will dwell on Yemen, which was the most important stopping point for the Byzantine Empire's contact with the Indian Ocean. The Kingdom of Himyarite was located in Yemen. The religions of Christianity and Judaism were widespread in this kingdom. Merchants belonging to these religions, both on behalf of the Roman and Byzantine Empires, traded in the Indian Ocean (Seland, 2012, p. 81).

In 521-522 AD, the King of Axum, who is Kaleb Ella Asheba, appointed Joseph, who is known Zur'a dhü Nuwas in Arabic, as the king of Yemen. However, Joseph declared its independence shortly afterwards (Robin, 2015, p. 147). After entering the religion of Judaism, he invited believers in Arab religions and Christianity to his faith. However, when he was rejected, he started to massacre those who did not change their religion. After this incident, the Byzantine Emperor Justinianus I sent an order to the King of Aksum asking him to intervene in the events (Aktaş, 2020, pp. 236-237; Robin, 2015, p. 149). There were two reasons behind the emperor's attitude. The first of these was that the Christians of Himyar were trading on behalf of the Byzantine Empire. The second was the geopolitical position of Yemen. An Aksumite army, including Abraha, invaded Yemen in 525 AD (Kazancı, 1994, p. 79).

As a result of the battles, Joseph and his forces were defeated, and a governorate belonging to the Kingdom of Aksum was established in Yemen. Thus, the southwest of the Arabian Peninsula came under the rule of Christianity. However, a power

struggle arose between the Aksum commanders who captured Himyarite Kingdom. The rivalry between them soon turned into war. Abraha became the governor of Himyar in 537 AD because he prevailed in the struggle (Aktaş, 2020, pp. 237-238; Fayda, 1996, p. 70). Although Byzantine, which paid more gold to silk than it was worth, allied with Axum Kingdom and Himyarite Kingdom in 531, it did not achieve results (Robin, 2015, p. 149; Onay, 2019, p. 8). Abraha's political charisma and military strength soon paved the way for him to conduct policies independent of the Kingdom of Axum. With his activities on the Arabia peninsula, Christianity became very strong in the south of the peninsula. During his reign, he was engaged in increasing the commercial and religious importance of Himyarite.

He decided to campaign against Mecca, where he saw an obstacle to the spread of Christianity on the Arabian Peninsula and the expansion of his sphere of influence. He also started the construction of a church called al-Qalis in the city of Sanaa. Thus, he wanted to attract religious and economic power to Himyarite. He went on a campaign against Mecca with a large army, including elephants. This campaign has been described in Al-Fil in the Qur'an. In 570 AD, Abraha's army perished when they came in front of Mecca. He survived this incident unscathed and fled to Yemen but he died soon afterwards (Aktaş, 2020, pp. 238-240; Kazancı, 1994, p. 80). There are discussions about the date of Abraha's death and the year of the Elephant. According to Fayda, the incident occurred between 569 and 571 AD (1996, p. 71). As far as M. J. Kister is concerned, this event happened in 552 AD whereas as said by Robin, this campaign did not occur in 552 AD since an inscription dating back to 552 AD, mentioning the victory of Abraha, was discovered (Robin, 2015, p. 151). Beeston (1986) has stated that this battle took place in 570 AD (p. 102).

After Abraha's death, he was succeeded by his sons Yaksum and Masruq. During this period, the Aksumites mistreated the local population of Yemen. Sayf b. dhi-Yazan encouraged the Yemeni people to revolt. They requested help from the Byzantine Emperor, but he was refused it. Therefore, they asked for help from the Sasanian Shahanshah Khosrow I Anushirvan. Accepting this request, Shahanshah sent a force of approximate a thousand people by sea to Yemen to support the rebellion. The Sasanian army, including the rebels, defeated the overcrowded army commanded by Masruq. He was killed on the battlefield. After this victory, Sayf b. dhi-Yazan became the king of Himyarite and a vassal of the Sasanian Empire (Aktaş, 2020, pp. 241-242; Edwell, Fisher, Greatrex, Whately, & Wood, 2015, p. 258). Thus, Khosrow I cut off the Indian Sea trade of Byzantine, which he had been trying to prevent for a long time. With the annexation of Yemen, he besieged the Byzantine Empire and the Kingdom of Axum from the south (Onay, 2019, p. 8). Byzantine suffered a severe wound in the struggle to break the monopoly of the Sassanids on the Silk Road. Due to the new political situation, Byzantine Empire was forced to establish contact with the Türk Khaganate through the Caucasus.

The political situation on the Silk Road from the beginning of the sixth century to the end of the first half was as follows; the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires existed as a superpower in Western Asia. The Aksumite Kingdom, the Himyarite Kingdom, the Ghassanids and the Lakhmids were in a state of regional power. Hephthalites were located in the centre of Asia and Northern India. In South India, the Gupta Empire was located. In China, there was a Tabgach state divided into two parts. The Rourans dominated the Eurasian steppes in the first half of the sixth century. Justinian began military, political and economic activities in the second quarter of the sixth century with the idea of a “Great and Christian New Rome” (Diehl, 2006, p. 33; Vasiliev,

1943, p. 169; Brown, 2017, p. 156; Ostrogorsky, 2019, pp. 63-64). For this reason, he was engaged in various military activities in the sixth century in the western territories of the Roman Empire.

The emperor chose North Africa as his destination in 533, and his armies conquered the region in a short time. This victory was followed by his campaign in Italy. In 540 AD, Belisarius, Justinian's general, entered Ravenna, the capital of the Ostrogothic Kingdom. However, this year, the Sasanian Shahanshah declared war against Byzantine (Brown, 2017, p. 153; Dignas & Winter, 2007, p. 39; Morrisson, 2014, p. 49). This war, which began on the eastern front, paved the way for the Ostrogoths to recover. Thanks to the years-long struggle of the Byzantine general Narses, the Byzantine Empire gained complete dominance in Italy in 555 AD (Ostrogorsky, 2019, p. 65; Diehl, 2006, pp. 37-38; Vasiliev, 1943, pp. 172-174). Justinian not only dreamed of a new Rome on the Mediterranean coast but also wanted to resurrect the legacy of the Roman Empire on the Maritime Silk Route.

As a consequence of the close relations established with the Kingdom of Axum through Christianity, he wanted to take advantage of them in the West Indian trade. The importance of the Kingdom of Axum, located at a strategic point where the Red Sea connects to the Indian Ocean, as a vassal of the Byzantine Empire increased rapidly in the sixth century AD. The Sasanian Empire was located on the road where silk, which was one of the vital commodities in the Roman world and then in Byzantine, was transported. The Silk Route passed through the Sasanian lands, reaching the cities of Tyre and Palmyra. The Sasanians tried to make their opponents kneel politically and economically by closing this trade route in every war situation. An alternative solution to these Sasanian moves was to trade with the shores of the Indian Ocean through the Kingdom of Axum.

The wars of the Byzantine Empire and the Roman Empire with the Sasanians have shown the importance of alternative trade routes. The wars between the Roman Empire and the Sasanian Empire embarked in 230 AD when Shahanshah Ardashir attacked Roman territory (Dignas & Winter, 2007, p. 19). The Armenian Kingdom and the Syrian Desert soon afterwards became the subject of contention between the parties. After the intermittent struggles during the third century AD, the Sasanian-Roman war became more intense in the fourth century AD. During the reign of Shapur II (309-379), the wars with the Roman Empire commenced again. On 5 March 363 AD, The emperor Julian launched a major Persian campaign. The Roman army besieged the Sassanid capital Ctesiphon, but they were unable to conquer the city. In the battle on the way back, the Emperor was killed (Greatrex & Lieu, 2002, p. 1; Dignas & Winter, 2007, p. 92; Brown, Geç Antikçağ Dünyası, 2017, p. 108).

By the last quarter of the fifth century, the Roman Empire and the Sassanid Empire had made peace due to the intensification of the Hun attacks. In the sixth century, the parties started wars again. The Sassanid Shahanshah Kavadh began attacks against the Byzantine Empire in 502 (Greatrex & Lieu, 2002, p. 62). In the struggle that lasted until 506 AD, the Sassanids achieved significant successes. However, the onset of new problems with the Hephthalites on their eastern borders left Kavadh in a difficult position. Therefore, he returned the conquered places to Byzantine (Dignas & Winter, 2007, p. 37). After the peace in 506 AD, Shahanshah Kavadh tried to improve relations with the Byzantine Empire. By 524 AD, the political goals of both states launched to clash with each other.

When Kavadh initiated to impose Zoroastrianism on Iberia, the Iberian King Gourgenes defected to Byzantium in 524/525. Within the same year, the Iberians rebelled against the Sasanians (Daryaee, 2009, p. 28). Both empires did not clash

directly and started a proxy war. They fought through their Arab allies in Syria Desert (Lecker, 2011, pp. 163-165). In the Caucasus, Anatolia and the North Arabian deserts, the parties' struggle in the form of hot conflicts in places has turned into proxy wars in the south of the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian Ocean. As we mentioned above, in 525 AD, the Aksumite army conquered the Himyarite Kingdom because this place was vital to the Byzantine Empire. During this period, when the Byzantine Empire was trying to revive the Maritime Silk Road, an epidemic of plague appeared on the Egyptian coast of the Empire. Both the plague epidemic and the activities of the Sasanians disrupted Justinian's plans. Below, we discussed in detail the effects of trade and climate changes in the sixth century (4.2.), when an epidemic of plague appeared in the Byzantine Empire.

However, both empires could not stay away from the hot conflict for a long time. As a matter of fact, in 526-527 AD, conflicts began in the Caucasus and in Upper Mesopotamia (Dignas & Winter, 2007, p. 38). In the early years of the war, the Sassanids dominated the battles. In 527 AD, the Iberian revolt was suppressed. In 529 AD, the Lakhmids attacked the Syrian lands of the Byzantine Empire (Greatrex & Lieu, 2002, p. 86). As a result of these fierce raids from the desert region, Emperor Justinian began to utilise the forces of the Ghassanid Al-Harith bin Jabalah. When Shahanshah Kavadh died in 531 AD (Daryaee, 2009, p. 28), he was succeeded by his son Khosrow I, and peace talks began between the Byzantine and the Sasanian. As a result of the reconciliation of the parties, "Eternal Peace" was signed in 532 AD. Both states withdrew from the territories they occupied, and Byzantium agreed to pay 110 *kentenaria* for once (1.22.3) (Prokopios, 2014, p. 57).

The Sasanian Shahanshah Khosrow I, who was worried about the successes of the Byzantine Empire in the western expeditions, went on the offensive before his enemy

became even strength and launched looting attacks on the cities of Syria and Mesopotamia in 540 AD (Morrisson, 2014, p. 49; Daryaei, 2009, pp. 30-31; Dignas & Winter, 2007, p. 39). During this period of struggle, the Sasanians banned the sale of silk to the Byzantine Empire. Thus, he harmed the Byzantine economy. In the face of this move, Justinian started activities to strengthen the Maritime Silk Road again. However, the Sassanids put forward countermeasures to prevent Axumite merchants from sailing toward the Indian Ocean and trading with ocean shores. Khosrow I used his navy on the Persian Gulf and sent his merchants to the West Indian coast to compete with the Axumites (Karadeniz, 2011, p. 211; Heyd, 1975, p. 8). On the other hand, he also began to support the Himyarite Kingdom, located at the intersection of the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, against the Byzantine Empire.

The wars between the Byzantine Empire and the Sassanid Empire occurred in the form of direct battles on the territory of Lazika, Georgia, the Armenian Kingdom. These wars continued in Mesopotamia in the form of proxy wars over the Lakhmids and Ghassanids. In 541 AD, the Sasanian Empire invaded Lazika, which provided the land link of the Byzantine with the Caucasus. Thus, he initiated a containment policy against Byzantine Empire. Procopius accounted (2.2.1-4) that the Goth's king, Vitigis sent an envoy to Khosrow I before the second Sasanian-Byzantine war began in the sixth century and encouraged the Sasanians to attack the Byzantine Empire through this embassy (Procopius, 2014, p. 74). Thus, when the Byzantine army went to the eastern borders, the Goths began attacks on Italy. The wars in Italy lasted until 555, and eventually Byzantium, under the leadership of general Narses, dominated Italy (Ostrogorsky, 2019, p. 65; Diehl, 2006, pp. 37-38; Vasiliev, 1943, pp. 172-174). In 545 AD, a five-year truce was signed between the two empires (Dignas & Winter, 2007, p. 40).

Although the truce was concluded in 545 AD, the peacetime did not last very long. In 548 AD, Gubazes, King of Lazica, asked Justinian for support against the Sasanians. In 548-549, the Sasanian army suffered a series of defeats against the Byzantine and Lazic army. The Byzantine Empire and the Sasanian Empire fought on the territory of Lazica in 551 AD. In that year, the armistice of 545 AD was signed again to be valid for five years (Treadgold, 1997, pp. 204-209). However, this peace period also did not last long, and in 554 AD, the Lazic wars launched again (Dignas & Winter, 2007, p. 40). Due to the problems on the eastern border of the Sasanians (Kurbanov, 2010, pp. 185-186), Khosrow I accepted the truce in 557 AD (Daryaee, 2009, p. 31). In 562 AD, the Fifty-Year Peace Treaty was signed, and the Sassanid army left Lazica (Dignas & Winter, 2007, p. 147).

After the Fifty-Year Peace Treaty was signed in 562 AD, the wars between Byzantine Empire and the Sasanian Empire ended (Vasiliev, 1943, pp. 176-177). During this period, the Sasanians directed their attention to the eastern border (Daryaee, 2009, p. 31). When the Byzantine Emperor Justinian died in 565 AD, he was succeeded by his nephew Justin II (Morrisson, 2014, p. 53). During his reign, relations with the Sasanians commenced to break down. In 568 AD, the embassy headed by Maniakh, sent from the Türk Khaganate, reached Istanbul (Vaissière, 2005, pp. 202-203; Heyd, 1975, p. 18). Maniakh became the second delegate sent to Byzantine. The reason for the contact with Byzantine Empire is the diplomatic and economic tension between the Sasanians and the Türks. Justin II utilized this political situation to his favour and sent Zemarchus to Istemi Yabghu (Ahmetbeyoğlu, 2009, p. 16; Heyd, 1975, p. 18). The delegation, setting out in 568 AD, arrived in the capital of the west part of the Khaganate after a long journey.

While Zemarchus met with Istemi Yabghu, the Sasanian envoy also arrived in the capital. He got mad at this envoy because of Sasanian politics. When the humiliated envoy set out to return to his country, Istemi Yabghu also set out with his army to attack the Sasanians (Özcan, 2014, p. 32). In 569 AD, Zemarchus set out to arrive in Constantinepole. The following year, the Sasanian army invaded Himyarite in response to Byzantine Empire (Aktaş, 2020, pp. 241-242; Edwell, Fisher, Greatrex, Whately, & Wood, 2015, p. 258). In 571 AD, the Iberian and Armenian Kingdoms rebelled against the Sasanian Empire. The Arab kingdoms, which were Byzantine and Sasanian vassals, also began to fight in the Syrian Desert. Due to the tense political environment, Justin declared war on the Sasanian Empire in 572 AD and attacked Nisibis (Diehl, 2006, p. 48; Epiphania, 2008, pp. 1.2-3.), but this siege was unsuccessful. While Justin II conducted unsuccessful military operations in 572 AD, Khosrow I captured the fortress city of Dara, which was vital for Byzantium, in 573 AD (Treadgold, 1997, p. 222).

Khosrow I gave two thousand Byzantine young girls, whom he captured on his campaign in 573 AD, as gifts to the Türks, his allies. John of Ephesus stated that *The ruler of Persia [Khosrow I] ordered these young girls to be sent to the barbarians, who lived in the heart of the Persian country and were called Turkis, in exchange for their help* (Var, 2021, p. 99). According to Var, the Turkis mentioned in this passage cannot be Hephthalites. Moreover, it is unlikely that they are the Hephthalites' successors or Türks (2021, p. 103). His determinations are accurate. As we mentioned above, Istemi Yabghu waged war against the Sasasians in 569 AD. That's why the gift can't have gone to them. Some Sabir and Avar tribes crossed the Derbent, located in Dagestan, and took refuge with the Sasanians (Harmatta, 2002, p. 158; Agathias,

1975, (4.7.) p. 115) due to the Khaganate's capture of western Siberia in 560s. In our opinion, the Turkis that Khosrow I gave as a gift are these tribes.

According to Harmattan, a gold signet ring found in Uc Tepe in Azerbaijan, dating back to the 6th century AD, belonged to the Sabir or Avar warrior. There is an inscription on this golden ring, inscribed with a Middle Persian. Janos Harmatta commented on this writing as follows: *Silig the abarzēnīgānbed*. He claimed that *Silig* seems a Turkish proper name, whereas *abarzēnīgānbed* is an official title. He noted that *Silig* means “the pure” in Turkish. *Abarzēnīgānbed* means the *commander of the guards of the royal tent*. It clearly appears that a Türk nobleman entered the Sasanian Shanshan’s service (Harmatta, 2002, pp. 153-156). Khosrow I utilized these tribes in the army of eight hundred people (Aktaş, 2020, pp. 241-242) that he sent to Yemen. It is likely that he rewarded them for this services.

