



BYZANTINE-IRANIAN RELATIONS

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I. Before the Islamic conquest.

Introduction. From the middle of the 1st century b.c. the Middle East was dominated by the political rivalries of the empires of Rome and Iran. In a.d. 224 [Ardašīr I](#) overthrew the Parthians and founded the Sasanian dynasty, with its capital at [Ctesiphon](#), which was to endure until the Islamic conquest in 650. Diocletian's reorganization of the Roman empire followed by Constantine the Great's (r. 306-37; Amida (modern Dīārbakr, Diyarbakır in Turkey); but, when a fresh wave of Hephthalites descended upon the Caucasus, he relinquished his gains in exchange for a substantial payment (Joshua the Stylite, pp. 38-62; Procopius, 1.7-10; Evagrius, 3.37; John the Lydian, 3.53; cf. Markwart, pp. 63f., 107). After another indecisive war in Lazica on the Black Sea, Armenia, northern Mesopotamia, and Syria, Kōsrow I Anōšīravān (531-79) and Justinian I (527-65) signed an agreement on unlimited peace in 532 (Procopius, 1.12-22; Malalas, *Chronicle* 18). The town of Dara at the base of the Taurus mountains remained in Byzantine hands, though no longer as military headquarters for Mesopotamia, and Byzantium agreed to finance the Persian defense of the Caucasus (Procopius, 1.22; Malalas, 18; Güterbock, pp. 36-45, with literature).

Thus secure on his eastern border, Justinian successfully waged war in Italy



and North Africa, vastly increasing his resources and military might and “[making] use of the years of peace to strengthen the defenses of the eastern provinces” (Bury, 1923, II, p. 90). Kōsrow became alarmed, and Ostrogothic and Armenian leaders urged him to counter the universalist aims of the Byzantine emperor before it was too late (Procopius, 2.2.1-11; cf. 2.14.11, 12). When Arab vassals of the two empires quarreled, war became unavoidable (540). Kōsrow swept through Syria, capturing the rich city of Antioch and extorting ransom from Dara and other towns and fortresses. After a truce that was very costly for Byzantium, intermittent hostilities continued for two decades, mainly in Lazica (taken by the Sasanians) and in Armenia, where the Byzantines continually fomented rebellion (Procopius, 2.3ff.; see also Güterbock, pp. 46-56, and Bury, 1923, II, pp. 89-120). The treaty of “fifty years of peace,” signed in 562, obligated both sides to relinquish their gains and to seek negotiations in future disputes; Persia guaranteed freedom of worship to its Christian subjects, and Byzantium pledged an annual payment in gold for defense of the Caucasus (Menander, frags. 11f., with Blockley’s note; Güterbock, pp. 57ff.). Ten years later Justin II (565-78) stopped this payment, stirred up rebellion in Persarmenia, and encouraged the central Asian Turks to invade Persia. Hostilities were resumed: Armenia and Mesopotamia were repeatedly ravaged, and eventually the emperor Maurice (582-602) defeated the Persian generals, including Bahrām Čōbīn. However, domestic troubles again forced both sides to withdraw to their respective territories (Agathias, 4.29; Theophylact, 3.9-20; 4.2f., cf. 1.1-15, 2.1-18; Menander, frags. 20ff.; Evagrius, 5.7ff.; 6.15; see further Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, pp. 238, 240, 264ff. n. 4; Güterbock, pp. 110ff; Higgins, 1939, chaps. 2f.).

In 590 Kōsrow II Parvēz (590, 591-628) appealed to Maurice for support after Bahrām Čōbīn had seized the Persian throne (Theophylact, 4.10f.; Theophanes, pp. 245ff.). Although hard-pressed by nomadic incursions, Maurice was eager to defend the principle of royal legitimacy (Chrysos, 1978, pp. 36, 70f.) and provided Kōsrow with generous financial and military assistance, in return for territorial concessions (Theophylact, 5.3ff.; Sebeos, pp. 38ff.; *The Chronicle of Séert*, p. 466). Bahrām was overthrown, and a cordial relationship developed between the two empires; it lasted until the usurper Phocas murdered Maurice and his family (Theophylact, 4.11ff., 5.1ff.; *Anonymous Syriac Chronicle*, tr. Nöldeke, pp. 1f.). Kōsrow then declared war (603), ostensibly to avenge his benefactor (Theophylact, 8.9.11ff.; Patkanian, p. 197; Rawlinson, 1876, p. 500, with further literature). In a series of campaigns he and his generals Šahrvarāz and Šāhēn captured Mesopotamia, Armenia, Syria, and Cappadocia,



amassing enormous booty. In 610 Heraclius (d. 641) overthrew Phocas and sought peace once again, but Ǧosrow refused. His armies continued their march in two directions: Šahrvarāz took Antioch, Apamea, Caesarea, Mazaca, Damascus, Jerusalem (whence he sent the “true cross” to Persia), and, in 616, Egypt. Šāhēn conquered the whole of Asia Minor, entered Chalcedon after a short siege, and encamped within a mile of Constantinople itself, in the expectation that his Avar allies would descend from the Balkans and take the city (Theophylact, 8.13ff.; Sebeos in Patkanian, pp. 197, 200, 211; Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, pp. 291ff.; Rawlinson, pp. 501ff.; *Anonymous Syriac Chronicle*, tr. Nöldeke, pp. 1ff.; *Anonymous Arabic Chronicle*; Agapius, pp. 449ff.; on the conquest of Jerusalem see particularly “Antiochus Strategos,” in Garitte, ed. and tr.). The Byzantine empire had reached its lowest ebb, and Heraclius pleaded for peace, but Ǧosrow, whose empire was at a zenith unequaled since the days of the Achaemenids, refused (*Chronicon Paschale* I, p. 385; Theophanes, p. 252; Agapius, p. 450).

