



MAURICE

MAURICE, Flavius Mauricius Tiberius Augustus (r. 582-602 CE; [Figure 1](#)), Roman emperor who helped restore [Kosrow II](#) (r. 590-628) to the [Sasanian](#) throne.

Maurice was born in 539 in the undistinguished [Cappadocian](#) city of Arabissus. He appears to have been a protégé of the Caesar Tiberius, whom he succeeded as commander of the palace guard (*comes excubitorum*) in 574 and helped in secret negotiations with Persia in 576, during the reign in Iran of [Kosrow I](#) (r. 531-79). Tiberius then appointed him commander of the eastern armies, with which he achieved considerable successes against the Persians in 578 and 580; an ambitious thrust towards [Ctesiphon](#) in 581 failed, but in 582 the Persians were again defeated near Constantina (present-day Viranşehir, Turkey). This record bolstered Maurice's position in the state, and when Tiberius lay dying in August 582, the emperor betrothed Maurice to his daughter Constantina and appointed him Caesar, hence heir apparent (Whitby, 1988, pp. 1-19).

The majority of our information about Maurice's reign derives from the *Histories* of [Theophylact Simocatta](#). Maurice faced considerable challenges. Tiberius had been very popular, thanks in part to lavish generosity, which depleted the imperial treasuries and limited his successor's scope for action. In the Balkans the Avars, after capturing the key frontier fortress of Sirmium in 582, could rampage easily to the south of the Danube, while Slav groups infiltrated past surviving Roman strongholds to begin to occupy territories in the central and southern provinces. The years 586-87 were particularly



critical, with Thessalonica being besieged, Corinth sacked, and the hinterland of Constantinople threatened (Whitby, 1988, pp. 38-51).

The military priority for Maurice, as for any Roman emperor, lay in the east, where he inherited the war with Persia that had been triggered by Justin II's (r. 565-578) decision in 572 to breach the Fifty Years' Peace of 561/2. Maurice appointed his brother-in-law Philippicus to the eastern command, where he secured victory at Solachon in 586 and organized successful raids into Arzanene and Beth Arabaye. However, a change of general in 588 was accompanied by an attempt to reduce military expenditure through a 25 percent pay cut, probably because the crisis in the Balkans was demanding attention. Although there were some offsetting changes to the length of service and the state's provision of equipment, this attempt was unpopular; the eastern armies mutinied, rejected the imperial officers, and elected their own leader. For a year Roman defenses were in some disarray, although the Persians found it difficult to exploit their advantage until the frontier city of Martyropolis was betrayed to them in 589, just as relations between Maurice and his armies were being restored (Whitby, 1988, pp. 276-90).

Events in the east now took a dramatic turn when a quarrel between the Persian general [Bahrām Čōbin](#) and Hormozd IV (r. 579-89) led in 590 first to the king's overthrow and then the flight of his son, [Kosrow II](#) (r. 590-628). [Kosrow](#) chose to escape to the Roman empire, where, after initial uncertainty, he was hospitably received on Maurice's instructions. Various factors influenced Maurice, including the notion that that Rome and Persia were the two established powers of the world with obligations to support each other as the two lights of the universe and whose legitimate rulers should co-operate against barbarians and usurpers. [Kosrow](#) cleverly presented himself as Maurice's subordinate, a son to Maurice's father, and also hinted at an interest in Christianity (Theophylact, 4.11). Conversion came to nothing, but [Kosrow](#) did make lavish dedications to the influential frontier shrine of Sergius at Resafa (Theophylact, 5.13-14). The expedition to restore [Kosrow](#) took time to organize, but in 591 a Roman army with a substantial Armenian contingent drawn from both Roman and Persian sectors moved east to confront the usurper [Bahrām](#) in battle near [Ganzak](#). Victory there led to [Kosrow](#)'s reinstatement and the redrawing of the frontier to Roman advantage in upper Mesopotamia and Transcaucasia (Whitby, 1988, pp. 292-304).

Peace in the east permitted Maurice to focus on reasserting Roman control across the Balkans, and considerable success was achieved in pushing the

Avars and Slavs back and defeating them north of the Danube. In 602, however, an attempt to consolidate these gains by continuing the campaigns through the winter months backfired. The soldiers saw this as another of Maurice's penny-pinching tactics, marched on Constantinople, and placed their leader, Phocas, on the throne. Maurice was captured and killed, but not before he had sent a plea to K̄osrow for help, perhaps with his eldest son Theodosius as the emissary. K̄osrow grasped the opportunity to intervene, whether out of an honest desire to repay his benefactor or a more calculating urge to wipe out the disgrace of his own reliance on Roman help and the consequent disadvantageous peace treaty. Accompanied by the young Theodosius, or an imposter, K̄osrow invaded Roman territory and launched 25 years of war, which, after spectacular successes, led to his own overthrow (Whitby, 1988, pp. 305-7).

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