The war in 573 AD was not very heartwarming for Byzantine Empire. In Italy, the Lombards, and in the Balkans, the Avars began to attack the Empire (Vasiliev, 1943, pp. 213-217). Tiberius, Justin's co-regent, decided on peace negotiations. Since diplomatic reconciliation could not be established, the Sassanids again began violent attacks in 578 AD. Khosrow I died in 579 AD and was succeeded by his son Hormuzd IV (Dignas & Winter, 2007, p. 42). He abolished the kingdom of Iberia in 580 and turned the region into a governorate (Mikaberidze, 2007, p. 517). In 582 AD, Emperor Tiberius died and was succeeded by Maurice. During this period, battles without absolute winners took place. In 588-589 AD, Bahram Cubin defeated the army of Hephthalites-Türk Khaganate (Daryaee, 2009, p. 31).

Hormuzd IV wanted to have Bahram killed to prevent him from getting stronger but he failed. Therefore, Bahram Chubin rebelled and seized the throne (Daryaee, 2012, p. 199; Greatrex & Lieu, 2002, p. 172). Hormuzd IV was killed and succeeded

by his son Khosrow II. However, in the battle, Khosrow II was defeated by Behram and fled to Byzantine. In 591 AD, with the support of the Byzantine army, he defeated Bahram at the battle of Blorathan. Bahram Chubin fled to the Western Türk Khaganate, but was assassinated soon afterwards (Pourshariati, 2008, pp. 118-130; Daryaee, 2009, pp. 32-33; Daryaee, 2012, p. 199; Dignas & Winter, 2007, pp. 42-43). Khosrow II, who ascended the throne again, ceded Dara, the western half of Iberia and a significant part of Persian Armenia to Byzantine Empire in 591 AD (Ostrogorsky, 2019, p. 73; Diehl, 2006, p. 48; Treadgold, 1997, p. 232). During the sixth century, the two empires fought each other on the border extending from the Caucasus to Yemen on the North-South line.

In the sixth century, while these struggles were maintained in the Middle Eastern part of the Silk Road, two significant powers in Central Asia and North India competed with each other. From the fifth century AD on, the wars commenced between the Hephthalite Empire, which dominated the Western part of the Tarim Basin, Sogdiana, Tokharistan, Khwarazm and Northwestern India, and the Gupta Kingdom, which possessed Central India. We do not have enough information about the early periods of Hephthalite history. There are various discussions about Chionites, Kidarites, and Hephthalites. According to Zeimal, there is a difference between Hephthalites and Kidarites. The name Kidarite indicates not the ethnic origin but a heraldic name (Zeimal, 1996, p. 124). According to Vaissière, it is certain that the Hephthalites came from the Altay, and they may even have been Ogurs (2003, p. 124). According to Kurbanov, the emergence of the Hephthalites on the historical stage happened in the middle of the fifth century (Kurbanov, 2010, p. 152). They came to the Bacteria region from the east, possibly from the Dzungaria or the southwestern foothills of Altai (Savaş, 2021, p. 45).

With the battles they won against the Kidarites around 460 AD, they soon expanded their borders to the north of Pakistan. During Akhshunwar, they annexed Tokharistan, Ferghana, Sogdiana, the western parts of the Tarim Basin, and Khwarazm to their lands (Kurbanov, 2010, p. 153; Savaş, 2021, p. 51). Peroz I lost his battle with the Hephthalite and was killed. Because of this defeat, the Sasanians became vassals of the Hephthalites (Rezakhani, 2017, pp. 128-129). Until the fall of the Hephthalites during Khosrow I, the Sasanians had to tax their neighbors to the east (Kurbanov, 2010, pp. 170-171). When the Mazdeki rebellion broke out, Kavadh fled the country and took refuge with the Hephthalites (Daryaee, 2009, p. 27). With military support, he headed for the Sassanid lands in order to win the throne. With this incident, which happened just before the sixth century, Kavadh was restored to the Sassanid throne (Kurbanov, 2010, p. 173).

Kavadh, who asked the Byzantine Emperor Anastasius I for financial assistance to pay the Hephthalite army, waged war when his request was rejected (Daryaee, 2009, pp. 27-28). In the battle with Byzantium in 502 AD, the Hephthalite army also fought together with the Sasanians. There was no change in the western borders until Khosrow allied with the Turks and attacked the Hephthalite Empire. The beginning of the expansion of Akhuns towards the south occurred between 460 and 470 AD (Kurbanov, 2010, pp. 174-176). At the end of the fifth century, Toramana was seen with the title of Teghin. It is understood that Toramana was not the ruler during this period (Savaş, 2021, p. 60). After Toramana ascended the throne as ruler, he expanded the borders of the Hephthalites even further south. During Toramana period, the frontiers that extended to the ancient city of Eran in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh were narrowed as a result of the wars with the Aulikar Empire

(Savaş, 2021, p. 68). The inscription Eran in Brahmi letters was erected here in the name of Toramana (Çeliktaş, 2019, p. 41).

When Toramana died in 515 AD, he was succeeded by his son Mihirakula. After taking control of Kashmir and the Indus River area, Mihirakula headed for the territory of the Gupta Empire. With his victory in 534, he extended his borders to Central India. According to the Savaş, after the defeat in 533 AD, Mihirakula passed away (2021, p. 73). According to Kurbanov, after Gandhara Kingdom was defeated by Mihirakula, Mihirakula passed away (2010, p. 181). His brother Pravarasena succeeded to the throne. However, he managed the southern parts of the country. Just like the division of the Turkish Khaganate into east and west, the Hephthalite Empire was divided into at least two divisions in the sixth century. The Hephthalites, with whom the Turkic Khaganate fought, are those of the north. Their territory stretched from the east to the western parts of the Tarim Basin. The Hephthalites conquered places from Kashgar to Turfan between 462 and 479 AD (Kurbanov, 2010, p. 182).

During the excavation, a tomb was brought to light in Xi'an in 2003. The walls of this tomb were adorned with reliefs depicting scenes of ceremonial dinners, hunts, and caravans. These scenes point out a close touch with the Central Asian and Iranian worlds. In addition, two inscriptions were found in the grave. These were written in Sogdian and Chinese. It has been learned from Chinese inscription the nation of tomb owner was Shi (Kesh). He was assigned as Sabao to Liangzhu. In addition, his name is mentioned as Wirkak in the Sogdian inscription. Hephthalites have been depicted with short hair on reliefs, however, Turks have been depicted with long hair (Grenet & Riboud, 2003, s. 138).

A close relationship was established between the Hephthalite and the Rouran Khaganate against the Wei state. After the founded of the Turkic Khaganate, it

became a border with Hephthalite. The fact that the Hephthalite Empire was allied with the Rourans and dominated the significant parts of the Silk Route caused the war between Hephthalites and Türks. This struggle will be discussed in detail below in the political history of the Türk Khaganate. In the sixth century, the political and economic conjuncture in Western Turkestan and Northern India was the same as we described above. On the other hand, there was a Northern Wei dynasty in northern China in the first quarter of the sixth century. The Northern Wei state was founded in 386 by the Tuoba, the tribe of Xianbei (Pearce, 2019, p. 155). Rene Grousset stated that the Touba were a Turkic clan that managed to unite the Turkic and Mongol states in northern China (2017, p. 90).

By the sixth century, Emperor Xuanwu was on the throne. With the death of the emperor in 515, a struggle for the throne began within the country. He was succeeded by his younger son Yuan Xu, who ascended the throne at the age of five as emperor under the name Xiaoming (Pearce, 2019, pp. 178-179). During this period, Buddhism in Northern China was personally supported and popularized by Empress Hu (Grousset, 2017, p. 94). After the assassination of Emperor Xiaoming in 528, the Northern Wei state began the process of dividing into two. Because of the deceased emperor, Xiaozhuang was enthroned by Erzhu Rong, a general. However, the new emperor had the general killed in 530 AD. After that, Erzhu Zhao, Erzhu Rong's nephew, also killed Xiaozhuang in the same year. Because of the events that occurred, Gao Huan, a general, rebelled and managed to kill Erzhu Zhao, enthroning Xiao wu in 532 AD. However, as a result of his struggle with the emperor in 534 AD, he divided the state into two parts. Thus, the Northern Wei state was destroyed, and then two states emerged (Pearce, 2019, pp. 181-182; Grousset, 2017, p. 94). The

history of the established Western Wei and Eastern Wei states and their successors will be examined below with the history of the Türk Khaganate.

One of the dominant powers in the sixth century in East Asia was the Rouran Khaganate. According to Grousset, the Rouran Khaganate, which dominated the Mongolian steppes in the sixth century, is of Xianbei origin (2017, p. 90). While Eberhard states that the Rourans are a mixture of Turks and Mongols and do not belong to a single ethnic identity (1995, p. 165), Yildirim also emphasizes that they spoke a similar language to the Tuoba and that their ethnic identity was Turkic (2015b, p. 56). At the beginning of the sixth century, the Rouran Khagan was Yujiulu Nagai. When the khagan died in 506 AD, he was succeeded by his son Yujiul Futu. However, his reign was short-lived. He was killed in 508 AD. The throne passed to his son Yujiulu Chounu (Yıldırım, 2015b, p. 35). The longest-reigning khagan of the Rourans was Yujiulu Anagui. He was able to establish a successful relationship with the Northern Wei dynasty in 520 AD, when he first ascended the throne (Kradin, 2005, p. 157). With the splitting of the Northern Wei dynasty into two, the Rourans began to increase their power (Yıldırım, 2015b, pp. 47-49). The fall of the Rouran Khaganate was caused by the Türk *Bodun*, which entered the historical scene in the second quarter of the sixth century.

Historical records indicate that the ancestors of the Türks lived in a country called Sou in the north of the Xiongnu and migrated to the foothills of the Altai, losing a war they had waged against a neighbouring state (Yıldırım, 2019, pp. 59-60; Golden, 2018, p. 129; Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 11-12; Taşağıl, 2018, p. 106). This incident in historical sources has parallels with the Ergenekon epic. When they migrated to the Altai Mountains, they started working as blacksmiths under the Rouran Khaganate. According to Thierry (2010), Turks are ‘resident’ in this region. He claims that had

Turks been blacksmiths and weapons producers in the Rouran Khaganate, they would be not a strictly “nomadic” tribe because iron production and iron working necessitate the sedentary. For this reason, before Türk Khaganate was established, they had lived partway sedentary in the Rouran Khaganate (2010, p. 60).

Chinese Sources state that the Ashina tribe settled Northwest of Gaochang. The information provided by historical sources is confirmed by archaeological finds. The finds of the Türks on the southern slope of the Altai Mountains date back to the 450s (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 12; Kafesoğlu, 2013, p. 96; Ercilasun, 2016, p. 36). By the end of the Northern Wei Dynasty (534), it seemed that the Bumin’s tribe was gaining strength. During those dates, they established trade relations with cities belonging to the Wei dynasty (Kafesoğlu, 2013, p. 96). According to Liu Mau-Tsai (2019), this date is 534 years (p. 16). Various research works have shown that in 534, the Wei dynasty was divided into two, and the Eastern and Western Wei states emerged (Balci, 2021, p. 171; Pearce, 2019, pp. 181-182; Grousset, 2017, p. 94; Taşağıl, 2018, p. 107).

In the light of this information, we understand that Bumin was the head of the Ashina tribe as early as 534 AD and that he led the union of tribes consisting of 11 tribes (Erkoç, 2019, p. 104) that would later form the Türk Khaganate on behalf of the Rourans. As we mentioned above, the tribes' unity under Bumin's administration came to the bazaars in the Chinese border cities in order to trade silk. According to Klyashtorniy (2008), the natural border of the Wei state with the steppe geography was the Yellow River. Proceeding from this idea, he states that the tribes under the rule of Bumin came to the banks of the Yellow River and bought silk and grain here in exchange for horses (p. 116). The date when Bumin and its related tribes are mentioned again in Chinese sources is approximately 542 AD. The year in which the

Turkish name was mentioned for the first time with certainty is 542 AD (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 18).

In this record dated to the year 534 AD, Bumin came to the edge of the Yellow River to trade with the tribes under his command, while information dated to the year 542 AD states that he crossed the Yellow River and flocked to the northern lands of the Northern Wei state. What was the changed situation in 542 for Bumin, who is mentioned in the sources as trading in 534? What made him conduct military activities? The image of Bumin in 534 AD is not the typical image of a steppe warrior. The tribes under his rule were seen by the Northern Wei state as merchants who came to the Yellow River to trade silk. However, by 542 AD, Bumin was depicted with a portrait of a warrior. These raids likely began a few years before 542 AD. What triggered this aggressive policy of Bumin? According to Klyashtorniy (2018), the reason for this change is that 'Wei border guards have removed some obstacles in the silk trade' (p.117). Ganiev (2014), on the other hand, attributes this change to the climate change that occurred between the years 534-542 (p. 5).

As we will explain the details in the following pages, a series of volcanic eruptions affecting the Northern Hemisphere occurred in 536 and 540. Byzantine sources recorded the climate change that occurred (Oppenheimer, 2011, p. 256). Recent tree ring surveys and studies of sulfides at the poles have demonstrated that a climate disaster has happened on the dates mentioned that have seriously affected the northern hemisphere. As with the accurate determination made by Ganiev, what caused Bumin to move away from commercial relations and engage in military activities was the climate change that affected the entire northern hemisphere. Liu Mau-Tsai (2019) considers that the place where Bumin attacked was a region in present-day Shaanxi province (p. 47). The tribes under Bumin were not the only

steppe communities to attack the Western and Eastern Wei territories at that time.

Anagui, the Rouran Khan, made looting attacks against both Wei states after 538 AD (Yıldırım, 2015b, p. 48).

After 536, the Tuyuhuns also began to raid Western Wei territory. In almost the same year as the Bumin raid of 542 AD, the Tuyuhun also attacked the Western Wei (Tok, 2021, p. 78). When we look at these raids, whose chronology we have quoted, it is seen that there was an intensification after 536 AD. Although it is a usual event for steppe tribes to attack China, it is observed that there is a proportion between this concentration and the climate crisis. These events have provided indications that a number of changes have taken place in the steppe geography under the influence of the climate crisis. A significant example of the impact of the climate crisis we mentioned above on the entire northern hemisphere is the following; shortly before the year 542, there was a major famine in Northern China (Newfield, 2018, p. 470). Moreover, the Wei Dynasty was divided into two parts due to a civil war.

In the competition between Western Wei and Eastern Wei, the political position of the Rourans has become an vital antilibration. Due to Anagai Khan's alliance with Eastern Wei, Western Wei went in search of allies. The attempt of the Töles to rebel against the Rourans was suppressed by Bumin. The rebellious Töles tribes were forced to recognize the dominance of Bumin. With this mass of about fifty thousand families entering into his service, his power launched to grow rapidly (Chavannes, 2007, p. 249). The "Töles tribes", mentioned in this passage, mean a group of tribes that extend from the Kherlen River in the east to the Caspian Sea in the west (Taşağıl, 2020, pp. 59-60; 2014, p. 21). Taşağıl (2021) considers that the Töles, participating in the rebellion movement, are located around the Tola River and south of Baikal Lake

(p. 21). Therefore, Taşağıl (2019) has the intention that the victory against the Tölesler as a turning point for the history of Türk Khaganate (p. 21).

In order to create a balance against the Rourans, the Western Wei state came into contact with this new force that was rising in the steppe. The envoy of Western Wei came to Bumin in 545 AD. For the steppe world, the arrival of an envoy from an independent state meant diplomatic recognition. With the appearance of this envoy, there was a significant increase in his reputation in Bumin's legality and charismatic leadership. In 546, Bumin sent an embassy to the Western Wei dynasty. Thus, an alliance between the parties became (Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 19-20; 2018, p. 108; Kafesoğlu, 2013, p. 96; Yıldırım, 2019, p. 60). The steppe khaganates consisted of more than one *Bodun*. The concept of *bodun* meant the union of *bods* (Kafesoğlu, 2013, p. 223). At the beginning of each *bodun*, there were administrators with various titles. Some of these administrators were appointed from the center, while others were selected from among the *bodun*'s own local administrators (Erkoç, 2008, pp. 227-229).

From this point of view, the steppe khaganates were in a kind of federative state structure. The *boduns*, whose managers were not appointed from the center, exhibited an autonomous administration. This led to the destruction of the khaganates by internal revolts in a short time. The union of tribes under Bumin was also a *bodun* of this type. Bumin was not a centrally appointed administrator by the Rouran Khaganate, but he was the head of the clan of the Ashinas, a local *bod*. These autonomous power of Bumin, the defeat of the rebellious Töles (Chavannes, 2007, p. 249; Taşağıl, 2014, p. 21) and the embassy delegation from Western Wei increased his courage. Having reached the limit of his power charisma, diplomatically and militarily, Bumin wanted to marry the daughter of Anagui, the Rouran Khan.

Chavannes interpreted Bumin's request as a reward for suppressing the Töles rebellion against the Rourans (Chavannes, 2007, p. 249). Taşağıl states that Bumin considers himself the same as the Rouran Khagan (2014, p. 21). As noted by Taşağıl, the institution of marriage for the steppe states is one of the indicators of diplomatic equivalence. Bumin had asked Anagui to accept his daughter as a wife in a concrete sense, while in an abstract sense he had requested to be accepted as equivalent to Anagui.

