



JUSTINIAN I

JUSTINIAN I (Flavius Petrus Sabbatius Justinianus), Eastern Roman emperor, 527-65 CE. Justinian's rule was marked by several military conflicts with the Sasanian empire under Kawād I and Chosroes (Kosrow) I which he had inherited from his uncle and predecessor, Justin I (r. 518-27). Nor did the conflicts end with the emperor's death on 14 November 565 (for birth and death dates, see *PLRE* II, 1980, pp. 645-48).

Sources (see Bibliography for translations). Most significant among the sources on Justinian is the *Wars* by the emperor's contemporary, Procopius of Caesarea (with extensive commentary by Rubin, 1957; important views are presented by Cameron, 1985). The first seven books were largely finished by 545 and published in 550-51; the eighth was published in 554 (see Greatrex, 1994, pp. 106-7). Reports on the wars with the Sasanians can be found in Books 1, 2, and 8. In Books 2 and 3 of *Peri ktismatōn (De Aedificiis)*, published a few years later, Procopius describes the emperor's construction projects on the eastern frontier of the Byzantine empire (for their locations, see Honigmann; on the historical credibility, Whitby, 1986; very critical treatment in Croke and Crow). Brief excerpts of Procopius's *Wars* are presented in Book IV of Evagrius's *Church History* (see overview of contents in Festugière, tr., pp. 361-62). The years 552-59 are described in the *Histories* written in the late 570s by Agathias of Myrina, who consciously follows Procopius. This unfinished work describes the Sasanians as a barbaric people devoid of culture.

The last years of Justinian's rule (from 559 on, where Agathias's work ends) are found in the work by Menander Protector, who wrote during the reign of



Emperor Mauricius (r. 582-602). Even though it is fragmentary, we have no other information concerning peace treaties between Rome and the Sasanians that is of a density comparable to that for the treaty of 561 CE in Fragment 6.1. (This point is emphasized by, among others, Blockley, 1985a, p. 16; according to Blockley's count, Frag. 6.1 = *Excerpta de legationibus* 3; it is supplemented in Frag. 6.2-3 = *Excerpta de sententiis* 11 and *Exc. de leg.* 4.) We may conclude from this with certainty that Menander had access to archival sources (see Blockley, 1985a, pp. 18-20).

Some valuable information about the military conflicts during the emperor's first years of rule is provided, independently of Procopius, by the Syriac *Church History* (the so-called Ps.-Zacharias Rhetor). Chapters 1-7 of the ninth book have been preserved. The wars were described in Book 10, of which only the information on the content exists.

An important eyewitness of the first years of Justinian's rule was Johannes Malalas. The first edition of his *Chronicon* covered events up to 532. The second edition described—although much less extensively—the events from 532 until the emperor's death; it is preserved up to 563. He offers a semi-official picture of Byzantium's wars with the Sasanians (however, see the nuanced view in Scott, 1985, p. 99). See Jeffreys (1990, pp. 209-10) for its high source value with respect to the early Justinian period. Also to be mentioned are chronicles of admittedly varying source value. Some notes can be found in the *Chronicles* by Marcellinus Comes, who lived in Constantinople during Justinian's time, but its chronology is not always correct. It exists in a later edition, covering the period up to 548 (ed. Mommsen, 1894, pp. 102-8; cf. Croke, 2001, pp. 140-41 and 169). The *Chronicon Paschale*, written in Constantinople in 630, describes in relatively great detail some events, such as the turn toward Byzantium on the part of Tzathes, king of Lazica (the ancient Colchis). However, certain other important events are not mentioned. A chronicle composed by Theophanes in the early 9th century is largely based on Malalas, along with Procopius, but its chronology is frequently flawed. Arabic authors are mostly unusable (e.g., Ṭabari, pp. 898.5-14, 958.11-960.7). An excellent compilation of sources in English translation with brief commentary is found in Greatrex and Lieu (pp. 82-134).

