



ASTABED

ASTABED. The word *astabid* occurs in two Syriac texts as the title of a high-ranking Iranian officer and is applied to three different individuals: (1) the general Bōē, who was appointed by Kavād to arrange an armistice with the Roman general Celer but died in 505 before the negotiations were concluded (Joshua the Stylite, pars. 59, 80, 81, 95; tr. Wright, pp. 50, 64-65, 72-73); (2) Bōē's successor in this role, who achieved the peace of 506 with the Romans (*ibid.*, pars. 97-98; tr. Wright, p. 75. Cf. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire* II, p. 99); (3) a high official appointed by Kavād to negotiate with Hypathius and Pharazman, the Roman emperor's representatives, in 527, and apparently the same person as the *astabid* who commanded an army against the Romans in northern Mesopotamia a few years later (Zacharias the Rhetor, 8.5 and 9.4; ed. Brooks, *CSCO* pp. 77, 95; tr. pp. 53, 65). The second and third of these men could be one and the same.

Joshua the Stylite (tr. Wright, p. 50) defines *astabid* as “*magister (militum)* of the Persians.” The eminent Byzantinist E. Stein took a special interest in this office, surmising that it corresponded to the *magister officiorum* of the Romans and had been instituted by Kavād shortly before 503 for the purpose of weakening the authority of the *wazurg framadār* (“Ein Kapital,” pp. 52f.; *Le Muséon*, 1940, pp. 131-32). This hypothesis found some support and appears to have been adopted by Christensen (*Iran Sass.*, pp. 136, 352, 521). If the word is read as *astabid*, the existence of an office with that title in Kavād's reign will have to be acknowledged.

It should be noted, however, that the Byzantine authors name the first of the



three men as Aspebedes (Procopius, *De Bello Persico* 1.9.24), Aspetios (Theophanes, *Chronography*, ed. I. Bekker, Bonn, 1838, I, p. 228), or Aspevedes (Photius, *Bibliotheca* 63; ed. R. Henry, *Photius* I, p. 66). Likewise the third *astabid* is clearly identifiable with the other Aspebedes mentioned by Procopius (op. cit., 1.21.4). These different Greek transcriptions are all likely to be distortions of the title *spāhbed*, lit. “army commander” (Justi, *Namenbuch*, p. 70; Zacharias, ed. Brooks, p. 73 n. 5; M. L. Chaumont, *Le Muséon*, 1968, pp. 234f.). It is therefore by no means improbable that in a common source used by the two Syriac chroniclers *astabid* had been wrongly written instead of *aspabid*, the normal Syriac form of the Pahlavi *spāhbed*, or perhaps *asp(a)bed* “chief of the cavalry” (cf. C. Lebeau, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, ed. J. Saint-Martin, VII, 1827, p. 364 and n. 5).

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Zacharias the Rhetor, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. E. W. Brooks, CSCO 84, *Scriptores Syri* 39 (III, 6), Louvain, 1921; *ibid.* 88, *Syr.* 42 (III, 6), Louvain, 1924.

See also M. L. Chaumont, *Le Muséon*, 1968, pp. 231-40.

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