The most vital thing that shows that what Bumin demands in the background has a political meaning is the harsh response of Anagui, the Khan of Rouran, to Bumin. Anagui, through the messenger he sent to Bumin said; *you are our blacksmith slave and how dare you to talk like that?* (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 21; Yıldırım, 2019, p. 60) Bumin's audacious request was met with humiliation by the Rouran Khan. Bumin had the messenger killed in response to these harsh words. He contacted the Western Wei Dynasty to establish a marriage bond that would confirm his independence. The Western Wei dynasty which was attacked by the Northern Qi dynasty, which destroyed the Eastern Wei dynasty in 550 AD, and its ally the Rouran Khaganate, rejoiced Bumin's request for this marriage and Princess Changle was chosen as Bumin's wife in 551 AD (Golden, 2018, p. 69; Taşağıl, 2014, p. 22; Zhanar, 2013, p. 119). Due to the established kinship ties, the Western Wei Dynasty was openly allied with Bumin. In this way, Western Wei gained to balance that it was looking for against the Rourans.

Although we do not know exactly what the situation of the Rourans was in this process, these political moves of Bumin (NmuV) support the assumption that the Rourans were in a difficult situation. In the spring of 552 AD, Bumin (NmuV) attacked the Rourans. In the battle north of Huaihuang, the Rouran army suffered a

decisive defeat. After the vanquishment, Anagui Khagan committed suicide on the battlefield (Yıldırım, 2015b, p. 49). The Rouran groups that remained from the debacle took refuge in the Northern Qi Dynasty. With this victory, Bumin (NmuV) received the title of Illig Khagan (the Great and Wealthy Khagan or Ruler of People) and established Türk Khaganate in 552 AD (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 22). Shortly after the Khaganate was established, it headed towards the Tarim Basin and the Sogdiana region. These two regions were inhabited by Iranian peoples. After the Turkish Khaganate captured these lands, located in the west of the Altai Mountains, it established a number of management systems. At the very beginning of this, a bilateral state organization was founded.

The regions in the east of the Khaganate were dominated by Bumin with the title of Khagan. The western lands of the Khaganate were under the administration of Bumin's brother Istemi (Sinor D. , 2017, p. 400). Some researchers argue that Istemi was also a Khagan (Golden, 2018, p. 140). The basis of this opinion is the text contained in the inscriptions builded during the time of the Second Türk Khaganate. However, it is known that the Turkic Khaganate is the largest administrator of the Kagan in the East under the state organization. On the other hand, when looking at the coins belonging to the heirs of Istemi, it has been seen that they historically used the titles of *Yabghu*, *Yabghu Khagan* and *Khagan* (Babayar, 2014, p. 14). The stamps printed on these coins also show changes. The tamga used by the Western wing of the Khaganate between 560 and 580 is; . During that period, they used the title of *Yabghu*.

Between 580 and 630, it is seen that the west of the Khaganate was less dependent to the east. We understand this situation that both from the new tamga which they have started using and from the *Yabghu-Khagan* title they have chosen. That's why

we chose to use the title *Yabghu* for the Istemi in our study. When studying the political events of the Turkish Khaganate between the years 580 and 600 AD, we will use the title *Yabghu-Khagan* for the rulers of the western part. As for the eastern part, we will always use the title of *Khagan*.

Before the period when Bumin appeared on the historical stage, the Rourans were beginning to gain strength. The reason is that the Northern Wei state was divided into two parts (Yıldırım, 2015b, p. 49). However, in 536, the climatic anomalies that affected the Northern Hemisphere influenced also the Rourans. When we consider the Gobi Desert where the Rourans live and its surroundings, the economy of the places where the Töles and tribes of Bumin live is more diverse, especially in terms of animal species and nature. According to Keys (2000), the drought caused by the climate crisis between 536 and 542 AD contributed vital damage to the herds of horses and sheep on the steppe. The Rourans were more affected by this famine than other steppe communities. This disaster must have brought about the destruction of the Rouran Khaganate (p.30). Considering the severe famine experienced by the Rourans, The subordination of the Töles to Bumin, and his alliance with Western Wei, we can say that all the conditions were ready for Bumin to start this rebellion. On the other hand, the season in which the attack was selected is also vital. Spring is a season when animals in the steppe will begin to breed. When the Rourans' animals were not ready yet, they pounced. Thus, the Rouran khaganate was withdrawn from the historical scene.

Some of the remnants of the defeated Rourans took refuge in the Northern Qi Dynasty under the leadership of Anagui's son Anluochen, his brother Dengzhu, Dengzhu's sons Tiefa and Kangti. Some of them retreated to the steppe and became subject to the Dengshuzi. The new khan of the Eastern Rourans was Tiefa. He was

killed in a battle with the Kitans in 553. After Tiefert's death, her father became the khan of Dengzhu Rouran (Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 22, 25; Yıldırım, 2015b, p. 49). After the death of Bumin in 552, he was succeeded by his son Kara and received the title of Ilci Khagan (Erkoç, 2016, p. 45). According to the information mentioned in the monument to Ash Tigin erected during the Second Khaganate, the Byzantine ambassador (Purum) attended the funeral ceremony due to the death of Bumin Khagan (Erdemir, 2004, p. 425). According to us, in this inscription, Bumin and Istemi's funeral were confused or consciously shown to belong to Bumin's funeral. If it is a conscious state, it is because of the struggle of the Second Khaganate with the *On Oks*. The Second Türk Khaganate wanted to dominate the *On Oks*, who were the heirs of the Western Türk Khaganate. Here they may have wanted to provide themselves with a diplomatic reference by showing that the funeral belongs to Bumin. Continuing his father's policy, Ilci Khagan maintained to fight as a soldier against the Rourans. In 553 AD, he attacked both Dengzhu and Dengshuzi and defeated them. When Dengshuzi was defeated near Woye, he took refuge in the Western Wei Dynasty. When Dengzhu was defeated, he was killed and replaced by his son Kangti (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 23).

After the death of Ilci Kagan in 553 AD, his brother Mukan became the head of the Türk Khaganate (Golden, 2018, p. 140; Sinor D. , 2017, p. 400). He also continued the Rouran policy of his father Bumin and his brother Kara Khagan. In 553 AD, he first organized an expedition on the Eastern Rourans. The Khagan of the Eastern Rourans, Kangti, was defeated by the Mukan Khagan. Because of this, Kangti was forced to take refuge in the Northern Qi Dynasty. However, he was dismissed by the Northern Qi Emperor Wenxuan and replaced by Anagui's son Anluochen (Yıldırım, 2015b, pp. 49-50). In order to reduce the threat of the Rourans, Mukan

made a peace treaty with the Eastern Wei dynasty. He allowed the Rourans to maintain their presence in the territory of Northern Qi and acquired significant commercial interests. However, this rapprochement between the Western Wei and the Türk Khaganate set the Eastern Wei state aback. In order to eliminate the rapprochement, they sent envoys to the Khaganate (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 24).

Thus, Western Wei protected its relations with the Turkic Khaganate. Anluochen, who became the head of the Eastern Rourans, rebelled against the Northern Qi state in 554 AD. His rebellion was spread by the Northern Qi Emperor Wenxuan, and the people subject to him were enslaved. Thereby, in 554 AD, the threat of the Eastern Rouran to the Türk Khaganate was completely eliminated (Dien, 2019, p. 198). In 553 AD, Dengshuzi was defeated by the Kara Khagan and took refuge in the Western Wei state, and in 555 AD, he was also defeated during the campaign of the Mukan Khagan. After the defeat, Dengshuzi again took refuge in the Western Wei dynasty with three thousand people. Mukan also wanted to eliminate this Rourans last remnant. He sent an envoy to the Western Wei Emperor Gong and demanded that the Rourans be handed over to him. Because of this demand, Dengshuzi and his three thousand accompanying people were handed over to the envoy of Mukan Khagan. These last remaining heirs of the Rourans were also killed by the Khagan, and thus the Rouran Khanate was completely removed from the historical scene (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 25).

Mukan ascended to the throne of the Türk Khaganate in 553 AD and ruled the khaganate until 572 AD. This period was the year of the brilliant victories of the Khaganate. In 555 AD, the Rourans' heirs were completely destroyed, and the Mukan Khagan organized excursions to subjugate other *boduns* living in the steppe. He campaigned against the Kitans of Xianbei origin in the east and this *bodun* bowed to

the Khaganate. Upon this victory in the east, the Kyrgyz *bodun*, who lived north of Lake Baikal, was voluntarily annexed to the Türk Khaganate (Golden, 2018, p. 140; Sinor D. , 2017, p. 400; Kafesoğlu, 2013, p. 97; Taşağıl, 2014, p. 25; Erkoç, 2020, p. 62). In addition, the Proto-Mongol Kumoxi and Shiwei tribes located in the east were also connected to the Türk Khaganate. After the Khaganate gained dominance in Mongolia and its surroundings, it initiated to move towards the west of the Altai Mountains.

In order to dominate the Silk Road, the Türk's army under the leadership of Mukan Khagan and Istemi Yabghu attacked the Hephthalites in 555 AD. In this battle, the Hephthalite's army was defeated (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 25; Kurbanov, 2010, p. 185). According to Savaş, this battle is likely to have been in 558 AD, not in 555 AD (2021, p. 80). After the battle in 555 AD, Istemi Yabghu, who ruled the western regions of the Türk Khaganate, formed an alliance with the Sasanian Shahanshah Khosrow Anushirvan against the Hephthalite Empire. In order to consolidate this alliance, he also married his daughter to Khosrow I (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 39). In 558 AD, the Türk's army under the leadership of Mukan Khagan launched an offensive towards the Sogdian lands of the Hephthalites (Kurbanov 2010 p. 185). Grousset determines that this battle happened in 565 AD (2017, p. 112) while Chavannes (2007, p. 254) stated also that the annihilation of Hephthalite was between 563 AD and 567 AD. Maksudov also agrees with Chavannes's opinion (2020, s. 68).

According to the agreement with the Khosrow I, the Sasanian's army would simultaneously attack the Hephthalites from the west. However, Shahanshah Khosrow Anushirvan did not attack the Empire by breaking a promise and went on hold. The Türk's army first took Tashkent and moved towards Karshi. The Hephthalite king Gatfar and his army were defeated here (Kurbanov, 2010, pp. 186-187). When the

Türk's army eliminated the Hephthalite's forces in Sogdiana, Khosrow I, taking advantage of this situation, invaded Tokharistan without a fight. The Türk Khaganate, on the other hand, annexed Sogdiana and Ferghana and the Tarim Basin. The Amu Darya River became the border between the two states (Beckwith, 2009, p. 116; Taşağıl, 2014, p. 39; Frye R. N., 2000, pp. 24-25). After this victory, the Türk Khaganate became the most important power of the Silk Road. In addition to the Byzantine Empire and the Sasanian Empire, which had great powers on the Silk Road, the Türk Khaganate was also added.

With the conquest of Sogdiana, the role of the Sogdians in the Silk Road trade increased dramatically. Along the Silk Road, the Sogdians began to trade as merchants of the Türk Khaganate. After the withdrawal of the Hephthalite Empire from the historical scene, the Avar communities appeared. Soon after, Avars appeared in Byzantine sources. They are said to have been the successors of the Rourans, who were destroyed by the Türk Khaganate in the Mongolian steppes (Golden, 2018, p. 121; Kurbanov, 2010, p. 184; Beckwith, 2009, p. 114). In 563 AD, the embassy delegation from Türk Khaganate showed their stance against the Avars very clearly and clearly (Ahmetbeyoğlu, 2012, pp. 543-544; Özcan, 2019, p. 217). Beckwith cites the date of the arrival of this apostle as the 558 AD (2009, p. 116). The second embassy, which arrived in 568 AD, also offered to form an alliance with Byzantine Empire against the Avars (Özcan, 2014, p. 30; Ahmetbeyoğlu, 2009, pp. 15-16; Mangaltepe, 2009; Protector, 1985, pp. 115-117).

Because of this situation, the opinion that the Avars were the continuation of the Rourans has emerged as a strong argument (Özcan, 2020, p. 133). However, when we consider that the Türks were located to the west of the Rourans, it was difficult for the dispersed Rouran masses to cross the Türk *bodun* and go to the west. On the other

hand, there are some temporal problems between the fall of the Rourans and their appearance in Byzantine sources. They were supposed to cross the Dzungaria, but there were Türk Khaganate in the area. In addition, Chinese sources state that the disbanded Rouran groups fled to China and the east of Mongolia. Scholars based on Chinese sources believe that the Avars and the Rourans are different communities (Grousset, 2017, p. 199; Kafesoğlu, 2013, pp. 154-155). The information given by Theophylact Simocatta (7.8.5) supports the opinion that the Avars and the Rourans are different. He stated that “...*the Pseudo-Avars... are divided in their ancestry, some bearing the time-honoured name of Var while others are called Chunni*” (Whitby & Whitby, 1988, p. 190; Mangaltepe, 2009).

There are also archaeological finds to support this view. Alram drew attention to Avar coins belonging to the Kidarite imitation have been found in Poland and Hungary (2014, p. 271). These coins give us clues about the Avar migration. After the destruction of the Hephthalites by the Türks, the Avars initiated to migrate to Europe. We argue that the Avars were likely to depend on the Hephthalites. These coins underpinned our argument. Within the framework of these views, we believe that the Avars are a nomadic community living in the region of Khwarazm and Tokharistan, subject to the Hephthalites. There is a parallel between the fall of the Hephthalite Empire and the appearance of the Avars in Byzantine sources. Probably, these Avar masses were mixed with the Ogur *bods* in the north of the Caspian Sea, where they migrated (Grousset, 2017, pp. 199-200). Due to the fact that the Khaganate conquered the Khwarazm region and quickly headed for the Caucasus, the Avars moved towards the Crimea together with some Ogur *bods* they connected to them.

In 555-556 AD, the Mukan Khagan organized campaign to dynasties in China. In order to stop the attacks of the Türk Khaganate, Western Wei gave Mukan a hundred

thousand rolls of silk. With the peace made, the incursions into the Western Wei state were stopped. At that time, the Northern Qi dynasty increased its defensive measures. However, during this period, Mukan's new target was the Tuyuhuns, not the Northern Qi. In 556 AD, Mukan led an excursion to the Tuyuhuns, passing through the territory of his ally Western Wei. The Tuyuhuns were defeated and their property confiscated. After this victory of Mukan, it is observed that he did not do much military activity in Mongolia and Northern China for a while. The reason for this situation is that there is no power left against the Türk Khaganate (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 26). According to Kradin (2002), the Türks managed to establish the first steppe empire throughout Eurasia (p.381). Dromp believe that the Türk Khaganate was the first steppe empire to dominate all of Eurasia before the Mongols (1989, p. 138).

In 557 AD, the Western Wei state was destroyed and the Northern Zhou state was established (Dien, 2019b, p. 224). Since 560 AD, a close relationship has been established between Northern Zhou and the Türk Khaganate. The struggle between the Northern Qi and Northern Zhou states intensified in 563 AD, and these two states entered into a race to attract the Türk Khaganate to their side diplomatically and militarily. Mukan Khagan began to direct this competition in accordance with the interests of the Türk Khaganate. By supporting these two states in a balanced way, he made them fight each other and in return received large amounts of tribute from both states (Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 27-28; 2018, pp. 112-113). Among these tributes, silk was in an important position. The Türk Khaganate exported both the silk received as tribute from the states in China and the silk produced in the oasis states in the Tarim Basin to the west and the Indian subcontinent through Sogdian merchants.

In 563 AD, an embassy delegation from the Northern Zhou was met by the eastern branch Khagan Ashina Kutluk Ditou, the brother of the first Mukan Khagan, within

the borders of the Khaganate. He frightened the arriving envoy by saying that his elder brother Mukan had agreed with the Northern Qi. The delegation convinced the khan with a great diplomatic effort when they came to Otuken. As a result of this meeting, Mukan Khan agreed to send his daughter Ashina Huanghou to the Northern Zhou as a bride. It seems that Mukan Khagan supported the Northern Zhou, and his brother Ashina Kutluk Ditou promoted the Northern Qi, making both states vassals to the Türk Khaganate. At the end of 563 AD, Mukan set out on a campaign to Northern Qi with his brothers Ashina Ditou and Börü, who were minor khagans (Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 28-29; 2018, pp. 113-114; Liu M.-T. , 2019, pp. 33-34; Dien, 2019b, p. 226).

In the spring of 564 AD, the Turkish army besieged the Northern Qi's city of Qinyang. However, there was a climatic anomaly and there was snowfall on an area of about 567 km², reaching a height of one meter. Because of this incident, Mukan had to withdraw his army from the battlefield and on the way back, they saw the Yellow River frozen. In addition, the horses lost a lot of strength on this return trip. The year 564 AD was a difficult process for Mukan and his army (Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 29-30; Liu M.-T. , 2019, p. 43). Due to a diplomatic crisis with the Northern Zhou, the khan stopped sending his daughter as a bride. In 568 AD, the Northern Zhou envoys arrived in Mukan Khagan to solve the marriage problem and to improve diplomatic relations. However, during the negotiations, a sudden storm broke out, the tents were scattered, and there was snowfall for ten days. Mukan Khan, who was very affected by this climatic event, agreed to send his daughter as a bride, keeping his promise made in 563 AD. In the same year that the meeting took place, Ashina Huanghou was sent to the Northern Zhou state as a bride (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 31; 2018, p. 115; Kafesoğlu, 2013, p. 97; Dien, 2019b, p. 227; Liu M.-T. , 2019, p. 30).