Twenty years of war had, however, depleted Persia’s warrior class (detailed discussion and sources in Baynes, 1904, and Gerland, pp. 330ff.); in 627 Ǧosrow had to raise “an army of slaves and foreigners” (Theophanes, p. 263 A, with Rawlinson’s explanation, p. 517 n. 1). He had also neglected to build a navy capable of destroying the vast Byzantine fleet or even of defending Persian shores, and he had both underestimated Heraclius’ military skills and determination to recapture Jerusalem and overestimated the strength and reliability of the Avars, who were driven back from Constantinople (Nicophorus of Constantinople, pp. 9ff.; Theophanes, pp. 252-72; *Chronicon Paschale*, pp. 393ff.; cf. the praises of Heraclius by George of Pisidia and Theodore Syncellus). In 622 Heraclius initiated a series of annual campaigns (Gerland, pp. 331ff.; Rawlinson, pp. 168-87; Stratos, *passim*; Ostrogorsky, 1969, pp. 100ff.; Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, pp. 356ff.; Minorsky), transporting his troops by sea to such harbors as Issos on the Cilician coast and Trebizond (modern Trabzon) on the Black Sea; he repeatedly took the Sasanian forces by surprise and defeated them. Emboldened by the arrival of heavy reinforcements from Khazar and eastern Christian supporters, the emperor devastated Ganzak in Azarbaijan, where the rich temple of *Ādur Gušnasp* was located, as well as many other towns in Mesopotamia, Persarmenia, and Media, including Dastgerd, Ǧosrow’s own summer resort.

In 628 the Persian generals and magnates, exhausted by constant warfare, rose in rebellion and killed Ǧosrow, placing his son Šīrūya (Kavād II) on the



throne (Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, pp. 382ff.; Rawlinson, pp. 533ff., with sources). After concluding a hasty peace with Heraclius (as the result of which all Sasanian territorial gains were given up and the “true cross” restored; Nicophorus, p. 14; Theophanes, pp. 272-73; *Chronicon Paschale*, p. 14) the new ruler plunged Persia into deep domestic strife, from which it did not recover before the Arab conquest.

Despite periodic conflicts arising from Byzantine claims to protection over Christians in Persia, Byzantine ambassadors and officials in Persia were, of course, Christians, and many Christian physicians, philosophers, artists, and soldiers visited or were forcibly settled there under royal protection; for example, Kōsrow I resettled prisoners from Antioch in a quarter of Ctesiphon called Veh-Andiyōk-Kōsrow, later Rūmīya (Christensen, pp. 386, 487ff.; Güterbock, pp. 93-99; Asmussen, pp. 933ff.; Garsoian, pp. 571ff.). Christian women were occasionally to be found in the royal households as well (Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, pp. 467, 472; Christensen, pp. 475f.). The claim of some early writers that Kōsrow II himself embraced Christianity is unfounded (Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, p. 287 n. 2), but at the beginning of his reign, when his relations with Byzantium were cordial, he did seek the support of Persian Christians and showed reverence towards Christian relics and shrines (Theophylact, 5.15, 8; Peeters, 1947, pp. 5ff.). It is certain, however, that any attempt to convert Persia to Christianity would have run counter to deeply rooted popular sentiment (Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, pp. 287f.). It is worth noting that Byzantine Christians and Iranian Zoroastrians were equally opposed to Manicheism and tried to suppress it and its offshoots.

Already under Diocletian (284-305) the Romans had recognized the parity of Sasanian rulers in the diplomatic and legal aspects of sovereignty (the use of the term *politia*, Gk. *politeía*, for the state was restricted to Rome and Persia; Chrysos, 1976, pp. 7ff.). Furthermore, though the title *basileús* “king” was occasionally applied to foreign rulers in Byzantine literary sources, the study of all available documents issued by the imperial chancery in the period from Constantine to Heraclius has shown that no foreign ruler, except the Sasanian king of kings, was ever officially acknowledged as *basileús*, even if he had received his crown from or with the support of Constantinople (Chrysos, 1978, p. 59).

For their part the Persians maintained that the diversity of man’s nature and his inclination toward evil made it “impossible for a single monarchy” to rule the world (Theophylact, 4.11.2). According to official Sasanian ideology, Rūm



(the Roman/Byzantine empire) and Ērānšahr (the empire of the Iranians) were by divine plan the two centers of civilizations (“the moon of the West and the sun of the East,” in the words of Kavād I; Malalas, p. 449), the two guardians of order and progress in the world, which, “like a man’s two shining eyes, ought to adorn and illustrate each other, and not in the extremity of their wrath to seek rather each other’s destruction” (from the Sasanian ambassador’s address to Galerius, r. 305-11; Petrus Patricius, ed. Müller, *Fragmenta* IV, p. 188 no. 13). This view was reiterated exactly 300 years later in a letter from Ɣosrow Parvēz to Maurice (Theophylact, 4.11.1ff.).

