



ARDAŠĪR III

ARDAŠĪR III, Sasanian king (r. September, 628-29 April, 629). His father Šērōyē (Kawād II) murdered most of the Sasanian princes and died after only a brief reign (Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, pp. 383ff.). Nobles and senior officials proclaimed his seven-year-old son Ardašīr king, and one of them, Meh-Ādur Gušnasp (Meh-Ādar Jošnas), the *kvān-sālār* ([royal] table-master), was elected as his supervisor and regent (Nöldeke op. cit., p. 386; Ya'qūbī, I, p. 196; Baḷ'amī, *Tārīk*, pp. 1192f.; Dīnavarī, p. 116, where the king's name is given as Šīrzād). The fact that Ardašīr's mother was a Byzantine lady (called Anzoi [?]: Th. Nöldeke, *Die von Guidi herausgegebene syrische Chronik*, Vienna, 1893, p. 31), probably made him less popular, and he was generally ignored, the real power being in the hands of the great nobles and especially Meh-Ādur Gušnasp (Nöldeke, op. cit., p. 386); he was surnamed "The Little One" (Bīrūnī, *Chronology*, p. 123). The *Šāh-nāma* ([Moscow], IX, pp. 293-94) attributes to him a rather stereotyped coronation speech. Meh-Ādur Gušnasp was well-meaning and loyal, and after the catastrophic last years of Kōsrow II and the plague of 628—which claimed almost half of Iraq's population (Nöldeke, op. cit., p. 385 n. 4)—his fair rule promised some degree of social justice and reestablishing of the order, as is proven by his acts (Nöldeke, op. cit., p.386; Yāqūt, *Mo'jam al-boldān* IV, p. 839; Ya'qūbī, loc. cit.; Baḷ'amī, op. cit., pp. 1192-93). But as Ṭā'ālebī rightly remarks, the political situation was extremely grave: Local chiefs and army leaders had gained too much power to obey the central government; imperial administration was disintegrating, and the Arabs and the Turks were attacking Iranian border regions (Ṭā'ālebī, *Gorar*, pp. 731-32). In 629 a Kazar army descended upon the northern border and was kept in check only by



Šahrwarāz (Šahrbarāz; in the *Šāh-nāma* [Šahrān-] Gorāz), the most distinguished general of Kōsrow II, who at this time was on the Byzantine frontier to guard against an invasion by Heraclius (K. Patkanian, *Essai d'une histoire de la dynastie des Sassanides d'après les renseignements fournis par les historiens arméniens*, Paris, 1866, p. 219). The difficult moment, which required a determined and experienced leader, tempted Šahrwarāz to seize power. He secured a pact with Heraclius, marched on Ctesiphon with 6,000 men, besieged it, and took it through treachery, killing Ardabīl, Meh-Ādur Gušnasp, and many other notables, and usurping the throne for himself (27 April 629; Nöldeke, *Syrische Chronik*, pp. 31f.; idem, *Geschichte*, p. 388; Baḷ'amī, pp. 1194-95; Ya'qūbī, I, p. 197; Ta'ālebī, p. 732; *Šāh-nāma* IX, pp. 294-98; Patkanian, loc. cit.).

Ardašīr is usually assigned a reign of one year and six months, but Hešām Kalbī gave him, more correctly, one year and seven months (Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, pp. 348, 433). His coins show him on the obverse as a youth, wearing a three-stepped crenellated crown (recalling the crowns of Šāpūr I and Yazdegerd II), while the reverse reintroduces the archaic form of the upturned flowing ribbons of the fire altar. On a second series the crown is ornamented with an eagle's wings (as on the crown of Kōsrow II) surmounted by a ball (as on the crown of Kawād II), indicating perhaps that his authority had by then been established (R. Göbl, *Sasanian Numismatics*, Braunschweig, 1971, p. 54, pl. 14, nos. 225-27). In the picture book of Sasanian kings, Ardašīr was represented as standing, leaning on a sword grasped in his left hand, while his right held a lance; his costume included a sky-blue gown and a red crown (Ḥamza, p. 61; *Moǰmal*, p. 37). According to a late tradition (*Moǰmal*, p. 464), the infant king was entombed in the land of Mēšān (Mesene).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text.

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