This political marriage has had a number of commercial returns. The Northern Zhou state began to tax the Türk Khaganate with one hundred thousand rolls of silk annually. By the year 572, Mukan Khan had passed away (Yıldırım, 2019, p. 62). In the east of the Khaganate, from 552 to 572, these events took place, and in the western part, the administration was in the hands of Istemi Yabghu. The Sasanian Shahanshah Khosrow Anushirvan wanted to seize Sogdiana, which remained in the territory of the Türk Khaganate (Kafesoğlu, 2013, p. 98). This place was within the boundaries of the historical Achaemenid Empire, and the Sogdians, who were local people, were also an eastern Iranian people. The Sasanian Empire was at war with the Byzantine Empire on its western borders during this period. The Shahanshah Khosrow Anushirvan wanted to damage them economically by preventing the sale of silk to the Byzantine Empire. In addition, in order to protect the economy of his country, he intended to sell only silk produced by the Sasasanians to the Byzantine Empire.

For this reason, the Sogdian merchants of the Türk Khaganate were forbidden to pass through the territory of the Sasanian Empire and sell silk to the Byzantine Empire. In this way, it would have damaged the economy of the Khaganate, which was increasingly a threat to it on the eastern border. In this way, it would have damaged the economy of the Türk Khaganate, which was increasingly a threat to it on the eastern border. There were many reasons why the Sasanian Shahanshah Khosrow Anushirvan considered the Khaganate a hazard. First, Khosrow I did not give military support to the Türk Khaganate before the fall of the Hephthalite Empire, not complying with the alliance agreement he made with the Istemi Yabghu. After waiting for the result of the war between the Hephthalite and the Türk Khaganate, he annexed Tokharistan to his territory without a fight. This undeserved gain is likely to have offended the Istemi Yabghu.

The second is that as a result of Istemi's military activities between 557 and 565, the Khwarezm region joined the territory of the Türk Khaganate and his army reached the north of the Caspian Sea. A third reason is that the Sasanians have been paying tribute to the Hephthalite since Kavadh I. After fall of the Hephthalite Empire, Istemi Yabghu asked Shahanshah Khosrow Anushirvan to pay the same tribute to him (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 39). In 563 AD, the Türks sent an envoy named *Askel* to the Byzantine (Confessor, 1997, p. 351; Frye R. N., 1998, s. 179; Ahmetbeyoğlu, 2012, pp. 543-544; Özcan, 2019, p. 217). According to Vardan, this ambassador is the second one, who came to Byzantine Empire (2012, p. 85). Beckwith cites the date of the arrival of this apostle as the 558 AD (2009, p. 116). *Askel* is one of the five tribes that make up the *Nushibi*, the western branch of the *On Ok* (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 223; Sinor & Klyashtorny, 1996, p. 328; Erkoç, 2019, p. 108; Sinor D. , 2017, p. 406).

The Sasanians, due to the activities of Istemi in the west, bordered the Turkic Khaganate on the east and northeast frontier. Shahanshah Khosrow Anushirvan's discomfort with being neighbours with the Türks negatively affected the relations of the Sasanian-Türk Khaganate. Shahanshah Khosrow I purchased silks, which present by the first embassy delegation, sent by Istemi Yabghu, and he burned it before the eyes of the missions. He also displayed this hostile attitude towards the second delegation sent. The delegation was murdered by poisoning (Protector, 1985, (10.1) p. 113; Taşağıl, 2014, p. 40). This incident broke the relationship between Khosrow and Istemi. However, the Yabghu wanted to find allies before attacking the Sasanians. On the advice of Maniakh, a Sogdian administrator (Vaissière, 2005, p. 167; Protector, 1985, p. 115), Istemi decided to contact the Byzantine Empire (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 40). In 567, a Turkish delegation headed by Maniakh was sent to the Byzantine Empire through the Caucasus.

In 568 AD, Ambassadors of the Turkic Khaganate arrived in Constantinople with a letter in Scythian (possibly Turkish) and here they were greeted with friendship. According to Vaissière, this letter was written Sogdian alphabet (2005, p. 203). Discussions on the language of this letter have not reached a full conclusion. According to some researchers, the letter was written in Turkish (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 40; Ercilasun, 2016, p. 64; Yılmaz A. , 2015, p. 43). It is known that it was in the seventh century that Nestorian Christianity was deeply spread in Central Asia (Feltham, 2009, p. 19). The Sogdian alphabet is one derived from Aramaic (Şirin, 2020, p. 45). On the other hand, there is no possibility that the Romans did not know Aramaic and its derivatives. On the other hand, there is no possibility that the Romans did not know Aramaic and its derivatives. Likewise, Byzantine merchants are likely to have had contacts with the Sogdian merchant in Syria and in territories of Sasanian. Therefore, we think that the letter, which is called Scythian, was written in Turkish.

These relations triggered the spread of the battle between Sasanian and Byzantine to Inner Asia. That is exactly why the 6th century is a complete “commercial space”. The sixth century was the maritime silk route and the overland silk route trade covering the Byzantine-ruled Mediterranean basin and the vassal Kingdom of Aksum; the Himyarite Kingdom; the Sassanid territories, India and Sri Lanka; the Turkish Khaganate on the Eurasian steppes and the Dynasties in Northern China. The political change in one of them naturally affected others. For this reason, it is a false inference to say that there was no globalization and trade area in Late Antiquity.

In response to the embassy delegation from the western part of the Khaganate in 567 AD, the Byzantine Emperor Justin II decided to send a delegation. In August 569 AD, an embassy delegation headed by Zemarchus set sail from Constantinople (Ayaz, 2018, p. 220). The delegation arrived in Sogdiana, and from there, they reached the

location of Yabghu, called *Ektag*, meaning Golden Mountain (Protector, 1985, (10.3. 21-25) pp. 117-119; Özcan, 2014, p. 31; Ahmetbeyoğlu, 2009, pp. 16-17). There are various discussions about where *Ektag* is located. Aydın (2016) states that the *Ektag* described by Menander is located in the Altai Mountain chain and is different from the *Ektag* mentioned in the Tonyukuk inscription (p. 71). Özcan (2014) indicates that the mountain was the Altai Mountains, which were also called the Golden Mountain during the Mongol era (p. 31). In the same way, Dobrovits (2011) considers that *Ektag* is located in the Altai range (p. 387). Sinor (2017) said that it is difficult to make an accurate determination of this place (p. 407). Golden (2018) remarks that *Ektag* is located in the Altai or Yulduz Valley (p. 142), while Grousset (2017) expressed that it is located around the Yulduz Valley (p. 113). Chavannes (2007) describes *Ektag* as located in the valley of the Tekis River north of Kucha and that this was the centre of the khaganate of the Western Türks (pp. 265-266). Taşağıl (2014), on the other hand, states that *Ektag* is located further east of the Talas River, in the Tenri Tagh range (Tian Shan) (p. 40). Ögel (1957) explained that *Ektag* is located in the Yulduz Valley north of Kucha (pp. 87, 116).

The most significant factor in not being able to determine the exact location of *Ektag* is that there are multiple Akdag names in Inner Asia. However, the information provided by Menander Protector gives us important clues. Menander (10.3. 21-25, 10.3.74-7) mentioned that “...*Sizabul* [Istemi] *was presently staying in a valley of so called Golden Mountain...*[On the way back] ...*When they were on the march and encamped in a place called Talas...*” (1985, pp. 119, 121). Based on the passage quoted, we can say that *Ektag* might be located east of the Talas River. If it were located as far east as the Yulduz Valley, Zemarchus would surely have passed near Lake Issyk. Menander mentions that Zemarchus passed by a large lake (Aral) and

went towards the Caucasus (1985, p. 125). Speaking of Lake Aral, Menander did not mention that Zemarchus passed through Lake Issyk when he went to Istemi or returned. In this case, *Ektag* may be located east of the Talas River and west of Lake Issyk. In our opinion, *Ektag* was near Tokmok.

The Byzantine ambassador who reached *Ektag* came into Istemi Yabghu's presence. While they were staying in the Talas region, the Sasanian envoy arrived. Yabghu quarreled with this delegate and declared war on the Sasanians. He allowed Zemarchus to return to his country and sent a new delegation to the Byzantine with him (Özcan, 2014, pp. 31-32). In 569 AD, Zemarchus set out to arrive in Constantinople. The following year, the Sasanian army invaded Himyarite in response to Byzantine Empire (Aktaş, 2020, pp. 241-242; Edwell, Fisher, Greatrex, Whately, & Wood, 2015, p. 258). As a result of the alliance between Istemi Yabghu and Byzantine Emperor Justin II, a war broke out between Byzantine and the Sasanian in 571 AD. In the following years, many envoys from Byzantium came to the Türk Khaganate. These envoys were Anankhast, Eutychius, Herodian Paul the Cilician and Valentinus (Mangaltepe, 2009; Protector, 1985, (19.1.1-17) p. 171). Due to the death of Istemi Yabghu in 576 AD, II. Tiberius sent Valentianus to the Turkic Khaganate as an envoy for the second time. However, Tardu mistreated this messenger, and the Türks waged war on Byzantine. They conducted a small military campaign against Byzantium in the Crimea (Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 40-41).

When we returned to the eastern part of the Khaganate again, after the death of Mukan Khagan in 572 AD, he was replaced by his brother Taspar Khagan, not his son Daluobian (Yıldırım, 2019, p. 62). Taspar Khan's name is mentioned as Tuobo in Chinese documents, while his name is mentioned as Taspar in the Bugut inscription. When he became the head of the Khaganate, the two neighboring Chinese states

immediately took action. They have entered into a race to establish friendship with this new Khagan. The Northern Zhou state offered a total of one hundred thousand rolls of silk, consisting of processed and raw silks, to the Khagan. In the same way, the Northern Qi state sent a large amount of gifts with its envoys because it was afraid of the attack of the Türk Khaganate. Taspar Khagan continued the foreign policy built by his older brother Mukan Khagan (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 33).

He subordinated the Northern Zhou and Northern Qi states to his khaganate as vassals (Yıldırım, 2019, p. 62; Erkoç, 2020, p. 62). Chinese sources explain the authority that Taspar established over these two states as follows: “My two loyal sons in the south are fighting for no reason”. (Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 33-34) This sentence given by the sources is a symbol explaining the relationship among the Türk Khaganate and the two vassal states. By organizing the administration of the khaganate, Taspar divided the eastern part into sub-khaganates and made himself the great khagan. He appointed his nephew Ashina Shetu as an Erzhu Khagan (Nevar Khagan in the Bugut inscription) to the east, and his other nephew Börü as a khagan to the west (Yıldırım, 2019, p. 62). Thus, the eastern branch of the Türk Khaganate was divided into three parts. It was located in the center as Taspar, in the west as Börü, and in the east as Erzhu khagan.

In addition to these, Taspar's uncle Istemi Yabghu was located in the western part of the Khaganate. During a military expedition to the northern Qi dynasty, the Buddhist monk Huilin was captured. This priest told the khan about Buddhism, which allowed him to enter this religion. In addition, a Buddhist Pagoda was built on the territory of the khaganate (Kafesoğlu, 2013, pp. 100-101). During this period, a lot of Buddhist monks came to Taspar. A Nirvana Sutra was translated into Turkish by the Northern Qi in 575, and this work was presented to Taspar Khagan (Taşağıl, 2014, p.

35). In the same years, a priest from India also began working to spread Buddhism in the territory of the Türk Khaganate. However, it was another Busit Sutra on which he was based. It is quite natural that Buddhism was so on the rise during the reign of Taspar Khan, and even Buddhist monks came from India.

Most of the roads from the Tarim Basin to Belh, Bamiyan and Taxila were under the administration of the Türk Khaganate. Long before the Khaganate, Buddhism was a religion rooted in the Tarim Basin. In addition, some of the Sogdian merchants with whom the khaganate had a close relationship were Buddhists. One side of the Bugut Inscription, which was erected for Mukan Khan, was written in the Brahmi alphabet (Şirin, 2020, p. 60). We mentioned Istemi Yabghu's activities in the west above. According to the information given by Menander, in 569 AD, Istami attacked the Sassanids after meeting with Zemarchus. It is likely that around the year 570 AD the Türk Khaganate conquered Tokharistan (Özcan, 2014, p. 32). The local states located in the region, such as Herat and Bamiyan, also became vassals of the Türk Khaganate. The period when the Buddhas of Bamiyan were built also coincides approximately with these years (Blänsdorf, Nadeau, Grootes, Hüls, Pfeffer, & Thiemann, 2009, p. 235).

The date of construction of the Eastern Buddha is approximately 544-595 AD, while the date of construction of the Western Buddha is 591-644 AD. According to the Grouesset, in the 590s Belh and its surroundings were definitively connected to the Türk Khaganate (2017, p. 114). In Song Yun's travel, which lasted from 518 to 522, he did not mention the Bamiyan Buddhas in Tokharistan (Yıldırım, 2015, pp. 281-300). This suggests that the Buddhas were built at a later date. Xuanzang, who went on a journey in 627 AD, mentioned the Buddhas of Bamiyan (Ergüven, 2011, pp. 65-66; Wriggins, 2004, pp. 45-48). Considering these dates, it is understood that

the statues were erected during the rule of the Türk Khaganate. It is for these reasons that the spread of Buddhism in the territory of the Türk Khaganate is a natural phenomenon.

During the reign of Taspar Khagan, political changes took place in Northern China. The Northern Qi state was destroyed by the Northern Zhou as a result of the war (Dien, 2019, p. 208; Dien, 2019b, p. 232). This political change was against the Turkish Khaganate. The fact that China was divided ensured both the security of the Turkish Khaganate and supported its economy (Drompp, 2005, pp. 102-103). Taspar Khan supported the remaining forces from the northern Qi state. Gao Shaoyi attacked to the Northern Zhou, taking with him the army of support provided by the Taspar Khagan. In 578 AD, the Türk's army entered the Northern Zhou territory and began raids. In order to stop the Türk's army advancing rapidly on its territory, the Northern Zhou sent successive armies. Six large armies fought to stop the progress of the Turkish Khaganate. Gao Shaoyi, who wanted to resurrect the Northern Qi state in the battles that took place with the sieges and square battles of the city, did not achieve the desired success, he returned to the Khaganate with the Türk's army (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 36).

In 579 AD, Taspar Khagan sent an envoy to the Northern Zhou and offered peace. The biggest reason he did this is undoubtedly because Gao Shaoyi failed. They stated that they could accept this offer from the Northern Zhou only if Gao Shaoyi was handed over to them. However, Taspar Khagan did not want to accept this offer either. Although he failed, Gao Shaoyi would always be a threat to the Northern Zhou. A peace treaty was concluded in 580 AD. Thus, princess Qianjin was sent as a bride and peace was established between the two states. In addition, at the special request of the Northern Zhou dynasty, the Taspar Khagan agreed to surrender Gao

Shaoyi. He was handed over to the Chinese during a hunting ceremony organized by the Khagan near the Chinese border. Thus, the Taspar Khagan recognized the end of the division in Northern China. Now there was a single Chinese dynasty opposite the Türk Khaganate. In 581 AD, Taspar Khagan died of illness. With the death of khagan, a great struggle for the throne of the Khaganate began (Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 37-38; Erkoç, 2020, p. 63; Kafesoğlu, 2013, p. 101).

Before he died, Taspar bequeathed to his son Anluo that he would be succeeded as khan by Mukan's son Daluobian. After Taspar's death, it was decided to elect a Daluobian khan in accordance with his will in the assembly convened. However, Daluobian's mother was not Turkish. This situation caused objections to his khaganate to arise. Shetu, the son of the Ilci Khagan (Kara Khagan), declared that he would not recognize the Daluobian as khagan and would only obey Anluo. This attitude of Shetu influenced the outcome of the khagan election. Anluo was elected as khagan. The Daluobian, who did not accept this situation, openly took a stand against the new khagan. Anluo, unable to ensure stability in the Khaganate, transferred the title of khagan to Shetu. Anluo retreated with his tribe to the edge of the Tola River. Here, he declared himself a minor khan as an Amrak. Shetu, who became a khan in 582, received the title of Ishbara Khan. While all the processes were going on, the Daluobian also declared its opposition to Işbara Khagan. As a matter of fact, he migrated towards the north together with his related tribes. Here, he declared himself an Apa Khagan. In order to gain allies, he sent envoys to the Sui Dynasty, which destroyed the Northern Zhou in 581 AD (Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 41-43; Erkoç, 2020, pp. 63-64; Yıldırım, 2019, pp. 62-63).

The process of separation in the Khaganate was not limited only to this, Tardu, the son of the western branch administrator Istemi Yabghu, also began to act

independently of Ishbara. It seems that the title *Yabghu* was used on coins minted in the western part of the Türk Khaganate until 580 AD. After the death of Istemi Yabghu in 576 AD, he was succeeded by his son Tardu (Erkoç, 2016, p. 47). After the death of Taspar Khagan in 581 AD, Tardu, taking advantage of the emptiness and the struggle for the khaganate, went on the path of increasing its independence. In coins minted after 580 AD, the title of *Yabghu-Khagan* was used (Babayar, 2014, p. 14). While all these processes were taking place within the Türk Khaganate, there were also significant changes in China. Yang Jian, the Northern Zhou general who played an important role in the fall of the Northern Qi state in 576 AD, destroyed the Northern Zhou with his palace coup in 581 AD and established his own dynasty, Sui (Dien, 2019b, pp. 233-235). In 589 AD, Sui Wendi (Yang Jian) managed to unite all of China under one state after three hundred and fifty years (Skaff, 2012, p.31; Wright A. F., 1979, p. 56). While a single and powerful state emerged in China, the Türk Khaganate in the steppes of Mongolia was in the process of being shaken by internal turmoil (Lewis, 2009, s. 149).