Mutual recognition of sovereignty and equal rank was clearly expressed in forms of address (Güterbock, pp. 6ff.; and for what follows, Chrysos, 1978, *passim*). Just as the term *basileús* was restricted to the Sasanian kings in official Byzantine documents, in Persian diplomatic documents the Latin title *caesar* was applicable only to Roman emperors. The division of the Roman Empire led to difficulties, however, for the Sasanian kings recognized only one equal sovereign power in the West; they therefore continued to address the emperors at Constantinople as *caesar* (see, e.g., Theophylact Simocatta, 4.11.1). Not until after Maurice had aided them against Bahrām Čōbīn did the Sasanians acknowledge the Byzantine emperors as *basileús*; Ɣosrow Parvēz addressed his benefactor by this title, which was then applied to his successors (Chrysos, 1978, p. 70). The king of Persia and the emperor called each other “brother” (and their queens called each other “sister”; e.g., in Theodora’s letter to Anōšīravān’s queen: Malalas, 18, p. 467), even during periods of war. Gifts were often exchanged between courts (Güterbock, pp. 7f., for what follows), and, when cordial relations prevailed or the need for a favor arose, Justin II could call himself “son of Ɣosrow [I]” (Menander, 20.1.10, ed. Blockley), or Ɣosrow Parvēz might address Maurice as “your son and suppliant” (Theophylact, 4.11.11). When a new ruler ascended either throne it was expected that he would send an embassy to the other, in order to announce the occasion. Permanent embassies were not yet known, however. In political, religious, and economic disputes senior officials were sent to negotiate. The safety of ambassadors was guaranteed; they paid no custom duties but received military escorts and travel expenses from their hosts, who also provided comfortable quarters and lavish entertainment. Although it was rare for either ruler to refuse an audience to an ambassador, envoys were customarily denied access to state officials or institutions, in order to prevent them from gathering harmful intelligence. Strict diplomatic forms and etiquette were maintained at both courts. At Constantinople only ambassadors



of the Sasanian kings and later their Islamic successors received the highest honors; others were treated with respect and courtesy carefully graded according to rank. This strict etiquette, “the diplomatic school of Europe,” was promoted by relations with the Sasanian court. “In the diplomatic intercourse between the Imperial and Persian governments,” according to J. B. Bury, “we may find the origin of the formalities of European diplomacy” (1923, I, p. 92).

Occasionally a Sasanian prince or a senior Roman official might take refuge with the other side and be received with honor (e.g., Hormozd, brother of Šāpūr II, and Craugasius, who fled Byzantine Nisibis in the 4th century). Constant rivalry prevented close familial relations, however. It is said that Arcadius (395-408) appointed Yazdegerd I (399-420) guardian of his son Theodosius II and that Yazdegerd treated the prince as his own child, sending a tutor to raise him and warning that enmity toward him would be taken as enmity toward Persia (Procopius, 1.2.6-10). Certainly relations between the two empires were friendly during Yazdegerd’s reign. In 522 Kavād I asked Justin I (518-27) to adopt Kōsrow I Anōšīravān as his own son and to guarantee his future succession, but Justin was advised to decline because, as he was himself without a son, such an adoption would have raised legal and diplomatic problems (ibid., 1.11.6-30). Oriental authors are unanimous that Kōsrow II Parvēz married Maria, a daughter of Maurice, and that Šīrūya was their son (e.g., Ferdowsī, *Šāh-nāma*, Moscow, IX, pp. 98f., 197f.; Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, p. 283 with n. 2), but, because this marriage is not mentioned in Western sources, most scholars have not accepted it as a historical event. K. Güterbock (p. 36) thought that perhaps “Kōsrow, son of Maurice,” as he styled himself in a letter, came to be popularly interpreted as “Kōsrow, son-in-law of Maurice.”

On political relations Rawlinson (1876) is still peerless in its comprehensive treatment of political relations and attention to sources; Nöldeke’s *Geschichte der Perser* offers the most judicious interpretations of sources on political relations; Güterbock remains the only independent study on diplomacy and international law in the age of Justinian, and Chrysos (1976) is fundamental on diplomatic forms and relations; other valuable contributions include Baynes (1904, 1936), Blockley (1984), Bury (1889; 1912; 1923, esp. I, pp. 90-96), Ensslin (1928, 1939, 1942), Gerland, Gray, Hewsen (1978-79, a lucid explanation of the difficult problem of the successors of Tiridates the Great), Higgins (1939; 1941, to be corrected by reference to Chrysos, 1976), Kornemann, Kramers, Stein (1928, 1949), Stratos, and Toumanoff (1963, valuable for Sasanian policy in the



Caucasus). For religious relations and the question of Persian Christians see in general Christensen (esp. pp. 258ff.), Labourt, Peeters, Sachau, and Asmussen. Markwart, Honigmann, and Minorsky are essential for topographical and diplomatic questions.