Historical overview. When Justinian assumed autarchy on 1 August 527, Byzantium and the Sasanian empire were already at war. Lazica had been for some time a point of contention (see for detailed treatment: Braund, pp. 269-83, as well as Greatrex, 1998, pp. 139-47, where dates partially diverge).



The first years of Justinian's rule (and of the command in the east of his general, Belisarius) coincided with the last years of King Kawād I; this period also saw a dispute over Iberia, which had been invaded by a Sasanian army (cf. Rubin, 1960, p. 261, and Evans, p. 115). Notable among the many border clashes were the Sasanian victories at Tannūrīn (Ps.-Zacharias, *HE* 9.2) and Biddōn/Mindouōn (Ps.-Zach., *HE* 9.5) (528 CE?). As the military action entered a new stage (cf. Greatrex, 1998, p. 163; *ibid.*, pp. 168-212 offers a detailed description of the events up to 532), the Sasanians were beaten at Dara (Procopius, *De bello Persico* 1.14; Ps.-Zach., *HE* 9.3; Malalas, p. 453) as well as at Satala in Armenia (Proc., *Pers.* 1.15.1-18; Mal., p. 469). They achieved a costly victory in April 531 at Kallinikon on the Euphrates (Proc., *Pers.* 1.18; Mal., pp. 461-65), but were defeated at Martyropolis and had to give up their siege of the city (Mal., pp. 468-70). The attempts by Kawād I in his last years of rule to come to an agreement remained fruitless (see Greatrex and Lieu, pp. 84-96).

Chosroes I, having assumed the throne, immediately proposed a cease-fire, which was accepted by Justinian after some hesitation (Mal., pp. 471-72). It was to last three months, during which peace was to be negotiated (cf. Scott, 1992, pp. 164-65). Peace was advantageous to both powers—to Justinian after the Nika uprising in Constantinople (January 532) and for his western policy, to Chosroes for consolidation of his initially not undisputed rule. The so-called “eternal peace” (*aperantos eirēnē*: Proc., *Pers.* 1.22.17; differently in Mal., p. 477) was concluded, ending the tense conditions which had persisted since 512 (cf. Blockley, 1985c, pp. 69-70; for a precise date, see Kislinger and Stathakopoulos, p. 77, n. 3). Procopius (*Pers.* 1.22) recorded some of the agreements made. The territorial status quo was confirmed in exchange for a payment of 11,000 pounds of gold. The *dux Mesopotamiae* was no longer to have his official seat at Dara, in the immediate proximity of the frontier, but in Constantina (Proc., *Pers.* 1.22.3; see also Whitby, 1986, p. 728). Furthermore, the long-lasting disputes over Lazica, occupied by Byzantium (since 528?) (see Braund, pp. 283-90) were settled for the time being. Byzantium's possession of Lazica was affirmed, and Sasanian troops vacated it, while, on the other hand, Byzantium accepted the Sasanian empire's control over Iberia. (The most recent treatment of the peace is by Greatrex, 1998, pp. 215-18; he also offers a chronological overview of the events from 526, pp. 222-23.)

In 539, King Wittigis of the Ostrogoths sent an embassy to Chosroes in the hope that Sasanian entry into a war with Justinian would tie down his forces on the empire's eastern front (Proc., *Pers.* 2.2.1-11). Moreover, according to Procopius