Ishbara Khan sent an envoy to the newly established Sui dynasty in 581. The role of Apa Khan in the departure of this embassy is great. It is a critical move against his search for allies. Princess Qianjin, who belonged to the Northern Zhou dynasty, was very upset about what her family was going through. His wife had begun to direct Ishbara Kagan against the Sui dynasty. During these years, the repatriation of the Türks in Chang'an, the capital of Sui, also caused Ishbara to take a stand against the Sui. The Chinese spy Zhangsun Sheng, who took part in the wedding procession in the year 580 AD, collected intelligence during his stay on the territory of the Türk Khaganate. Due to his close relationship with Ishbara Khagan, he learned about the strife in the family of Ashina. In particular, he reported the rivalry among Ishbara, Apa and Tardu,

and stated that Ishbara was jealous of his brother Chuluohou. When Zhangsun Sheng returned to his country in 581 AD, he presented the information, which he had obtained, to Wendi (Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 44-45; Erkoç, 2020, p. 64).

In the light of this information, the Sui state started to establish contacts to divide the Türk Khaganate. The envoy, sent to Tardu by Wendi, presented him with a wolf-headed flag. This gift, which was presented to him, was a symbol of independence. Tardu, who was in opposition to Ishbara Khagan, did not turn down this opportunity and thus became the ruler of an independent state. From this date, Tardu began to use the title of *Yabghu-Khagan*, not the title of *Yabghu*. Sui Wendi placed the envoy from Tardu Yabghu-Khagan higher than the messenger of Ishbara Khagan. In this way, he supported the civil war and division in the Türk Khaganate. The Khaganate, founded in 552 AD, was divided into East and West in 581 AD (Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 46-47; Erkoç, 2020, p. 64). In the following parts of our study, we will use the East Türk Khaganate and the West Türk Khaganate instead of the Türk Khaganate.

In 582 AD, a great excursion was launched against the Sui state with an army consisting of four hundred thousand cavalry under the rule of Isbara Khan. All the khagans (Tardu, Tanhan, Chuluohou, Apa and Ishbara) participated in this campaign. The Türk's army quickly defeated the Sui forces and launched an offensive towards the capital Chang'an. The army captured seven large settlements on the territory of Sui. However, during this successful expedition, Tardu Yabghu-Khagan, along with the soldiers under his command, left the headquarters. At the time of the withdrawal of Tardu, Yami, the son of Chuluohou Khan (who would later ascend the throne as Qimin Khagan), gave false information that the Töles tribes were rebelling to Ishbara Khagan. Isbara Khagan was forced to stop the campaign and return to the khaganate

center due to this incorrect information. In 583 AD, Wendi issued a royal decree to give morale to his army and people (Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 47-49; Yıldırım, 2019, p. 64).

In this royal decree, Wendi emphasized that the Western and Eastern Türk Khaganates are actually in a fragmented state. He underlined the power struggle between the five khagans. In addition, it is mentioned in the edict that various *boduns*, such as Tuyuhun and Kitan, have a grudge against the Türks. Besides, Sui Wendi provided vital information about a devastating climate disaster in the Türk Khaganate (Liu M.-T. , 2019, p. 71). According to the information in the royal decree, there was no precipitation in the steppe in 582 AD. The vegetation was widely damaged. The flow rate of rivers fell. The soil dried up and even there was an invasion of locusts (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 50). This catastrophe seriously weakened the Eastern Türk Khaganate. The animals were not fed. Ganiev and Kukarskih (2018) believe that volcanic activities may be the cause of this climate catastrophe. There are layers of sulfur dioxide detected in fragments taken from glaciers in the Northern and Southern hemispheres, indicating the years 574-575. They believe that this volcanic activity triggered anomaly 582 AD (p.6).

Taking advantage of this climate disaster in the Eastern Türk Khaganate, the Sui state launched their attacks in 583 AD. Ishbara Khagan's army was defeated and retreated to the steppe, dropping their weight. This vanquishment was brought about by the nonpreparation of the army and the fact that Tardu, which had declared its independence, did not provide military support to Ishbara. Retreating to the steppe, the Isbara Khagan and his army faced a great famine. The army, which had lost most of its weight during the rout, experienced famine and a subsistence crisis in the steppe. Since they could not find food, they had to eat bone powder. Apart from these disasters, an epidemic occurred in the army. Because of all this, there were a lot of

deaths in Ishbara's army and his power decreased. The Sui's army, on the other hand, continued its attacks on the Eastern Türk Khaganate. The Apa Khagan was unable to stop the attacks of the Sui's army and was forced to retreat. This defeat demolished the relationship between the Apa Khagan and the Ishbara Khagan (Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 50-51; Yıldırım, 2019, p. 64).

Ishbara attacked the Apa because he doubted that Apa would rebel. The Apa's forces were defeated in the battle. However, the Apa managed to escape to Tardu, who lived in the west. One of those who joined the opposition in the face of the hardening attitude of Ishbara Khagan was Tanhan Khagan. Ishbara Khagan immediately organized a campaign against this rebellion and defeated Tanhan's forces. He subjected to tribes of Tanhan. Tanhan took refuge in Tardu Yabghu-Khagan. In the face of his rivals consisting of Tardu Yabghu-Khagan, Apa Khagan and Tanhan Khagan, Ishbara sought allies. At this time, Apa Khan sent an envoy to ask Sui Wendi for support. However, Sui Wendy did not want Ishbara to be completely defeated. Instead, he wanted the khaganate to remain in a civil war that the existing parties could not defeat. Because of this, he did not support Apa Khagan. In order to maintain his Khaganate, Ishbara decided to ask Sui Wendi for help (Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 52-53; Yıldırım, 2019, p. 64; Erkoç, 2020, p. 64).

For this, he used his wife Qianjin, who belonged to the Northern Zhou dynasty, as an intermediary. In 584, Qianjin addressed Sui Wendi as father and established diplomatic contact on behalf of her husband Ishbara. Sui Wendi gave a name Qianjin as "Dayi" (Wright D. C., 2011, pp. 44-45). At a ceremony in Otuken, Ishbara Khagan became Sui Wendi's son-in-law. The Chinese envoy asked Ishbara to take Sui Huangdi's letter with a bow and take it to his head. Ishbara did these things with shame. At this time, the statemen at the ceremony watched this sight with tears. Not

finding concessions sufficient, the envoy asked Ishbara Khagan to declare that he was a vassal of the Sui country. Although he wanted to resist this request, the khagan was obliged to declare that he was a vassal. Thus, an alliance was established between the Sui dynasty and the Eastern Türk Khaganate. During the period when Ishbara was a vassal, the lands owned by the opposite alliance extended to Otuken. The dominance of the Apa (Abo) Khagan stretched from Kucha and Hami to the Altai (Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 55-56).

The attacks of the Tardu in 585 AD left the Ishbara Khagan in a difficult position. Due to the growing threat of the Apa (Abo) Khagan, Ishbara Khagan, with permission from Sui Wendi, crossed to the south of the Gobi Desert. Ishbara, who was not asked to completely fall from power, was supported by the Sui state. Supported by an army under the command of prince Kuang of Qin region, Isbara Khan defeated Apa Khan and regained the places, where he had lost. However, in this battle, the Apa (Abo) Khan managed to escape again. In 587 AD, Ishbara Kagan became ill with a fever during a hunting ceremony. After lying sick for about a month, he passed away. Before he died, he bequeathed his son Yongyulu the succession of his uncle Chuluohou to the throne. In accordance with the will, Chuluohou became a khan in 587 AD, receiving the title of Baga Khan (Liu M.-T. , 2019, pp. 75-76, 139).

Baga Khagan received permission from Sui Wendi to campaign against Apa (Abo) Khagan. This permission shows us the degree to which the Eastern Türk Khaganate was vassal to the Sui. Apa (Abo) Khagan was captured in the battle. After that, an embassy was sent to Sui's palace again and permission was asked to kill him (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 60; Liu M.-T. , 2019, p. 81). Baga Khan campaigned a region in the west in 588-589 AD. He was shot in the forehead with an arrow in a battle and died. According to Taşağıl, this region, whose name is not mentioned in the sources, is

likely to be the Western Türk Khaganate under the administration of Tardu Yabghu-Khagan (2014, p. 61). According to Sinor, he was killed by Bahram Cubin (2017, p. 411). In 588-589 AD, Bahram Cubin defeated the army of Hephthalites-Türk Khaganate (Daryaee, 2009, p. 31).

After the sudden death of Baga Khagan, Ishbara Khagan's son Yongyulu ascended the throne under the name of Tulan (Doulan) Khagan. During this period, the East Turkic Khaganate existed as a vassal state. Tulan (Doulan) Khagan's wife Dayi, formerly Qianjin, started to carry out activities against Sui dynasty together with her family again. In process of time, the Eastern Türk Khaganate became the center of the alliance against the Sui dynasty. Tulan (Doulan) Khagan, who was influenced by his wife, also cut off his tribute to the Sui and even began to attack the borders. Sui Wendi conducted espionage activities to disrupt the established alliance and was successful in this. Due to this, they managed to bring Tulan (Doulan) Khagan into the fold. After that, Sui Wendi sent an envoy to Tulan (Doulan) Khagan informing him that the title of princess Dayi had been abolished and that she must be killed (Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 61-63).

In the end, the princess was killed, and thus the anti-Sui alliance was destroyed (Liu M.-T. , 2019, pp. 83-84). However, while all this was happening, the khaganate began to boil inside again. In 593 AD, the chiefs of the *bods* belonging to the Eastern Türk Khaganate united and sent an embassy delegation to the Sui state. These *bods* offered to establish bazaars and trade on the Chinese border. Sui Wendi issued an edict accepting these requests. Thus, for the first time in history, tribes other than the Ashina family established political contact with a dynasty in China (Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 63-64). This contact, which was established, served the interests of the Suis in the following years. They easily got the opportunity to attract tribes. In 597 AD, Ashina

Rangan (Tuli), the son of Baga Khagan, sent an envoy to the Sui dynasty and wanted to establish political unity through marriage (Liu M.-T. , 2019, pp. 83-84).

Tulan (Doulan) Khagan wanted to unite the Türk Khaganate again. Because of this, there were wars between him and the TarduYabghu-Khagan. Not wanting Tulan to strengthen, the Sui state decided to support Ashina Rangan (Tuli). Under the direction of Zhangsun Sheng, princess Anyi was sent to Ashina Rangan (Tuli) as a bride. In addition, this envoy provoked Ashina Rangan against the Tulan Khagan. Having received news of these, the khan decided to campaign against the Sui. However, Ashina Rangan told the Sui about the excursion, which would conduct in 598 AD. In 599 AD, Ashina Rangan again delivered campaign information to the Sui dynasty. In order to punish this betrayal of Ashina Rangan, the Tulan (Doulan) Khagan allied with the Tardu Yabghu-Khagan. They attacked Tuli and defeated him. Having managed to escape from the battlefield, Tuli took refuge in Sui Wendi's palace. At this time, the armies of Tardu and Tulan crossed the Yellow River and made raids on Sui's territory (Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 64-66; Liu M.-T. , 2019, pp. 85-86).

After the battles in the Sui lands were lost by Tardu and Tulan's army, Sui Wendi declared Tuli, who had taken refuge with him, a khagan in 599 AD with the title of Qimin Khagan (Liu M.-T. , 2019, p. 86). At this time, while the Sui army was preparing to attack the East Türk Khaganate again, it was raided by the army under the rule of Tulan (Doulan) Khagan and suffered a heavy defeat. However, a new Sui army was prepared for the excursion. Tulan (Doulan) Khagan was killed by his commanders between the end of 599 and the year 600 AD, before this army had even crossed the Sui borders. After that, Tardu tried to unite the state again by declaring himself a khan of the Türk Khaganate (Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 68-70; Liu M.-T. , 2019, p. 87). However, this attempt was also not enough to stop the civil war. The Qimin

Khagan, supported by the Suis, went to the steppe, and many of the Türk's *bods* were subjected to him.

By the end of the sixth century, the political image of the Türk Khaganate was in a fragmented and worn-out state. With the death of Taspar Khan in 581 AD, the khaganate was involved in a major civil war until the end of the sixth century. In the same year, it was divided into two parts in the form of east and west, and the eastern branch witnessed the scene of bloody battles between the heirs to the throne. After its establishment in 552 AD, the Türk Khaganate, which remained independent for about 32 years, entered a new political situation when Ishbara Khagan became a vassal of the Sui Dynasty in 584 AD. Until the return of the Qimin Khagan to the steppe in 600 AD, the Eastern Türk Khaganate was devastated by civil wars. In the process, in 581 AD in the west, Tardu gained its independence and received the title of Yabgu-Khagan and retained its power.

With the murder of Tulan Khagan in 599 AD, he wanted to unite the western and eastern parts of the khaganate by declaring himself khagan, but he was not successful in this. During the chaos that the Turkish Khaganate entered with the death of Taspar Khagan, the authority of the khaganate on the Silk Road lost power. The political vacuum damaged trade. The events that took place in the Turkic Khaganate served to the Sasanian Empire. They strengthened their position in silk production and trade. Silk fabrics of Sasanian production became a fashion all over the Silk Road. The fashion for Sasanian silk fabric continued until the date when it was destroyed by the Sassanids in the Arab invasion. Since the last quarter of the sixth century, Sassanid fabrics have been seen extensively in the Tarim Basin and China. One of the things that made the Sasanians stand out was that the Turkish Khaganate could not buy silk products from China as tribute.

Thanks to this, the demands of the countries on the Silk Road have become supplied by Sasanian weaving. This situation visibly increased both the commercial power of the Sasanian Empire, their diplomatic power, and their military power. Their victories over the Byzantine Empire, especially in the first quarter of the seventh century, prove this. Sasanian hunting scenes were widely used in fabrics and metal objects. Those reached East Turkestan by way of the Sogdians. (Feltham, 2010, p. 28)

This situation sheds light on the influence of political events on art and trade. In the second half of the sixth century, the Byzantine experienced Lombard and Avar attacks. In these problems, the Turks became a lifeline for the Byzantine. It would not be correct to consider the relationship between Byzantium and the Turkish Khaganate only on the plane of political Dec. Byzantine art penetrated the Turkish Khaganate through trade and diplomacy.

As stated by Gaybulla Babayarov and Andrey Kubatin, the geopolitical position of the Türk Khaganate contributed to the establishment of connections among Asia Minor, Central Asia and East Asia. Within these connections, the Türk Khaganate-Byzantine Empire relationship came to the forefront because this relationship impacted the Türk Khaganate from a point of view of culture. They agree with M. E. Masson and O. I. Smirnova's opinion that Western Türk Khaganate coins were modelled from Byzantine coins. M. E. Masson shed light on that Western Türk Khaganate imitated Byzantine copper coins of Justin II. Türk's coins appeared after they established close contact with Byzantine. There is an image of Justin II and his wife Sofia on the obverse of copper coins of Justin II. Similarly, there is an image of khan and his wife Khatun on the obverse of Western Türk coins (Babayarov & Kubatin, 2013, pp. 48, 56). In the Shoroon Bumbagar tomb in Mongolia, the materials belonging to early Türk culture were discovered. Among the materials discovered in

the tomb are more than 15 Byzantine coins. It has been identified three of these coins. These are the solidi of Phokas (602-610) and Heraclius (date back to 616-625), and the imitation of the solidus of Tiberius II Constantinus (578-582) (Yatsenko, 2014, pp. 13-18, 24).

The products of Byzantine art not only remained on the territory of the Turkish Khaganate, but also went beyond it. Victor Cunrui Xiong and Ellen Johnston Laing commented on foreign jewellery discovered in China in their study. The grave of Li Xian (569 AD) was excavated by archaeologists. There are exciting foreign goods in the tomb, such as a ring, a Greco-Roman silver ewer and a Sasanian glass bowl (Müller, 2019, pp. 395-396). Another archaeological finding is that the ring which was discovered in the tomb of Li Xizong (540 AD) and his wife has a deer design on the top. It has known that this deer pattern emerged in Taxila, Pakistan. (Xiong & Laing, 1991, pp. 165, 171; Marshak B. I., 2004, p. 51). There is no doubt that the Türk Khaganate played a role in the development of trade relations between Taxila and Inner Asia and China in the sixth century.

In the sixth century, there were multiple events affecting the Byzantine economy. The first of these is the wars with the Sassanids for whole the century, although there were periods of peace. those wars were a burden to Byzantine treasury. In the sixth century the Empire was fought not only against the Sasanians, but also against the Avars and Lombards (Laiou & Morrisson, 2007, s. 23-24). In addition, Justinian carried out major reconstruction activities in important cities of the empire. One of the things that damaged the Byzantine economy in the sixth century was the plague epidemic. According to Sarris, Byzantine Empire was affected by the plague epidemic, as its agricultural population was declining (2002, p. 177). In the empire, between 542 and 550, Solidus was regulated down (Sarris, 2006, p. 219).