Trade. Private trade between subjects of the two empires was not encouraged. Commercial transactions were stringently regulated by the imperial administrations on both sides, and merchandise could pass only through designated border towns. For example, at Dara and Nisibis customs duties were collected and travelers searched, lest merchants should act as spies. The main traditional commercial artery was the Silk Road, which ran from China through Central Asia, Khorasan, and northern Persia to Mesopotamia, where one branch continued to Trebizond and the other to Antioch and the Syrian coast. Persia had monopolized the silk trade along this route for centuries, but in 552 Christian monks smuggled silkworms into Syria, and the Byzantine Empire soon became a major producer. In addition to silk, spices, precious stones, incense (particularly for churches), and ivory (in great demand in Byzantium for both religious and secular uses) arrived in the West via this route. The Byzantines also traded textiles and artifacts for spices, incense, and ivory from India and south Asia through the Red Sea, Ethiopia, and the Mediterranean, but in 570 Iran occupied the Yemen and seized temporary control of this route as well.

On commercial relations see Andreades (1948), Bivar (1970), Busse, Christensen (pp. 126ff.), Frye (1972), Lopez, D. T. Rice, and Runciman (1952).

Cultural relations. Some modern scholars have attributed similarities between Sasanian and Byzantine institutions and art either to Persian borrowing or to parallel development from common Hellenistic sources. G. Ostrogorsky, for example, pronounced: “Direct influences from the East were of secondary importance; they were never determining factors in Byzantine civilization, unlike Roman, Hellenistic, and Christian influences” (p. 32 n. 1). N. Garsoïan concluded that “In none of the administrative institutions of the two states can we, therefore, observe at present a clear cut case of imitation or borrowing” (p. 589).

Particularly under Զosrow I Anōšīravān and Maurice, however, ideological exchanges and institutional borrowings are demonstrable, reflecting close political and diplomatic ties. Indeed, Զosrow in his *Kārnāmag* (now lost but summarized by Ebn Meskawayh, *Tajāreb*, ed. L. Caetani, Leiden and London,



1909, I, pp. 207ff.; tr. Grignaschi, pp. 16-28, esp. 27f.) reports that, after examining the traditions of his forebears, he investigated the customs and conduct of the Romans and the Hindus and adopted what seemed to him praiseworthy: “Of all the customs, we adopted those that enhance our rule, and we incorporated them into our own law and customs We have not rejected anyone because he belonged to a different faith or people . . . we have not scorned to learn what they possessed.” A trend toward recognition of such historical interchange is discernible in recent works by Byzantinists (see, e.g., the critical review of the first edition of Ostrogorsky’s book by Gerstinger; see also Baynes, 1952; Ensslin, 1953); it has been characterized by E. K. Chrysos as follows: “After the publication of A. Alföldi’s classic articles on the imperial representation and ceremonies we have learned to be careful not to attribute to Persian influence the elements which characterize the Late Roman and Byzantine court. However true and helpful Alföldi’s conclusions have been to the scholarship of the last forty years, there are several references in the sources which cannot be interpreted merely as anti-Persian topology, since there are some aspects of the constitutional theory and the political life of Early Byzantium which can be explained more easily as influences from the neighboring Great Power of the East than can be traced back to ancient Roman forms” (1978, p. 71).

Persian military successes led the Romans to organize a heavy-mailed cavalry along Persian lines, the *clibanarii* (see *EIr.* II/5, p. 496; Eadie, pp. 169ff.). On the other hand, the Romans’ superior military science and war engines (e.g., ballistas and portable towers) influenced Persian warfare. By the second half of the 6th century the armies of both empires were quite similar and evenly matched. Particularly influential in Persia was the Roman system of fortifications, the line of strong-walled and garrisoned border fortresses called *limes*, which Kōsrow II Parvēz imitated, especially in the Caucasus. As E. Stein (1920, pp. 82ff.) has shown but some historians have vigorously denied, Kōsrow’s restructuring of the empire into four quarters, each ruled by a military governor (*sepāhbad*) with full civil authority, in turn inspired Heraclius (an Armenian, possibly of Arsacid descent; see Shahid, pp. 312ff.) to reorganize his administration, placing a general (*strategos*) with civil authority over each of the four main military districts (*themes*). See also Baynes (1952), Bivar (1972), Ensslin (1953), and Gignoux (1984).

At a much earlier date Diocletian had adopted the magnificent Persian court ceremonial (see especially Ensslin, 1939, pp. 387f., who, p. 387 n. 4, cites Eu-



tropius, 9.26; Aurelius Victor, 39.2-4; Ammianus, 15.5.18; and Jerome, ed. Helm, p. 216.10ff.; he also observes that in order to deny a Persian influence, the leading Byzantinist Alföldi had to “see in the reference to Persia no historical fact at all, but a literary commonplace in the representation of a tyrant,” cited *ibid.*, n. 5). In the 6th-century mosaics at Ravenna Justinian is shown wearing high, soft Persian boots (D. T. Rice, 1953, p. 49). The Persian crown furnished models for ornamental elements in Byzantine royal headgear (*ibid.*); and the halo, the symbol of grace and divine majesty, was adopted in Western iconography (Ensslin, 1939, p. 387, with references). Similarly, a Persian gesture of deference, pulling long sleeves over the hands during the royal audience (Shahbazi, 1983), became an accepted feature of Byzantine iconography and ritual (Dietrich, pp. 446ff.). Among more enduring influences the introduction of sugarcane and polo from Persia can be mentioned; conversely Byzantine urban factions were emulated in Persia under Kōsrow II and ultimately evolved into the *‘ayyār* brotherhoods.