(*Pers.* 2.2.12-15), Chosroes was unwilling to accept any further increase of the emperor's power after the defeat of the Vandals and the Ostrogoths in the 530s. Hence Chosroes broke the so-called eternal peace with a military campaign begun in the spring of 540 under the pretext of conflicts among Arab foederati. The military clashes between the two powers were to last 21 years, while a large part of the Byzantine forces remained committed in the west of the empire. Procopius (*Pers.* 2.5-13; other sources listed in *EIr.* VII, p. 301; cf. Downey, 1953 and 1961) offers a detailed description of the campaign along the Euphrates under the personal leadership of the Sasanian king. Sura and Beroia (Aleppo) were burned, and the campaign culminated in June with the capture of Antioch, one of the greatest cities of the Byzantine empire (Mal., p. 479). Many cities attempted (even during Chosroes' retreat) to prevent capture or destruction by offering ransom. Antioch was pillaged after its capture and was destroyed on Chosroes' orders (Proc., *Pers.* 2.9.16-8; *Aed.* 2.10.20; see also Downey, 1939, p. 367). Survivors were deported to the Sasanian empire; many valuable works of art and construction material such as marble were hauled away. (The sources do not discuss the grave economic aftereffects.) Chosroes ordered a city to be built near the Sasanian capital. It was named "Chosroes—better than Antioch" (Wēh Antiök Kōsrow). Many deportees from Antioch and other cities were resettled there (see *EIr.* VII, p. 301). A substantial payment induced Chosroes to withdraw from Syria. On his way back he moved against Dara by way of Edessa but failed to take it. In 541 Belisarius, after taking the Ostrogoths' capital at Ravenna, again became commander in the east. He was defeated near Nisibis but starved out the small fortress of Sisauranōn. Due to losses caused by sickness among the troops, he was forced to retreat.

Chosroes, after the Laz changed over to his side (due to Byzantium's provocative actions in Lazica), transferred his military activity to the north; after prolonged effort (Proc., *Pers.* 2.17) he was able to take Petra, the Byzantine stronghold there on the Black Sea coast. He stationed an occupation force in Lazica (which remained a Sasanian protectorate for many years) but returned to Mesopotamia on receiving unfavorable news (probably about Belisarius's activity; thus Proc., *Pers.* 2.19.47-48). In 542, Chosroes staged another expedition, this time to Sergiupolis, but withdrew back across the Euphrates without having accomplished his broader plans, possibly unaware of the opposing army's weakness. Before this, however, Kallinikon was taken and its inhabitants deported (see Kislinger and Stathakopoulos, pp. 84-85, on the reasons for the retreat). A counter-attack took place in the fall of 542



against Persarmenia in the direction of Dubios (Dvin) but was repulsed at Angl. In 543, Chosroes moved against Edessa and besieged it unsuccessfully. Exhaustion of both sides finally resulted in a truce in the 19th year of Justinian's rule, during the 9th indiction, i.e., in the period September 545-March 546 (Proc., *Pers.* 2.28.3-11). The Byzantines paid a large sum of money, but Lazica was not included in the truce. The king of the Laz again changed to the Byzantine side ca. 547 (Theophanes, under AM [*anno mundi*] 6046; see Mango and Scott, pp. 335-36), so that Justinian sent troops for support upon his request (see PLRE III, pp. 559-60, s.v. Gubazes). Fighting in Lazica continued for a long time (detailed description by Braund, pp. 298-311; see also Greatrex and Lieu, pp. 116-22). Despite courageous fighting by the Byzantine soldiers, the Sasanians succeeded in defending Petra in 549 (Procopius's *De bello Parthico* ends here). In the following year the Sasanians again invaded Lazica (Proc., *De bello Gothico* 4.1); due to the death of the Sasanian general (Proc., *Goth.* 4.8), the military conflict ended in a victory by the allied Laz and Byzantines. Despite additional losses by the Sasanian armies, such as the loss of Petra in 551 and the failure to take Archaiopolis, Justinian concluded a new five-year truce at the end of the year (in his 25th year of rule) for a payment of 2,600 pounds of gold (Proc., *Goth.* 8.15.1-3; for an evaluation, see Rubin, 1957, p. 513); the money was used by Chosroes (according to Procopius, *Goth.* 8.17.9-10) to support his soldiers in Lazica and to hire mercenaries.