4.2. Climate Events and the Plague Epidemic in the Sixth Century

Ole J. Benedictow draws attention to caravans in his work. He has said that the goods are transported with infected fleas or rodents all along the Eurasian exist in the Silk Road trade. It is considered that vector fleas are carried over long distances in raw materials, especially in grain, cotton, wool, and woven fabrics (2013, p. 7; Yu, et al., 2020, p. 8). In humid and warm conditions, with approximately 90 per cent relative humidity and below 15° C, it is known that infected fleas can survive unfed for a minimum of fifty days. In natural circumstances, at 27° C, *X. cheopis* has spread the plague after 29 days of starvation. Moreover, these circumstances are likely to engender to extend the survival period to circa 1.5–2 months. Not only *X. cheopis* but also *Y. Pestis* can survive without feeding (Kofahl, 2013, p. 5). It lives, in general, from 15° C to 20° C (Rosen, 2007, p. 200) Hinging on temperatures, feral-rodent fleas have been understood to hut *Yersinia Pestis* for 396 days in southeastern Russia. Notwithstanding, they are still able to transmit the plague (Benedictow, 2013, pp. 7-8).

During carrying, an arid climate is dangerous for fleas. In the parts of the Silk Road that pass through Central Asia, there are several arid and desert regions. For this reason, these routes are unfavourable to the survival of fleas. In addition, they are weak to cold and be defeated at temperatures below 5° C. Given this situation, the plague cannot spread on the overland Silk Roads (Benedictow, 2013, p. 9). Although overland Silk Roads didn't allow, the plague could have been carried in the maritime Silk Road. In this route, Axum has played a drastic role, because Indian merchandise, passing through the Indian Ocean, firstly has arrived at the Axum Kingdom. Axum has been a distributor. Indian goods have been transported from Axum along the Red Sea. Then they has been carried by caravans to Alexandria and Pelusium

(Benedictow, 2013, pp. 10-11; Kofahl, 2013, pp. 12-13). In the first chapter, the history of this sea route is examined in detail. (See Chapter 1)

Contemporary sources give information on the origin of the pandemic of bubonic plague, breaking out in 541 CE. There is a general opinion that the plague was shipped out of Pelusium to Constantinople (Bramanti, Stenseth, Walløe, & Lei, 2016, pp. 5-6). It was transported to Mediterranean ports by ships. Evagrius of Antioch claims that plague came from the Kingdom of Axum, the marine trading power (Benedictow, 2013, p. 14). After the plague of Justinian occurred in AD 541, consecutive outbreaks of this disease relapsed in 8-12 years cycles for two centuries. It has been shown that a plague maintains in an average-sized town as long as the population of rats don't fall below sixty thousand (Kofahl, 2013, p. 19). It is estimated mortality of 15-40% (Wagner, Klunk, Harbeck, Devault, & Wagglechner, 2014, p. 1). According to O'Neill, it demolished twenty five percent of population of Byzantine Empire (2008, p. 276). If the plague appeared in a city, the outbreak could recur time and time again.

However, in case there is not an adequately-large rodent population dwelling in an urban area, the plague shows the tendency to do away with itself before it spreads to humans and other mammals. On the other hand, we bear in mind that inasmuch as both *X. cheopis* and *Y. Pestis* are likely to survive months without feeding, it may be said that they bided with patience in process for rodent populations to recover (Kofahl, 2013, pp. 4-5). Natural foci of plague on the Asian continent are observed on a very large area between the Equator and 51° northern latitude (Dubynskiy & Yeszhanov, 2016, p. 102). Klunk and et al. (2014, p. 4-5) developed a hypothesis that the Justinianic plague did not occur in Africa, and it commenced in Kyrgyzstan (Morelli, et al., 2010, pp. 1140-1143; Rasmussen, et al., 2015, pp. 571-582;

Damgaard, et al., 2018, pp. 1-5; Wagnera, Klunk, Harbeck, Devault, & Waglechner, 2014, pp. 4-5) to spread from east to Europe by the Silk Road (Keller, et al., 2019, p. 12368).

Marmot fleas are actively engaged in the contagion of plague pathogen between animals. They can host the following species of fleas: *Oropsylla silantiewi*, *Rhadinopsylla li ventricosa*, *Ceratophyllus lebedewi*, and *Pulex irritans*. Marmots in mountainous plague foci of Kyrgyzstan carry a specific strain of *Y. pestis* (Sariyeva, et al., 2019, p. 2). It was proposed that the strains of 0.ANT branch served as the etiological agent of the first plague pandemic, the Justinianic Plague. 0.ANT3 and 0.ANT5, which are branches of 0.ANT, were uncovered in the Upper-Naryn in Kyrgyzstan. In the Aksai region, 0.ANT3 and 0.ANT5 were found. Moreover, 0.ANT3 branch was unearthed in the Alai region, located in the south of Kyrgyzstan (Eroshenko, et al., 2017, p. 6). In particular, the Upper-Naryn and the Aksai focus of plague have a critical role because this region is on the historical Silk Road. Most crucially, in these regions, there is 0.ANT5 branch, being one of the closely related to *Y. pestis* strain responsible for the Justinianic Plague.

Another considerable region is the Alai mountains because one of the overland Silk Routes is located here. This route initiates in Kashgar, located in the East Turkestan, and crosses the Alai mountains, reaching lower Transoxiana in Tajikistan. As mentioned above, there is 0.ANT3 branch in the Alai mountains. Due to this road or the road of the south of Issyk-Kul Lake, the plague is likely to have spread to firstly Inner Asia and then India. In 1898 in India, it was discovered to be effective vectors, rats, and fleas, but it was not determined to be effective vectors in ancient plague outbreaks (Barbieri, et al., 2020, p. 32). If it had been emitted the plague in India, it could have been mentioned in the sources. However, Indian sources are silent on this

subject. Moreover, Indian sources don't have identified the plague as a term for both the Justinianic plague and Black Death, whereas Black Death has spread to India. Justinianic plague might have transited from India to the Red Sea. In this case, it should be noted that *Y. pestis* can wait in ambush months under the right conditions for launching an outbreak (Kofahl, 2013, pp. 12-13; Dols, 2008, p. 335).

According to Barbieri, et al., the claim that the plague has spread to the West via the Indian Ocean maritime route, based on genomic and phylogenetic analysis, contradicts some historical sources because Procopius, experiencing this pandemic, described the plague as originating from Egypt. Malalas (18.90) said that “...*men died of a plague in Egypt...*” (Jeffreys, et al., 1986, p. 286). On the other hand, Evagrius (4.29) described an “Ethiopian” origin of this outbreak (2020, p. 29; D., 1954, p. 12; Whitby, 2000, p. 229; Sarris, 2002, p. 169). According to Sarris, the Himalayas and the surrounding area cannot be the source of the Justinian plague. One of the bases for this opinion is that Byzantine trade with India was not more active than Chinese trade with India. He also says that there was no mention of bubonic plague in China until 610. Defending the views of Evagrius, he says that it is of African origin (2007, p. 122). As far as Sallares is concerned, the origin of the plague is Upper Egypt (Sallares, 2007, p. 242).

As this works of Sarris and Sallares belong to the year 2007, we should make our criticisms with this eye. In that year, no more bacteriological studies had been conducted that proved that the Justinian plague originated in Inner Asia. Because of this, Sarris said, based on Byzantine sources, the origin of the plague is Africa. However, studies starting from 2010 have shown that the origin of the plague is the Tenri Tagh (Tian Shan). It is shown that there is a relationship, between plague foci and altitude, in the Qinghai–Tibetan plateau. *Marmota himalayana* inhabits prairies at

elevation levels between 2700 and 5450 m in this region. Likewise, *Marmota sibirica* inhabits meadows at elevation levels of over 1000 m in Inner Mongolia (Xu, et al., 2014, p. 6). Despite high altitude levels, the spread velocity of the plague may support the argument that the Justinianic plague spread from the high mountains of Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, in the sixth century, in the grasslands of the Tenri Tagh (Tian Shan) of Kyrgyzstan, some *bods* lived as pastoral nomads. These *bods* were establishing trade links with their neighbours. In this way, the plague is likely to have been spread into India in Hephthalite's lands.

A 1°C rise in spring causes a >50% increase in prevalence. It is explored that fleas are active when the air temperature is above 10°C. Therefore, spring temperature is significant. In summer, dry and hot conditions are known to hurt the survival of fleas. In more humid conditions (more summer precipitation), there are more fleas, supporting the transmission of plague (Stenseth, et al., 2006, pp. 13111). McCormick has demonstrated that rats' migration from Southeast Asia to Roman Empire and medieval Europe was discovered by archaeological and biological finds. It can be said that the history of rats is directly linked to the economy of the ancient world and the medieval economy. As claimed by McCormick, various rodents, such as African or Egyptian *Arvicanthis niloticus* (Grass rat), may have played a role in retaining or transmitting plague in early medieval Europe (2003, p. 1).

On the other hand, *Rattus rattus*, known as the black or ship rat, is a possible causing of the Justinianic Plague (Kofahl, 2013, p. 4). In the Roman port of Quseir el-Qadim, located on the Red Sea coast, the archaeologists uncovered rats dating back to the first or second centuries A.D. Moreover, the translation of the Greek name of this port seems to be "Port of the Rat" (McCormick, 2003, pp. 7-8). It is a known fact that *Rattus rattus*, the black rat, does not move more than 200m and it completes this

distance in 2 years, which is equal to approximately its lifespan. Hence, the black rats cannot immigrate to long distances. How did they reach the Mediterranean? *Rattus rattus* is known as “ship rat” because it lives in ships. The black rats migrate from port to port. Due to maritime trade, they launched to inhabit the Mediterranean. The Silk Road maritime trade played a dramatic role in transporting rats from India to Europe. It is known that grain-laden ships contribute to the plague of Justinian to spread to whole ports of the Mediterranean and set out the pandemic. It can be assumed that in these ships, there are infected black rats, and they carry the plague to ports. As in the Mediterranean, the plague may have been carried from Indian ports to ports of the Red Sea in the same way. Moreover, literary sources supply us with a good deal of references to trade, been well-established for centuries between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean (Kofahl, 2013, p. 3). Therefore, we claim that the plague spread from Kyrgyzstan to India and then ports of the Red Sea.

In the sixth century AD, some occurred climatic phenomena were closely related to the Justinianic plague. Some scholars have claimed that the abnormality of climate gave rise to or triggered the pandemic (Newfield, , 2018, p. 472). There are witnesses to these climatic phenomena in the Byzantine. According to Prokopios account (4.14.5), “During the whole year the sun gave forth its light without brightness, like the moon, and it seemed extremely like the sun in eclipse, for the beams it emitted were not clear nor like those it usually makes.” (Prokopios, 2014, p. 221). Prokopios was a witness to this event in 536/7 in Italy. Likewise, the senator and consul Cassiodorus said that the moon and of the sun has lost its “shine” and appeared “bluish”. He described it as “a winter without storms, a spring without mildness and a summer without heat.” (Newfield, 2018, p. 450). John the Lydian reported the sun darkening “for nearly a whole year” in 535/6 (Arjava, 2005, p. 80). John of Ephesus

wrote that the sun was covered with darkness for eighteen months (Newfield, 2018, p. 450).

In the 6th century AD, climatic catastrophes did not only occur in the Mediterranean. The entire northern hemisphere was affected by this. A lot of studies were conducted to understand these effects. In northern Europe, the Mediterranean, Siberia, and Northern China, the studies show that a critical climatic catastrophe occurred in the first half of the sixth century AD. Tree rings belonging to northern Europe show poor growth in 536 and again in 540. In the same year, it is well known heavy winter precipitation in Syria (McCormick, 2003, p. 21). As maintained by the data, it has been determined that there is a large amount of sulfate in ice cubes dated between 536-540 years. The presence of a large amount of sulfate indicates that there was a very large-scale volcanic eruption during these periods. In addition, it is seen that the disaster in 535-6 was only the first of the explosions, as well as another explosion in 540 (Kozan, 2018, pp. 217-219).

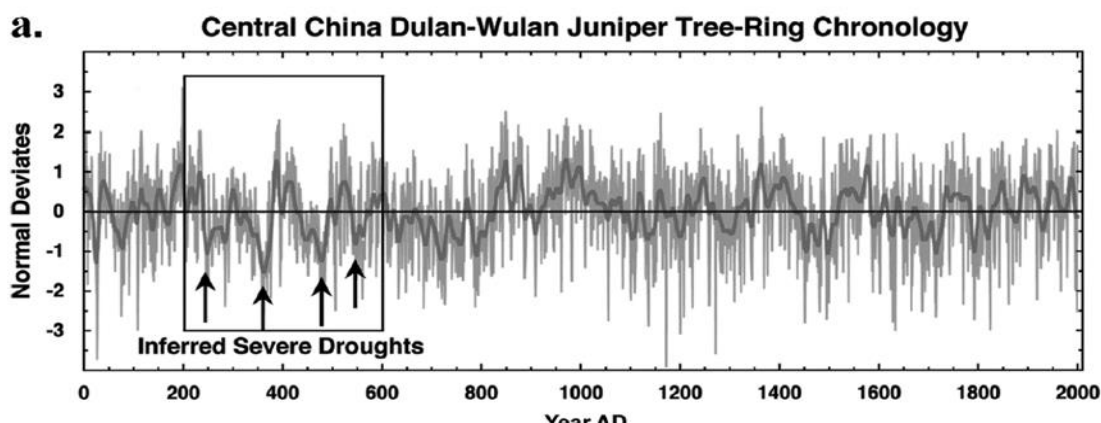
Because of the tree ring data, it may be said that a complex global climate system paved the way for climate change in the first half of the sixth century AD (Barrett, 2007, p. 142). Procopius and John of Ephesus, living in the sixth century AD, described the dust veil event of 536 AD. These historical records are supported by scientific datasets. The effects of the dust veil are observed in fossil tree-rings that point out how the summer in the northern hemisphere. The average summer temperature has been forecast to have fallen 3-4°C, a significant getting worse climate in northern Sweden and Siberia. These datasets also demonstrate that there were two periods of violent climatic downswing, the first 536 AD and the second 540-542 AD (Gräslund & Price, 2012, p. 430). Estonia has been one of the affected places in the 536-537 AD climate disaster. The population of the region experienced a dramatic

decline in the sixth century. Estimates show that the population of Scandinavia has fallen by fifty percent (Tvauri, 2014, pp. 36-37). In 536 AD, in Sasanian territories, extreme drought occurred (Stathakopoulos, 2016, s. 269).

The compiled records have shown that in between 536 to 538, cold summers occurred in China. Moreover, these summers led to bad harvests and starvations. The count of burial finds after AD 536–545 are 90–95 per cent fewer than in the south of Norway than in the previous period. It has understood that there has been a significant decrease in the population of regions. Archaeological researches exhibited that in the Baltic islands, Öland and Gotland, 1300 houses were abandoned in the sixth century (Gräslund & Price, 2012, pp. 430,432). The catastrophes, occurring in the sixth century, are mentioned in East Asian records. In 534-535 AD, civil war came to light in China and resulted in the separation of the Northern Wei Dynasty to the Western Wei Dynasty and the Eastern Wei Dynasty. Furthermore, north China was damaged by a famine killing eighty per cent of the population in the country (Ganiev & Kukarskih, 2018, p. 5). In addition, in these years, in between the Yangtze and Yellow River, drought, frost, snow, and extraordinary summer cold were recorded. As stated by Koguryo Annals, in Korean Peninsula, there was extremely heavy famine and drought in 536/7 (Newfield, The Climate Downturn of 536–50, 2018, p. 451). Dulan-Wulan Juniper Tree-Ring has presented the precipitation and drought data since Common Era. In the 6th century, according to data (Figure 1), it has been observed extraordinary drought. After above-average precipitation had sustained up to 538, dry conditions began at 539 and continued till late 580 (Figure 2) (McCormick, et al., 2012, pp. 192, 199).

Figure 8

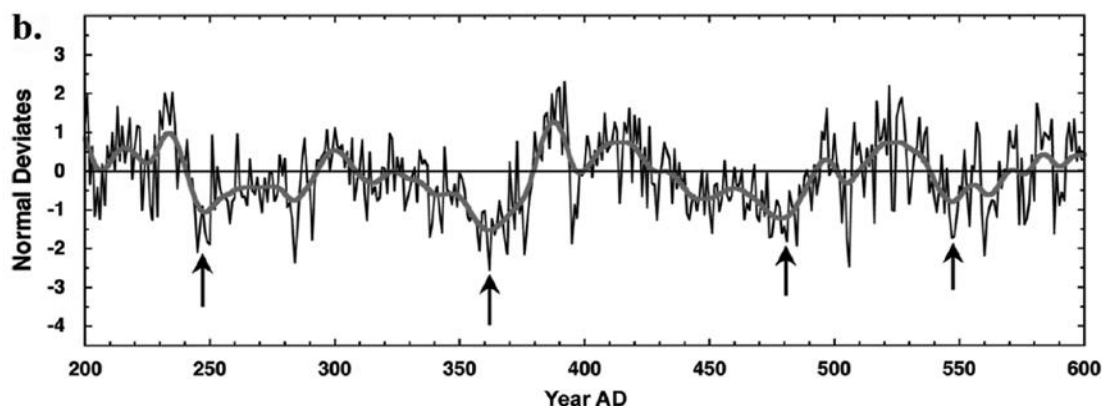
Precipitation and Drought, Central China:



Note. From “Climate Change during and after the Roman Empire: Reconstructing the Past from Scientific and Historical Evidence” by McCormick and et al., 2012, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, p. 192.