For cultural exchanges see also Baynes (1952), Christensen (*passim*), Chrysos (1978), Ensslin (1953), Grignaschi, Inostrancev, Kornemann, Kramers (1936), D. T. Rice, Shahid (esp. pp. 299-320), and Stein (1920, 1941). On the *‘ayyārs* see Vryonis (1965); on Heraclius’ Armenian and possibly Arsacid origin Shahid (pp. 312ff.) and Toumanoff (1985).

Iran owed a substantial debt to Byzantine learning, particularly in the natural sciences. Cultural centers like the “Persian school” at Edessa and the medical college at Gondīšāpūr (Veh-Andiyōk-Šāpūr) were established and maintained by Hellenized eastern Christian scholars enjoying Sasanian support. In 529, when Justinian closed the academy at Athens on religious grounds, seven of its teachers found welcome and patronage at Kōsrow I Anōšīravān’s court. One of them, Priscianus of Lydia, wrote a treatise of which a substantial portion survives in Latin translation under the title *Prisciani philosophi solutiones eorum de quibus dubitavit Chosroes persarum rex* (philosophical answers to questions posed by Kōsrow, king of Persia; see Quicherat). Another scholar of repute, Paulus the Persian, translated an abridged version of Aristotle’s *Logic* into Middle Persian for Kōsrow I, whose interest in Greek philosophy was well known (Kraus, pp. 16-20). Greek medical treatises were used by Persian scholars at Gondīšāpūr, where the school continued to flourish well into the ‘Abbasid period (see below). In astronomy, too, Middle Persian translations of Greek (and Indian) texts served as the foundation for later Arabic and Persian scholarship. For example, the *Anthologíai* of Vettius Valens (mid-2nd century)



was translated into Middle Persian as *Wizīdag* and later into Arabic as *al-Bezīdaj*, and the *Tà paranatéllonta toīs dekanōīs* “Representations of the decans” by Teukros from Babylon (2nd half of the 1st century) was also translated into Middle Persian and subsequently into Arabic (Nallino, 1911, pp. 193-94; 1922, pp. 351-62). Byzantine military handbooks were also studied by Sasanian scholars and tacticians.

On the scientific exchanges see also Agathias (2.28-32), Bailey (pp. 80ff., 98, 105), Christensen (pp. 427ff. and passim), Gray (1904), Hayes, Inostrancev, Kraus (esp. pp. 17ff. on Paul the Persian), Nallino (1911, 1922), O’Leary, Pingrec, Quicherat, Sayılı, Siassi (1963), Vogel, and Vööbus.

In the realm of belles lettres exchanges seem to have been limited to romantic and didactic tales. A Middle Persian version of the story of Polycrates of Samos and his brother Syloson was prepared for Kōsrow I (Shafi). The Alexander Romance of Pseudo-Callisthenes was also translated into Middle Persian and became well known in Islamic Persia (Southgate, introd.). On the other hand, a number of romances of Indian origin reached Byzantium via Iran, sometimes after a lapse of centuries, and subsequently became popular in Western literature. One of them was the famous *Pañcatantra*, translated into Persian for Kōsrow I and subsequently into Arabic as *Kalīla wa Demna*, which in the late 11th century Symeon son of Seth translated into Greek under the title *Stephanítēs kai Ichnēlātēs* (Brockelmann). A lost Indian work entitled *Siddhapati*, translated into Persian as *Sendbād-nāma*, became Greek *Syntipas* in the late 11th century (Dölger, p. 242). The biography of the Buddha, in Persian *Belowhar o Būdāsaf* was translated successively into Arabic, Georgian, and Greek. The Greek version, under the title *Barlaam and Iosaph*, was prepared by St. Enthyimius the Athonite and his school and recast in accordance with Christian belief in about 1000 (Lang, p. 1217); it is the story of the conversion to Christianity of a pagan prince who withstood all opposition and finally became a monk.

Rūm was the setting for the legendary adventures of many Iranian heroes. Goštāsp, patron of Zoroaster, for example, was said to have fled as a young prince to Rūm, where he met and married a daughter of the emperor, who bore him the paladin Esfandīār (*Šāh-nāma*, Moscow, VI, pp. 20ff.; Ta’ālebī, pp. 245-56; cf. Boyce, pp. 465f.). Šāpūr II was popularly believed to have traveled to Constantinople in disguise but to have been recognized and imprisoned; he escaped and defeated Julian, forcing him to accept a humiliating peace treaty (this story, as incorporated in the Syriac *Julian Romance*, was repeated in



Islamic sources: Nöldeke, 1874). A love story was woven around Šarvīn Daštābī, whom Yazdegerd I supposedly sent to Constantinople as tutor to Theodosius II (see above; Mīnovī, 1954, pp. 75-76).

For literary relations in general see also Dölger and Grégoire and Goossens.

Only one inscription in Pahlavi has been found in Byzantium, the tomb inscription of an Iranian Christian, early fifth century. It has been repeatedly discussed, by Gignoux (1969), Harmatta, Menasce, and Nyberg.