Nevertheless, the fighting did not stop at this point, and the Sasanians suffered several defeats, so that in 557 a new truce was concluded, without a time limit and on the basis of the status quo. This time it included Lazica (Agathias, *Histories* 4.30.9). In 561 (recently the date has been again changed to 562: Greatrex and Lieu, p. 277, n. 44) it was transformed into a general peace agreement upon Justinian's wishes. According to Evans (p. 258), Chosroes wanted peace at the western frontier in order to be free to fight the [Hephthalites](#) in the east. We have excellent information regarding the peace terms, the diplomatic record, and the total of 13 treaty articles, thanks to the significant Menander fragments that have been preserved in the *Excerpta de legationibus* and are based on the report by the diplomat Petros Patrikios (see above, Sources). The peace treaty covered all parts of the empire as well as Persarmenia and Lazica, in addition to client states of both empires and Arabs allied with them (see Shahîd, pp. 266-75). Decades of wrangling over Lazica ended in that it was returned to Byzantium and the territories occupied by the Sasanians were vacated. The sides could not come to an agreement over Suania, a former dependency of Lazica on the latter's northern border; and



additional negotiations did not result in an accord. The disagreements of the parties over the duration of the truce were finally removed by settling on a 50-year term (art. 13 of the treaty). Byzantium pledged a staggered payment of 30,000 gold pieces annually (details in Güterbock, pp. 61-65).

Among the treaty terms, the following should be emphasized. The defense of both mountain passes in the Caucasus (see *EIr.* VII, pp. 13-14), which was an old source of contention between the two empires (see Johannes Lydus, *On Powers* 3.52-53; also Blockley, 1985c, pp. 63-69, and Braund, pp. 269-70) continued to be the responsibility of the Sasanians, and the expenses were included in the payments due (art. 1). Both sides pledged not to erect any new fortresses at the frontier or to fortify any cities located there. Trade and transport between the two sides were settled in the traditional way: to prevent spying, trade was restricted to the cities of Kallinikon, Nisibis, and Dvin (art. 3), while envoys and couriers were exempt from the restriction (art. 4). Traders from other nations (including the allied Arabs) were restricted to Dara on the Byzantine side and Nisibis on the Sasanian side (art. 5). Refugees were free to return to their homelands, with a guarantee of impunity (art. 6). Reparations were specified in articles 7 and 11 (see in detail Güterbock, pp. 83-90). In conclusion an appeal was made to God's mercy to reinforce the peace (art. 12). Some articles carried the added stipulation that failure to abide by them would result in a revocation of the peace. Special agreements were made in a separate treaty for the benefit of Christians in the Sasanian empire: they were permitted to build churches and to worship freely. They could not be forced to convert to Zoroastrianism against their will, but they were not permitted to convert the magi to Christianity. (See Guillaumont, 1969, pp. 49-50; a brief evaluation of the peace in Blockley 1985b; with respect to international law in Verosta and in Cameron, 2000, pp. 84-85; see Miller for a comparison with other peace treaties.)

Corippus's panegyric to Justin II wrongly represents Chosroes as a vassal of the new Roman emperor (Turtledove, p. 296 with sources and literature). In 572, after tensions (described by Turtledove) had grown over the years, Justin II broke the peace which had comprehensively settled the disputes between the two empires 10 years earlier. Menander (Frag. 16; see Blockley, 1985a, pp. 23-24) and Theophylaktos Simokates (3.9.4) assign principal responsibility to the Byzantine emperor (cf. Whitby, 1988, p. 227), while Theophanes disagrees (AM 6064; however, cf. Mango and Scott, p. 363, nn. 5-7).