Figure 9

Tree Rings as above, detail of 200–600 AD:



Note. “Climate Change during and after the Roman Empire: Reconstructing the Past from Scientific and Historical Evidence” by McCormick and et al., 2012, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, p. 192.

Depending on studies of Siberian pine, we may say that Mongolia ties in with the observations of summer frosts and snow, crop failure, and famine certified for northern China in July and August of 536-7 AD. According to the situation reflected in the tree rings, in Mongolia, there is a hasty growth decline in 536 AD followed by a mini recuperation and ensuing dwindling. These findings are connected with historical and archaeological observations of extreme cold, crop failure, plague, and

famine. (D'Arrigo, Frank, Jacoby, & Pederson, 2001, pp. 241-242). By the end of the Northern Wei Dynasty (534), it seemed that the Bumin's tribe was gaining strength. During those dates, they established trade relations with cities belonging to the Wei dynasty (Kafesoğlu, 2013, p. 96). According to Liu Mau-Tsai (2019), this date is 534 years (p. 16). The date when Bumin and its related tribes are mentioned again in Chinese sources is approximately 542 AD. The year in which the Turkish name was mentioned for the first time with certainty is 542 AD (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 18).

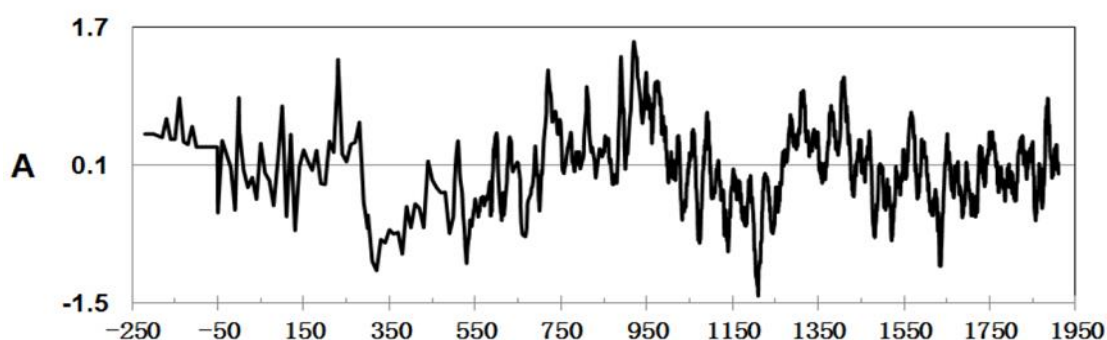
In record dated to the year 534 AD, Bumin came to the edge of the Yellow River to trade with the tribes under his command, while information dated to the year 542 AD states that he crossed the Yellow River and flocked to the northern lands of the Northern Wei state. As stated by the historical record, Türks, benefiting from the fact that Yellow River was covered with ice annually, easily crossed to the south and plundered it (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 18). This information is significant because we understand that the Yellow River frequently froze in the middle of the 6th century AD. What was the changed situation in 542 for Bumin, who is mentioned in the sources as trading in 534? What made him conduct military activities? The image of Bumin in 534 AD is not the typical image of a steppe warrior. The tribes under his rule were seen by the Northern Wei state as merchants who came to the Yellow River to trade silk.

However, by 542 AD, Bumin was depicted with a portrait of a warrior. These raids likely began a few years before 542 AD. What triggered this aggressive policy of Bumin? According to Klyashtorniy (2018), the reason for this change is that 'Wei border guards have removed some obstacles in the silk trade' (p.117). Ganiev (2014), on the other hand, attributes this change to the climate change that occurred between the years 534-542 (p. 5). As we will explain the details in the following pages, a series

of volcanic eruptions affecting the Northern Hemisphere occurred in 536 and 540. Byzantine sources recorded the climate change that occurred (Oppenheimer, 2011, p. 256). Recent tree ring surveys and studies of sulfides at the poles have demonstrated that a climate disaster has happened on the dates mentioned that have seriously affected the northern hemisphere. As with the accurate determination made by Ganiev, what caused Bumin to move away from commercial relations and engage in military activities was the climate change that affected the entire northern hemisphere. This record coincides with the graph of temperature in historical China (Figure 4). It is also observed that in the first half of the sixth century, there was a dramatic decrease in precipitation (Figure 3).

Figure 10

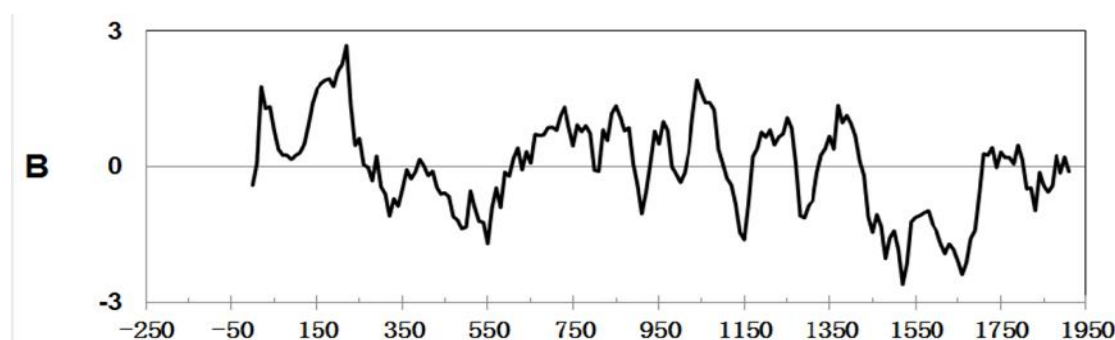
Precipitation anomaly (mm), 220 BC to AD 1910



Note. From “Long-term relationship between climate change and nomadic migration in historical China” by Pei and Zhang, 2014, *Ecology and Society*, p. 4.

Figure 11

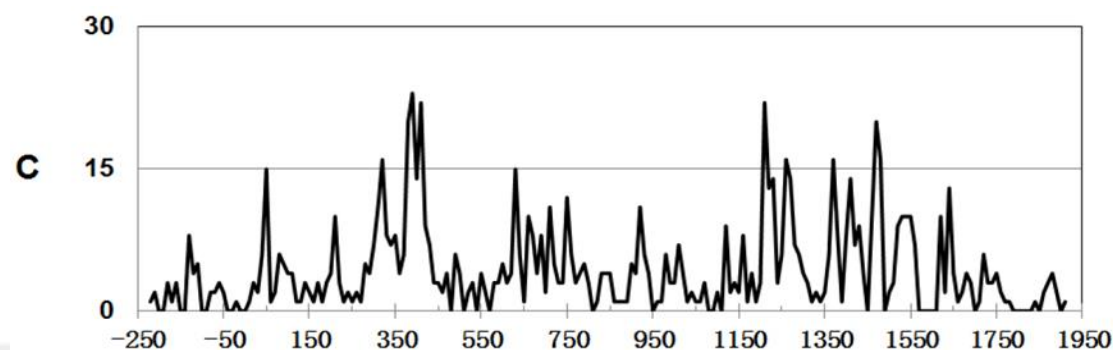
Temperature anomaly (°C), AD 1 to AD 1910



Note. Temperature anomaly (°C), AD 1 to AD 1910: From “Long-term relationship between climate change and nomadic migration in historical China” by Pei and Zhang, 2014, Ecology and Society, p. 4.

Figure 12

Nomadic migration, 220 BC to AD 1910



Note. “Long-term relationship between climate change and nomadic migration in historical China” by Pei and Zhang, 2014, Ecology and Society, p. 4

Before the establishment of the Türk Khaganate, a major Töles uprising occurred against the Rourans, but the leader of the Türks *bods*, *Bumin*, who was a vassal of the Rourans, quelled the rebellion. Thus, *Bumin* increased his strength. Thereafter, he began a rebellion against Rourans and attacked them in 552 AD. Finally, the Rouran Khaganate was fallen by the Türks. Rourans took refuge in the Northern Qi dynasty (Taşağıl, 2014, pp. 21-22). This historical information and Figures 3, and 4 show that the dramatic shrinking in precipitation and temperature influenced political events in the first half of the 6th century, especially the rebellion of the Töles *bods*. In addition, the fall of the Rouran Khaganate is reflected in Figure 5. The study based on tree ring data from northern and central Sweden, Finland, Russia, and Austria was present by Larsen and et al. According to data, summer cold sustained from 536 to at least 550. They determine that in 536 AD, there was a cold period in Mongolia. In this study, it was exhibited that in the Greenland Ice Cores, the AD 533/34 $\pm$ 2 deposits and the 1815 Tambora deposits show some similarities. However, the Greenland Ice Core

data asserts that the eruption associated with the 536 dust veil caused 40% more SO_4^{2-} deposition than the Tambora eruption (Larsen, et al., 2008, pp. 2-5).

Timothy P. Newfield (2018) analyzes previous studies and puts forward his own opinion on the climate phenomenon that occurred in the sixth century. Recent scientific studies have shown that six of the sixteen coldest summers north hemisphere since 500 BCE have happened between 536 and 550 (p. 448). The study based on Alpine and Altai trees presents that the 540s was the second coldest decade since 100 CE in Central Asia. Besides, the authors of this article confirmed that sudden temperature falls onset a unique period of cooling – a Late Antique Little Ice Age- in a major part of Eurasia (Büntgen, Myglan, Ljungqvist, & McCormick, 2016, pp. 231-236). In recent studies, glacier ice from Siberia's Altai Mountains was shown to contain high sulfate levels dated 536 AD (Newfield, 2018, p. 463). The study of Greenland Ice Cores (GISP) sheds light on cooling that began in the early 400s AD and peaked in 540 AD (Figure 6).

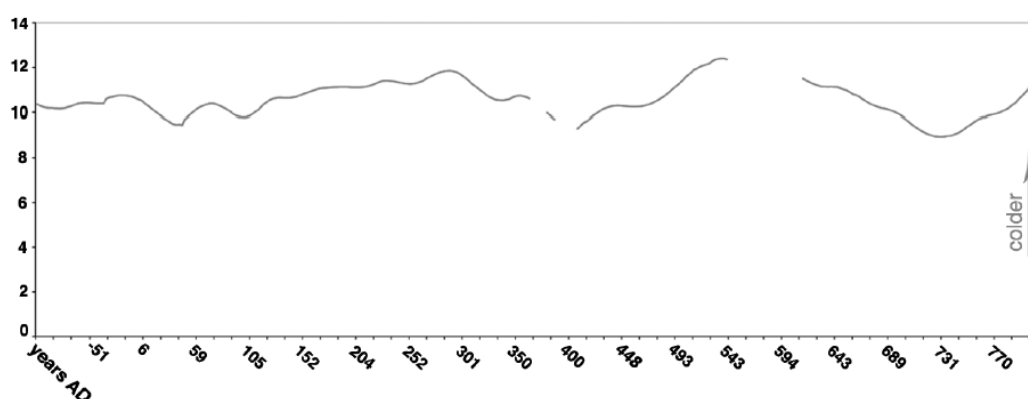
Moreover, GISP shows that abrupt cooling happened nearly 526 to 535 AD. Then it occurred again in 585 AD (McCormick, et al., 2012, p. 191). This cooling period also engraved in the history of the Türk Khaganate. Sui Wendi provided vital information about a devastating climate disaster in the Türk Khaganate (Liu M.-T. , 2019, p. 71). According to the information in the royal decree, there was no precipitation in the steppe in 582 AD. The vegetation was widely damaged. The flow rate of rivers fell. The soil dried up and even there was an invasion of locusts (Taşağıl, 2014, p. 50). This catastrophe seriously weakened the Eastern Türk Khaganate. The animals were not fed. Ganiev and Kukarskih (2018) believe that volcanic activities may be the cause of this climate catastrophe. There are layers of sulfur dioxide detected in fragments taken from glaciers in the Northern and Southern hemispheres,

indicating the years 574-575. They believe that this volcanic activity triggered anomaly 582 AD (p.6).

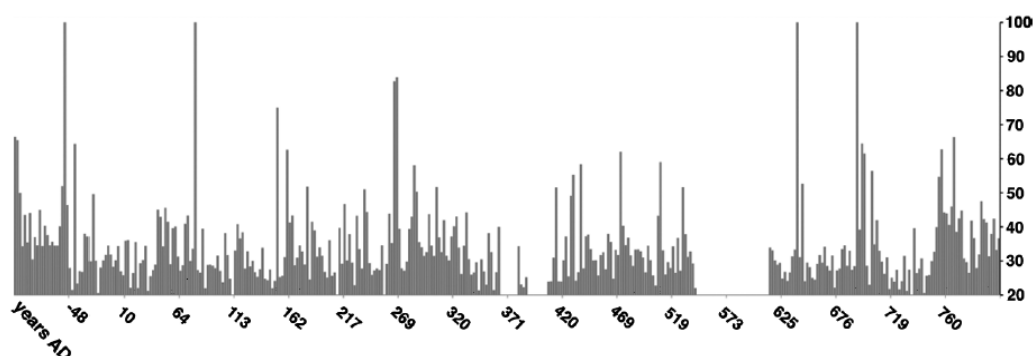
Taking advantage of this climate disaster in the Eastern Türk Khaganate, the Sui state launched their attacks in 583 AD. Ishbara Khagan's army was defeated and retreated to the steppe, dropping their weight. Retreating to the steppe, the Isbara Khagan and his army faced a great famine. The army, which had lost most of its weight during the rout, experienced famine and a subsistence crisis in the steppe. Since they could not find food, they had to eat bone powder. Apart from these disasters, an epidemic occurred in the army. Because of all this, there were a lot of deaths in Ishbara's army and his power decreased. GISP data supported the Byzantine records. As mentioned above, the Byzantine sources refer to a decrease in sunlight in 536/7 AD. This event seems in the GISP data. In figure 7, SO₄ data reflects huge volcanic eruptions (McCormick, et al., 2012, pp. 177, 195).

Figure 13

Greenland Ice-Core Proxy Data for Sea Ice, Volcanism, and Annual Temperature



Note. “Climate Change during and after the Roman Empire: Reconstructing the Past from Scientific and Historical Evidence” by McCormick and et al., 2012, Journal of Interdisciplinary History, p. 177.

Figure 14SO₄ peaks

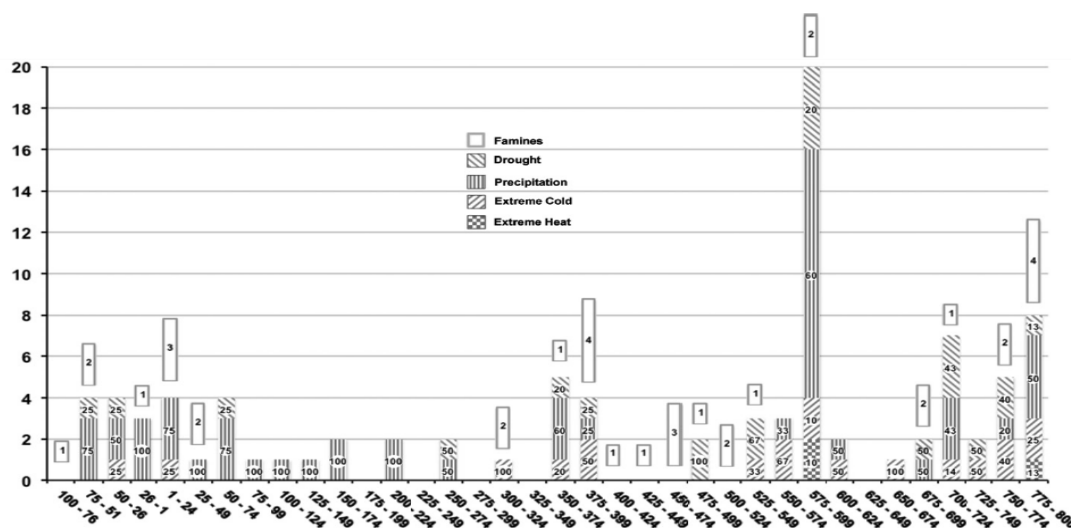
Note. “Climate Change during and after the Roman Empire: Reconstructing the Past from Scientific and Historical Evidence” by McCormick and et al., 2012, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, p. 177.

“The winter season in 548 extremely cold,” Gregory of Tours, Gallo-Roman historian, said. Furthermore, “we deal with a famine that damages us,” Fabius Fulgentius, a Latin writer, said at the end of the fifth century. It seems that abnormalities began in Europe in the 5th century AD. These peaked in the 6th century AD (Montanari, 2018, pp. 13-14, 46). Figure 6 shows the cause of these abnormalities. We might estimate that if the temperature shows a falling tendency, the number of famines and droughts will increase. It is seen that extraordinary natural events took place in the Western Mediterranean between 525 and 600 AD (Figure 8 and 9). In the 6th century AD, one hundred and ten cases of extreme cold, eighty-seven cases of drought, and three cases of famine were recorded (Figure 8). On the other hand, Figure 9 shows that fifty-seven cases of extreme cold, one hundred and eleven cases of drought, and sixteen cases of famine occurred on the territory of the Byzantine Empire in the sixth century AD. In the Levant, a long drought, lasting for 15 years occurred in the first half of the sixth century AD (McCormick, et al., 2012, p. 197). Moreover, the effects of the event of 536 AD are frankly seen in the data in Figure 9. The climate disasters in the sixth century AD occurred not only in the

Mediterranean but also in the entire northern hemisphere, as in detail mentioned above (Ganiev & Kukarskih, 2018, p. 4).