This long history of political and cultural contact inevitably left traces in the languages of both empires. Aside from “loan translations,” particularly in scientific fields, Middle Persian and Persian include the following terms from Byzantine Greek (for details see Nöldeke, 1892, pp. 34-46): *pengān/fenjān* “saucer, hence water-clock” (< *pínax*); *lagan* “basin” (< *lechánē*); *kālbād* “body” (< *chalopódion* “last, block”; cf. Ar. *qāleb*); *kelīd* “key” (< *chleīda*); *kapān* “steelyard” (< *champanón*); *narges* “narcissus” (< *nárchissos*); *pesta* “pistachio” (< *pistáchion*); *almās* “diamond” (< *adámas*); *yākand* “hyacinth” (< *hyákinthos*); *zomorrod* “emerald” (< *zmáragdos*); *morvārīd* “pearl” (< *margarítēs*); *sīm* “silver” (< *ásēmos*). Many scientific terms were also borrowed from Greek. Byzantine Greek in turn borrowed from Middle Persian the following terms (see details in Hemmerdinger, pp. 23-27): *iásmē* “jasmine” (< *yāsamīn*); *chardarígos* “prime minister” (< *kārdār*); *lazoúri(on)* “lapis lazuli” (< *lājvard*); *marzabanās* “governor” (< *marzbān*); *móschos* “musk” (< *mošk*); *rasnān* “officer who presents petitions to the king” (< *rāzbān*); *sellários* “commander” (< *sālār*); *tzuchnión* “polo” (< *čawgān*). From Persian (Hemmerdinger, pp. 27-33) the Byzantines took *zatríchion* “chess” (< *šatranj*); *zoulápin* “rose water” (< *golāb*, Ar. *jolāb*); *chabádi* “mantle” (< *qabā*); *pazári* “market” (< *bāzār*); *láscharis* (the name of Theodore Laskaris; < *laškarī* “warrior”); *narántzi* “bitter orange” (< *nārang(i)/nāranj*); *noûfar* “lotus” (< *nīlūfar*); *sourládes* “horn trumpet” (< *sūrnā* “trumpet”); *tzēráchis* “apprentice” (< *čerāg*); and the title *chótz(i)as* < *kʷāja*).

The fine workmanship of Byzantine artists (*kūb-kārī o šenāʿat-e Rūm*) was proverbial among Iranians (Mīnovī, 1932, p. 41; cf. Mīnovī, 1954, pp. 65ff.). In particular, military equipment, brocades, and small luxury objects are repeatedly mentioned with admiration in the *Šāh-nāma* and other Iranian sources. Masʿūdī’s report (*Morūj* II, p. 186) that prisoners from Amida resettled by Šāpūr II in Kūzestān developed silk and brocade industries there is credible; indeed, Šūštārī silks remained famous through the early Islamic



period (Ackerman, p. 2002). Literary references are sometimes confirmed by material remains. For example, unpublished findings by M. Azarnoush have revealed that Byzantine mosaic workers decorated Šāpūr's palace at Dārābgerd, and Byzantine artistic conventions can be recognized in both the symbolism and the organization of the shah's triumphal relief at Bīšāpūr (Azarpay).

Literary testimony must not be accepted unquestioningly, however. For example, Theophylact Simocatta (5.6.10) reported: "It is said that the emperor Justinian provided Chosroes [Kosrow I] son of Kabadēs [Kavād] with Greek marble, building experts, and craftsmen skilled in ceilings, and that a palace situated close to Ctesiphon was constructed for Chosroes with Roman expertise." It is clear that Theophylact himself had doubts about the story; furthermore, the reference to an unnamed palace near Ctesiphon is too vague to support Garsoïan's reference to "Justinian's loan of imperial workmen for the royal palace of Tāq-i Kistrā at Ctesiphon" (pp. 591-92; cf. p. 570). Indeed, "[T]here is no evidence to corroborate Theophylact's account of Justinian's gift to Chosroes, and it is possible that both materials and craftsmen had actually been captured by Chosroes at Antioch, where marble was included amongst the booty plundered from a church" (Whitby, p. 140 n. 26; cf. Procopius, *Wars* 2.9.15-16). Ferdowsī (*Šāh-nāma*, Moscow ed., IX, pp. 220-22) reports a tradition, which seems to contain a germ of truth, that Kosrow II Parvēz used Byzantine artists in the construction of the *takt-e tāqdīs* (domed throne). Byzantine artistic ideas can be clearly recognized in Kosrow's monuments at Tāq-e Bostān: the integrated organization of the entire central *ayvān*, including the relief panels on the side walls; the pair of victories in the spandrels of the arch; and the frontality of the investiture group. A number of carved stone capitals found nearby also reveal strong Byzantine influence (Mackintosh; Lushey, 1968). On silver vessels representations of dancing girls, continuous vine scrolls inhabited by animals and birds, small winged figures carrying diadems, and subjects related to the cult of Dionysos owe much to Western inspiration, though none of these motifs can be shown to have had the same connotations in the Near East (Harper, 1978, p. 18; cf. Ettinghausen).