An important role in the conflicts between Byzantium and the Sasanian



empire was played by the allied Arab tribes, whose knowledge of the terrain was excellent. The Lakhmids sided with the Sasanians in *Hira*; of the same value, the Phylarchs (local rulers) of Syria-Palestine were on Byzantium's side well into Justinian's times, as was, for a time in the early 6th century, the Kinda confederation of central Arabia (see Evans, p. 87, and Conrad, p. 692). *Monḍer b. No'mān* (Alamundaros), a Lakhmid always loyal to the Sasanians (505-54 CE; see PLRE II, pp. 40-43) successfully staged numerous incursions into Byzantine territory, frequently together with the Sasanians (e.g., the thrust in 531) but sometimes without their knowledge. For example, in 529 he devastated the Syria I province and fled with enormous booty (Mal., p. 445). The Lakhmids' tighter organization prompted Justinian during the early years of his rule to install the Ghassanid *Ḥāreṭ b. Jabala* (Arethas) as king (ca. 529/30-69) (cf. PLRE III, pp. 111-13, and in detail Shahid, pp. 95-117) in order to place him above the individual Phylarchs and create a counterweight to *Monḍer*, thus establishing a balance of power between the two empires in this region (Proc., *Pers.* 1.17.46-47). The king provided the Byzantines with often sizeable troop contingents and personally fought on the side of Byzantine generals, as for example at Kallinikon in 531. However, the Arab tribes practiced a quite independent policy (such as *Monḍer's* attempt to conclude a separate peace accord with Byzantium after the battle of Kallinikon: Mal., pp. 466-67) and sometimes fought among themselves without intervention by their overlords (as for example in 537/38, in a conflict over pastures south of Palmyra, and in about 546: Proc., *Pers.* 2.28.12-24; and Peters). Overall, *Monḍer* was a far more dangerous opponent for the Byzantines than *Ḥāreṭ* was for the Sasanians (see Proc., *Pers.* 1.17.40-48). After "decades of murder, burning, and plunder" (Procopius), he was defeated by *Ḥāreṭ* at Chalkis in Coelesyria, and killed (sources: PLRE III, p. 113). Prior to that, he had been receiving from Justinian an annual subsidy, which was also paid to his son *'Amr b. Monḍer* (554-69). Justinian also tried to gain allies against the Sasanians among the Christian rulers in southern Arabia (*Ḥimyar*) and those in Ethiopia, as witnessed by an embassy to *Simyafa'* (in 531?) (Müller, p. 318) and later, to his successor *Abrehā* (no later than 543), urging the latter to mount a campaign (which failed) against the Sasanians. The Sasanian ruler, in turn, sent a mission to *Abrehā*. There should be no question about Justinian's efforts to secure the Indian Ocean routes in order to protect the lucrative India trade from Sasanian interference (already in Güterbock, p. 73; cf. Evans, p. 114, and most recently Conrad, p. 691) and break the Sasanian monopoly on the import of Chinese silk. Trade policy reasons are also cited in Justinian's resolute effort to prevent Sasanian influence over Lazica, which would have provided them



with access to the Black Sea (see, e.g., Evans, p. 169), even if a plan to attack Byzantium from Lazica, ascribed by Procopius to Chosroes, does not deserve much credence (with Braund, pp. 297-98).

Military actions to protect the frontiers were adopted by Justinian very early on (see Liebeschütz, pp. 495-96), frequently in conjunction with administrative measures. For example, in 528, Armenia became an independent military district with six dukedoms (*Corpus Juris* I.29.5: *Armenia et Pontus Polemoniacus et gentes*; Mal., p. 429), and, from 536 on, the former satrapies were subordinated to a regular proconsul as Armenia IV (*Novellae* 31.1.3). (For additional details of the military reorganization of the “border buffer” [Cameron, 2000, p. 70], see Whitby, 1986, p. 728.) Book 2 and part of Book 3 of Procopius’s *De Aedificiis* are dedicated to Justinian’s building projects at the eastern frontier. Bases were constructed or expanded in this border region to enable the staging of attacks against the enemy country (see Whitby, 1986, p. 727) but also to serve as refuges during enemy incursions. Worth mentioning are, among others, Theodosiopolis (now Erzerum), Citharizon, Martyropolis, Dara, Tannūrīn, Sergiopolis, Palmyra, and Kirkesion (see Whitby, 1986 with fig. 40.1 on p. 718, and 1988, pp. 200-213; many additional contributions are found in French and Lightfoot, eds., 1989). Also worth mentioning here is the establishment of the phylarchate for Ḥāretī to protect the Palestinian and Arab *limes* from the Euphrates to the Gulf of ‘Aqaba. The primarily protective organization of the border defenses (often provided with only small troop contingents) was insufficient to completely block the invasion routes of the Sasanian armies (see Liebeschütz, pp. 495-99). Justinian’s active diplomatic efforts, justly interpreted by Gray (p. 31) as a means for the protection of the empire, are generally noteworthy and at times included the assignment of important missions to bishops (see Cameron, 1985, p. 128). Inclusion into Byzantium’s sphere of influence of client kingdoms and tribes like the Tzani (south of Lazica; see Braund, p. 289), as well as those of the Arabian peninsula, were preconditions for the creation of an uninterrupted defensive zone from the Black Sea to the Red Sea.