Figure 15

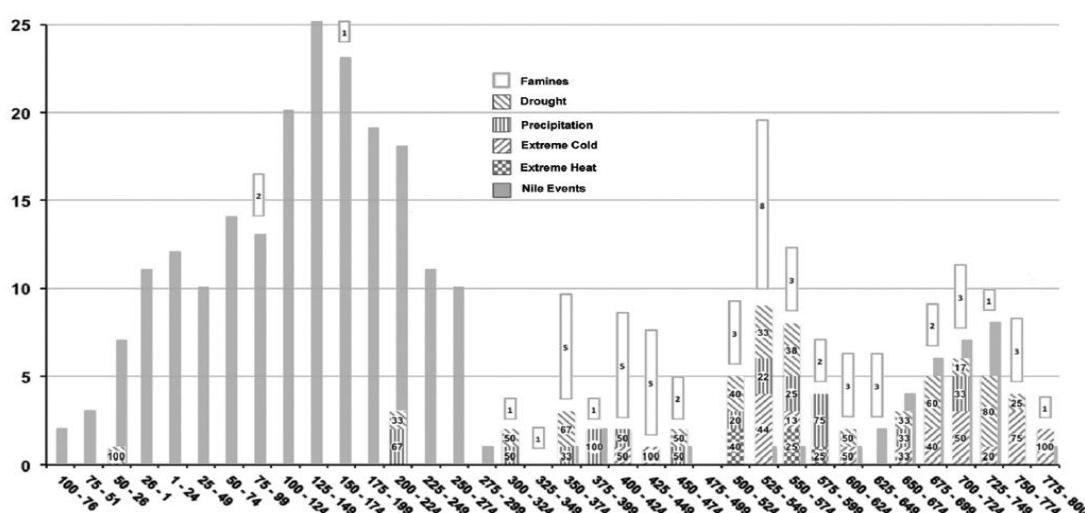
Climate Events from Written Records, 100 BC–800 AD in Western Roman Empire and Successors



Note. “Climate Change during and after the Roman Empire: Reconstructing the Past from Scientific and Historical Evidence” by McCormick and et al., 2012, Journal of Interdisciplinary History, p. 182

Figure 16

Climate Events from Written Records, 100 BC–800 AD in Eastern Roman Empire and Successors



Note. “Climate Change during and after the Roman Empire: Reconstructing the Past from Scientific and Historical Evidence” by McCormick and et al., 2012, Journal of Interdisciplinary History, p. 182.

There is also an opinion to differ from the theory that climate change is engendered by volcanic activities. Emma Rigby, Melissa Symonds and Derek Ward-Thompson claim that a comet caused climate change in the 6th century. They have calculated how much impact a small comet has. The origin of this comet is probably the Taurid meteor stream. As maintained by their theory, it is likely that a piece of the comet might have struck the Earth and resulted in the atmospheric dust-veil event (Rigby, Symonds, & Ward-Thompson, 2004, p. 26). If this atmospheric phenomenon had occurred, it could have been observed by people and recorded in historical documents. It is a known fact that volcanic eruptions paved the way for climate change in the first half of the sixth century. We might suggest that the first eruption occurred in 536 AD and the second of it erupted nearly in 540. These eruptions are likely to engender the Justinianic plague due to the structures of a complicated catastrophe (Newfield, 2019, pp. 97-98). At the heart of our argument are the following: the first eruption dates back to 536 AD. Because this volcanic activity caused drought and famine in all of the northern hemispheres, it most likely damaged rodent nests and plague foci in Kyrgyzstan. As mentioned above, there is a large increase in the activity of infected fleas due to temperature.

Thus, the plague spread from Kyrgyzstan to India via the Silk Road (Ganiev & Kukarskih, 2018, p. 5). Reaching the trading ports in Western India, the plague is likely to have carried to the Axum Kingdom and ports of the Red Sea by ships. In these ships, the plague could be carried from western India to East Africa by *Rattus rattus*. According to Sarris, the plague was carried by means of merchants, armies and rodents (2021, p. 5). Probably on those days, the second volcanic eruption (540) happened. This eruption paved the way for droughts and famines in the Mediterranean. Therefore, it triggered an increased sensibility to disease among

human beings. Moreover, rodent nets in East Africa were damaged. Infected black rats easily transmitted fleas and the plague to other rodents. Consequently, they transmitted to human beings. As claimed by Prokopios, the Justinianic plague began in mid-July 541 (Newfield, 2018, p. 471; Newfield, 2019, p. 93; Ganiev & Kukarskih, 2018, p. 5; Stathakopoulos, 2016, s. 113). Setting out the date of the epidemic mentioned in *The Wars of Justinian* is crucial. Mooson winds commence blowing from land to sea in the winter season. Therefore, trade ships sail to reach from western Indian ports to ports of the Red Sea. These ships reach the ports of the Red Sea at about the beginning of the summer season. Indian trade goods transport from this region to the Eastern Mediterranean (Kofahl, 2013, p. 15). According to Prokopios (2.22.6), the Justinianic plague launched in Pelusium, and then it spread to the entire Mediterranean (Prokopios, 2014, p. 120). Trajan's Canal supplied the transportation of Indian and East African goods through the Red Sea ports to the Pelusium in the Antiquity Age (Kofahl, 2013, p. 14). As a result, the date when the ships arrived in the Eastern Mediterranean coincides with the date when the plague began.

CONCLUSION

The German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen produced the concepts of "Seidenstraße" (Silk Road) and "Seidenstraßen" (Silk Roads) in 1877. The Swedish geographer Sven Anders Hedin, a student of von Richthofen, made expeditions in the Tarim Basin and the Pamirs. He discovered the ruins of the historic city of Loulan. The Silk Road Works, which began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, increased in intensity with the archaeological discoveries made in East Turkestan in the twentieth century. The famous English archaeologist of Hungarian origin, Sir Marc Aurel Stein, conducted expeditions in East Turkestan in 1901, 1906-1908, 1913-1916 and 1930. He uncovered the ruins of ancient cities in the Tarim Basin. He

moved the documents, which he found in the Dunhuang caves to the British Museum. The French soon afterwards became involved in the Silk Road work. The Sinologist Paul Pelliot, a student of the French Sinologist Edouard Chavannes, reached out to the documents of the Kucha lost language in 1906. In 1909, he bought some of Dunhuang's manuscripts and brought them to Paris. These great discoveries and the study of the manuscripts initiated the researches of the history of the Silk Road. The German academy studies the ancient civilizations of the Silk Road mainly through philological research. Anglo-Saxon historiography, on the other hand, explores the Silk Road by building it more in the form of a world history. In addition, it also examines a certain region or period of the Silk Road as a subject of a monograph. Regional studies are conducted mainly on cultures in the Tarim Basin. An overview of the history of the Silk Road is made by taking the region as the center. The Russian Academy, on the other hand, conducted archaeological excavations that shed light on the history of Eurasia during the twentieth century. During the USSR period, enormous discoveries were made in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Southern Siberia and Ukraine, along which the routes of the Silk Road passed. In addition to political historiography, cultural studies of the Silk Road have gained importance since the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In particular, the effects of religions such as Buddhism, Manichaeism, Christianity and Islam on the Silk Road have been the subject of study. The discoveries of Paul Pelliot and Sir Aurel Stein shed light on the importance of Uyghurs in the Silk road culture. Thanks to archaeological excavations conducted throughout Asia during the twentieth century, the importance of the Türk Khaganate, the Hephthalites, the Kushans, Alexander the Great and the Scythians, not only the Uyghurs, was understood. In our thesis, we based on the method of studying the Silk Road as a world history of Anglo-

Saxon literature. Our research topic is limited to the sixth century. We have examined the history of the Silk Road in this century on a wide geography. We have revealed the study of an Afro-Eurasian history, which includes in the east of Asia, the Northern Wei dynasty and its successors, in the Eurasian steppes, the Rouran and Türk Khaganates, the Hephthalite Empire and the Gupta Kingdom in Inner Asia and Northern India, the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires in the Middle East and the Kingdom of Axum in East Africa. In our thesis, we not only adopted chronological historiography but also studied the socio-economic history of the sixth century.

Archaeological resources have been used for this purpose. The most important factor in determining the subject of our thesis was the Covid-19 pandemic that emerged at the end of 2019 and turned into a pandemic in 2020. Throughout the history of mankind, many epidemics have occurred. Some of them have been experienced on a regional and some on a global scale. The question of how epidemics such as the plague have affected the history of humanity has devoured the minds of many researchers. Since there is no possibility of experimental observation in the study of history, as in the natural sciences, the reconstruction of the past has been one of the most vital topics of discussion. The Covid-19 pandemic has given the opportunity for historical research to observe how an epidemic spreads and what socio-economic consequences it entails, and even what political results it creates. So, based on the pandemic process in 2020, we first produced theories about the emergence, spread and socio-economic and political consequences of the Black Plague epidemic. We compared the climate during the Covid-19 and Black Plague periods, the causes and consequences of the spread of the disease, and found that there is a parallel in these titles. In the light of these inferences, we examined the Justinian Plague and the sixth century. The summary of the results we have presented is as follows; The “Cooling of

Late Antiquity” was a triggering factor in the emergence of the plague epidemic. During this review, bacteriology studies published since 2010 have been guided the way. These studies have shown that the Justinian plague originated in the plague foci in the Tenri Tagh located in Kyrgyzstan and China and reached the Middle East and turned into a pandemic. Peter Sarris stated in his study in 2007 that the Himalayas and the surrounding area cannot be the source of the Justinian plague. According to him, the volume of Byzantine trade with India is smaller than the volume of Chinese trade with India. Therefore, it is not possible for the plague to come by sea trade. Defending the views of Evagrius, he states that the Justinian plague originated in Africa (p. 122). Sallares, on the other hand, states that the origin of the plague should be sought in Upper Egypt (2007, p. 242). Since these works by Sallares and Sarris belong to the year 2007, we should give our answers with this in mind. In the year mentioned, no bacteriological studies had yet been conducted proving that the plague of Justinian originated in Inner Asia. For this reason, both Sarris and Sallares, based on Byzantine sources, stated that the plague may have originated in Africa. In this study, we aimed to present arguments that are opposite to Sarris' views on Byzantine-Indian trade. One of the land routes of the Silk Road coincides with the plague foci detected in Kyrgyzstan. A volcanic eruption or eruptions in 536 caused a volcanic winter that affected the entire Northern Hemisphere. This climate catastrophe has caused damage to rodent nests in the Kyrgyz highlands. Rodents, whose food areas have been damaged, have moved further away from their habitat. Rodents descending from high-altitude areas to the valleys where the Silk Road passes have caused infected fleas to be transported here along the trade route. Since 536, infected fleas have been transported from Kirgiztan to the coast of Western India by trade route. In contrast to Sarris, it is seen that activities were carried out Dec the Justinian period between

Western India and Byzantium to revive the Silk Road maritime trade. Justinian established contacts with the Kingdom of Axum and the Himyarite Kingdom to increase Indian Maritime trade before the plague epidemic in 541. In brief, contrary to Sarris's claim, it seems that trade was on the rise shortly before the plague epidemic broke out. In the 540, a second volcanic eruption or eruptions occurred that affected the Northern Hemisphere. It was probably at this time that the plague reached the coast of Western India. Since the nests inhabited by rodents on the territory of the Byzantine Empire were damaged by the climate disasters of 536 and 540, these rodents flocked to the cities in order to find food. Ships leaving the coast of Western India might have reached the ports of the Red Sea precisely at this time. Infected fleas and rodents on ships came into contact with the excessive rodent population in the port cities, causing the spread of plague among mammals in the Byzantine and starting the pandemic. One of the factors that caused the pandemic to occur, in our opinion, is an archaic globalization in the sixth century. In this century, the territory of the Hephthalite Empire stretched from the easternmost parts of the Tarim Basin to the westernmost parts of the Khwarazm region. In the south, the borders had expanded to the ancient city of Eran. From these lands, the Overland Silk Routes passed, which we discussed in detail in the second part of our thesis. Infected fleas spread from the Tenri Tagh, where located in the Hephthalite lands, to the surrounding area and again reached the ports of northwestern India, where located in the Hephthalite territories. At this point, the following question should be asked; But why did the infected fleas go to Egypt by sea and not go to China or Iran by land? Fleas are suitable for living in warm spring and humid summer conditions. They also live at temperatures above 10°C. Their survival in dry and hot conditions is becoming more difficult (Stenseth et al., 2006, p. 13110-13115). In the event that infected fleas are carried by clinging to a

living being or object, the arid climate is fatal for fleas. The silk route from Inner Asia to Iran passes through the Karakorum Desert, and the route to China passes through the Taklamakan Desert. Therefore, the routes under consideration are unfavorable for the survival of fleas (Benedictow, 2013, p. 9). However, the silk road routes to Western India were more convenient because they passed through mountainous areas. In this case, a second question arises. Why did ships transport infected fleas and rodents to Byzantium by sea and not to China? The answer to this question is hidden in the eruption of the volcano, which occurred in the year 540. Probably, the Southern and Eastern Chinese coasts were not affected or were little affected by the 540 climate crisis. However, as we have examined in our thesis, the climate disasters of 536 and 540 caused severe effects on Byzantine Empire. The Mediterranean geography, which normally has a problematic rainfall regime, has experienced frequent droughts due to 536 climate disasters. The immune system of humans weakened. Access to food became difficult and rodents came to the cities to feed. Under these conditions, the Byzantine lands, which experienced a second climate disaster in 540, became pregnant with epidemics. Probably the ships that sailed from the West Indian coast around this year caused the outbreak of the pandemic in Egypt in 541 due to the infected fleas and rodents, which they carried. One of the issues, we have discussed in our thesis, is the silk trade that enabled the globalization of the sixth century and its political reflections. Justinian and his successors tried to use the various routes of the Silk Road to break the Sasanian monopoly on trade. Justinian's attempt to revive the Indian Maritime trade caused an epidemic of plague. However, soon after the Türk Khaganate came into contact with Byzantine Empire, the silk trade shifted to the Caucasus. Khosrow Anushirvan invaded Yemen to cut off the Indian Maritime route, and also attacked the Caucasus to block the land link of Byzantium with the Türk

Khaganate. The Byzantine-Sasanian war changed shape and turned into the Byzantine-Sasanian-Türk Khaganate war. The economic and political struggle was reflected in the field of art and culture. Byzantine art spread as far as China. In particular, the influence of Byzantine coins is observed on the coins minted by the Western Türk Khaganate. An example of an outcome of its globalization in the sixth century can be cited the spread of Buddhism in the Türk Khaganate. Tokharistan and the Tarim Basin were areas where there were important Buddhist settlements. When these places joined the territory of the Khaganate, Buddhism naturally penetrated in the rulers of the Türk Khaganate. We have discussed the effects of climatic events in 542 and 583 on the Turkic Khaganate in the fourth chapter. Although it is not the main topic of our thesis, we would like to draw attention to an important point here. The effects of climatic events on the emergence and collapse of the state in the steppe should be studied by researchers with interdisciplinary comparisons. We think that the results that will be revealed will add new interpretations to the historiography of steppe history.

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APPENDIX A

Figure 17

This table shows Eastern products subject to customs tax on import into Alexandria

<i>Eastern imports into the Roman Empire</i>	
This table lists Eastern products subject to customs tax on import into Alexandria. ¹	
Cinnamon	Linen
Long pepper	All sorts of gems
White pepper	Pearls
Pentasphaerum leaf	Sardonyx
Barbary leaf	Ceraunium (bloodstone)
Costum	Hyacinth stone (blue gems)
Costamomum	Emerald
Nard	Diamond
Tyrian cassia	Sapphire
Cassia-wood	Turquoise
Myrrh	Beryl
Amomum	Tortoise stone
Ginger	Indian or Seric drugs
Malabrathrum	Raw silk
Indian spice	Silk or part-silk clothing
Galbanum	Dyed cloth
Asafoetida	Embroidered fine linen
Aloe	Silk thread
Lycium	Indian eunuchs
Perian gum	Lions
Arabian onyx	Lionesses
Cardamom	Pards (maneless big cats)
Cinnamon-wood	Leopards
Cotton goods	Panthers
Babylonian hides	Purple dye
Parthian hides	Wool
Ivory	Dye
Indian iron	Indian hair

Note. by McLaughlin, *Roma and the Distant East Trade Routes to the Ancient Lands of Arabia, India and China*, 2010, p. 181.

APPENDIX B**Figure 18**

An Indian female figure discovered in Pompeii



Note. by McLaughlin, 2010, p. 108

APPENDIX C

Figure 19

“A first- to second-century Gandharan sculpture of the Buddha”



Note. by Darley, 2013, p. 51.

APPENDIX D**Figure 20**

“A roman-style winged figure motif from Miran”



Note. by Hansen, 2012, p. 144.