An idea of the Byzantine manufactures most prized in Persia can be gathered from a passage in *Ketāb al-mahāsen wa'l-aẓdād* (Pseudo-Jāḥeẓ, pp. 369ff.), in which gifts exchanged between Kosrow Parvēz and Maurice are described, Maurice sent one thousand garments, twenty robes (*qabā*) of brocade embroidered with figures of birds, one thousand thoroughbred horses with



gilded saddles and bridles of solid gold, caparisons of brocade embroidered with gold and pearls, and mules loaded with fine cloths and silk brocade (*estabraq*). On Nowrūz of the following year he sent to Ƙosrow “a gold horseman riding on a silver charger whose eyes were of white onyx containing black pupils The rider held in his hand a golden polo bat (*şawlajān*) and alongside of him was installed a silver polo field (*meydān*) in the middle of which was placed a ball of red cornelion. The field was borne by a pair of silver bulls. The horse discharged water and when the water was flowing, the polo bat hit the ball, driving it back to the edge of the field. At the same time, the bulls were set in motion, and the field moved and the horseman appeared to be swiftly galloping” (Inostrancev, pp. 45ff.).

Conversely, Persian influence on Byzantine art was profound and long lasting. The Byzantines always showed an appreciation for Persian luxury goods (especially silks) and architectural decoration in both secular and religious contexts. Many Persian motifs became known in Byzantium from imported textiles: the peacock feather; confronted and addorsed figures, often flanking a “sacred tree”; symmetrical plants growing from vases; windblown ribbons on horse trappings; the “master of animals”; and the winged composite creature within a pearled roundel. These patterns were so closely imitated by Byzantine craftsmen that it is often difficult to determine the provenience of surviving textiles; they are sometimes called “Byzantino-Persian.” Pseudo-Jāḥeẓ also provides a list of Persian gifts sent by Ƙosrow to Maurice, among them golden saddles studded with hyacinths and emeralds; a large amber table with three golden legs, in the shape respectively of a lion’s paw grasping a green hyacinth, a deer’s leg with a ruby beneath the hoof, and an eagle’s claw clutching a partridge made of azure; an onyx bowl; and boxes containing musk and amber (Inostrancev, pp. 45-46).

Persian architecture had considerable influence in Byzantium through the intermediary of Armenian architecture. “The elliptical arch, the use of niches for the external adornment of buildings, the squinch to effect the transition from the square plan of a base to the circle of a dome, and probably also the extension of the square plan by additions at the sides into one of Greek cross form, were all thought of there before they were elaborated elsewhere” (D. T. Rice, p. 47). Hagia Sophia, the Church of the Holy Apostles, and other monuments of Byzantine architecture can thus be seen as products of “the blend of the Roman competence with the more imaginative, if less efficient, systems of the East” (p. 48), Persian influence can also be recognized in silver



bowls and indirectly in the treasure of Nagy Szent Miklos found in eastern Hungary (pp. 48-49).

Mutual influence between the two empires can be observed in coinage as well. After each shipment of gold from Constantinople the Sasanians minted gold coins (Göbl, 1971, pp. 50f.). Byzantine influence was particularly apparent during the reign of Kōsrow II Parvēz; the Persian governor in Egypt, for example, issued coins in Byzantine style, even to the cross atop the crown on the obverse and a Greek legend on the reverse (p. 21 and n. 23, pl. xii; see also Curiel and Gyselen). On the other hand, the large, thin Sasanian silver coins also had an impact: “They are the first thin coins in history, and coming via Byzantium and the Arabs, they have predetermined the image of the occidental thin coins of the Middle-Ages and Modern Times” (Göbl, p. 27).

For general discussions of artistic relations see also Ghirshman, Herzfeld, Erdmann, Ackerman, Grabar (1966, 1951), Duchesne-Guillemin (1974). On the coins see Vermeule (1956-57). On representation of Byzantine emperors in Sasanian art see Macdonald and Shahbazi (1985).

II. In the Islamic period. A brief survey.

When the Arabs completed the conquest of Persia in about 21/641-42, the Byzantines witnessed the event with apathy. Persia was no longer an independent partner and rival on the international scene, and the emperors shifted the focus of their diplomacy to the caliphs. It was not long, however, before Persians came as allies or warriors of the caliphs to fight the *rūmīān* (Byzantines). Furthermore, a large number of Persians had fled to Byzantine territory to escape Arab domination. They and their descendants, still called “Persians,” served in the imperial armies, sometimes achieving elevated positions. When Bābak Kōrramī rebelled against the Arabs in Azarbaijan in the 3rd/9th century, many of these “Persians” joined him, including Naṣr Kordī, known to the Byzantines as Theophobus, a high official of the emperor Theophilus (829-42). Bābak and Theophilus formed an alliance against the Arabs, but the ‘Abbasid general Afšīn vanquished Bābak and led the caliph al-Mo’taṣem’s army against Theophilus with remarkable success. For the next 150 years Persian Muslims participated in and even led incursions into the eastern areas of the empire (cf. Margoliouth and Amedroz, *Eclipse V*, pp. 234f.: some 20,000 came in 355/966 towards Ray to join the sacred war against the



Byzantines). Under Šamšām-al-Dawla a renewal of relations and mutual interest between Persia and Byzantium began to develop—*ibid.*, VI, pp. 4ff., 115ff.—but did not flourish. Eventually the Persianized Saljuq Turks under Sultan Alp Arslān defeated a Byzantine army at Manzikert (Malāzgerd) in 463/1071, capturing Emperor Romanos Diogenes—an event that resounded throughout the Muslim and Christian worlds and fueled European zeal for “the Crusade” against the Muslims (cf. Cahen, 1934). Alp Arslān released the emperor, who returned to Constantinople but was murdered by pretenders to the throne; “vengeance” for his murder became a pretext for the Saljuqs’ conquest of Anatolia. A branch of the family later founded a dynasty there, the Saljuqs of Rūm (cf. Cahen, 1955).