The seven (?) philosophers from the school in Athens (closed in 529) who came to Chosroes a few years after Justinian’s teaching ban were soon disillusioned, if we accept Agathias’s anti-Persian representation (for his sources and credibility, see Hartmann, pp. 133-34). It is difficult to say anything certain regarding the philosophers’ motivations (see Hartmann, p. 152; an authorization by Justinian, postulated by Bucci, p. 546 is—with



Hartmann—certainly to be excluded). In the peace treaty of 532/33, Chosroes succeeded in stipulating that the philosophers would be allowed to return to their homeland and spend the rest of their lives there; they were permitted to keep their belief but not to teach it. According to Agathias, Chosroes verified adherence to the stipulations (Agathias, 2.31.2-4, but without parallels in the literature; see also Hartmann, pp. 127-29). They probably returned to the Byzantine empire in 533 (Hartmann, p. 138). Religion was a central theme in Justinian's diplomacy (Cameron, 1985, p. 120) and therefore frequently the cause for tensions and wars between the two powers. The attempt by Kawād I to introduce Zoroastrianism in Iberia was the reason for King Gurgēn's appeal for Byzantium's help and for his escape to Lazica, where he fought against the Sasanians on Byzantium's side (see PLRE II, p. 527, s.v. Gurgēnes). The religious disagreement between the Laz and the Sasanians was probably also the reason why Lazica in the end remained with Byzantium (see Rubin, 1960, p. 362). The Sasanian empire was, in turn, the refuge for those persecuted in the Byzantine empire, such as the Samaritans after their revolt in 529 (see Pertusi, p. 195, and most recently Hartmann, p. 143, with additional data).

Despite the numerous conflicts, Justinian, like his predecessors, viewed the Sasanian empire as a power of equal status and respected it as such (see primarily Güterbock and Helm, who chronologically lists all legations during Justinian's time), so that we can justly speak of an international legal system between the two states; the monarchs of both empires addressed each other as "brother." It was thus in accordance with ancient custom that Justinian, through his envoy Hermogenes, sent notification—although late (529)—to Kawād I of his enthronement (Mal., pp. 447-48), to which he received a reply from the Sasanian ruler (Mal., pp. 449-50). Gifts were exchanged on this occasion, as was frequently practiced. There is disagreement among researchers to what extent the relations between the two countries suffered from the Byzantine emperor's rejection of the request by Kawād I to assure his son Chosroes' succession (see, e.g., Blockley, 1985c, p. 70; Whitby, 1988, pp. 207-8; on the "adoption request," see Pieler). As part of the diplomatic exchanges, Justinian complied with a request by Chosroes and dispatched several physicians to the Sasanian empire—for example, Tribunus in 545 (Proc., *Goth.* 8.10.14-16; differently, *Pers.* 2.28.8; see Hartmann, p. 146, n. 78 with additional data). Some of them were also involved in diplomacy (Proc., *Pers.* 2.26.31; in general, Blockley, 1980). After the peace treaty of 561, Chosroes complied with Justinian's request to send the leading figures of the (Nestorian) Christian church in the Sasanian empire to a religious conference



in Constantinople (see Guillaumont, 1969, pp. 50-53, and 1970). On the other hand, persistent military conflicts prevented the two states from further developing the relations which had prospered in the 5th century. Nevertheless, at the end of the conflicts Justinian could claim to have preserved, at a cost of great fiscal sacrifices, the empire's territorial possessions in the east. To this extent the emperor's defense strategy was successful.

See also [BYZANTINE-IRANIAN RELATIONS](#).

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