For the political relations in the Islamic period see especially Bury (1912), Busse, Constantelos, T. T. Rice, Spuler, Vasiliev, and relevant chapters of *The Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. IV.

Trade links between Iran and Byzantium continued in the Islamic period, particularly under the Buyids and Saljuqs. Persian paper, metalwork, carpets, enamels, and ivory work were favored in Constantinople, and Byzantine silk, military equipment, and other luxury items were in demand in Persia. This demand was reflected in the royal gifts exchanged between the courts. The Buyid ‘Azod-al-Dawla (r. Baghdad 367-72/978-83), for instance, received a Byzantine gift including 200 royal robes and horses, white falcons, and other goods; at his death he left 500 pieces of Byzantine royal silk (Busse, 1969, p. 259; see also Bivar, 1970).

The translation of Greek texts also continued in the Islamic period. A son of the Persian Ebn Moqaffa’ translated Greek philosophical works into Arabic, and the Barmakid Yaḥyā commissioned a translation of Ptolemy’s highly praised *Megālē syntaxis* (Ar. *al-Mejestī*; see Ebn al-Nadīm, ed. Flügel, pp. 267f.). For centuries Persians continued to regard Byzantium as a center of civilization and progress. Gardīzī, writing in Khorasan in the middle of the 4th/11th century, said: “Rūm is a large country with many centers of population. The *rūmīān* are an intelligent people, very learned, and Christian by faith. The land of Rūm has produced, from early times until the present, many scientists and philosophers, who have written large numbers of books, particularly on medical and natural sciences” (p. 280).

Persia repaid the intellectual debt, however. Persian scientific work was central to the Byzantine cultural revival under the Paleologues. In about a.d.



1300 “Arabic” numerals and the zero, originally borrowed from India, were introduced into Byzantium from Persia by Maximus Planudes. Another scholar, probably Gregory Chioniades, translated an astronomical work of Šams-al-Dīn Boḵārī (d. ca. 740/1339), who worked in Tabrīz (Pingree, pp. 142-43). Isaac Argyrus (c. 1350), who has left many mathematical works, and Theodore Meliteniotes, whose *Astronomikē trībīblos* (written ca. 1361) “is the most comprehensive and learned work of this kind in existence” were both influenced by Persian sources (Vogel, p. 278). In the 13th century several Persian medical treatises, including one on urine by Ebn Sīnā (See avicenna), were translated into Greek (p. 291). Byzantine pharmacological studies greatly benefited from Persian compilations (e.g., George Choniates, *Antidotes Culled from Persian and Translated into Greek*, ca. 1290), as well as from medicinal substances imported from the East (e.g., cloves, nutmeg, and hemp seeds, or hashish). Gregory Chioniades grew up in Constantinople, where he “had acquired all the sciences,” but he wished to master the art of healing. He “heard from some friends that he would not be able to attain his wish unless he went to Persia” (Gray, 1904, p. 168). He journeyed to Persia, learned Persian, and returned with many books, mainly on astronomy and pharmacology. He founded a kind of academy in Trebizond and translated his Persian materials into Greek, often in adapted form. In the 14th century George Chrysococces based his astronomical, medical, and geographical treatises on these works (cf. *Commentary on the Persian Astronomical System*, 1346). “Thus by a circuitous route the learning of Greek antiquity returned to Byzantium” (Vogel, pp. 277-78). The Middle Persian version of Polycrates and Syloson (see above) was versified in Persian by ‘Onṣorī under the title *Wāmeq o ‘Aḍrā* (Shafi). Finally, a detailed saga of romance and heroism evolved around the figure of Šahrvarāz Rōmīzān, one of the generals of ẖosrow II (Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, pp. 290-91 n. 3); transformed into the legend of King ‘Omar (or ‘Amr) No‘mān of Malatya and his sons, it was incorporated into the *Thousand and One Nights* (Grégoire, pp. 51-59) and was one of the sources of the 10th-century Byzantine epic of Digenís Akritas (Grégoire and Goossens).

Cultural exchanges specifically between Iran and Byzantium seem to have been revived after the 4th/10th century, particularly through the Saljuqs of Rūm, who were strongly influenced by Persian culture; indeed most bore heroic Iranian names from the legendary past like Kayḵosrow and Kayqobād. These rulers enjoyed generally cordial relations with the Byzantine emperors. One section of the royal palace at Constantinople was apparently so



completely Persian in appearance that it was called “the Persian hall” (Rice, 1953, p. 52). In this period Persian objects were imported and even imitated in Byzantium. The use of Arabic script as an ornamental device, already popular on Persian pottery and metalwork, was adopted in the West, and even Byzantine architectural ornamentation revealed Persian connections: For example, carved marble slabs from buildings in Asia Minor, Constantinople, Athens, and Venice display animal motifs derived from Persian art. One such slab, incorporated in the walls of St. Mark’s Cathedral in Venice, preserves a representation that has been identified as “the ascent of Kaykāvūs to heaven in his chariot” from the *Šāh-nāma* (Rice, 1953, p. 57).

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