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ŠĀPUR I: HISTORY

ŠĀPUR I, second Sasanian king of kings (r. 239-70) and author of several rock-reliefs and the trilingual inscription on the walls of the so-called Kaʿba-ye Zardošt [ŠKZ].

i. History

The name. Three Sasanian king of kings and a number of notables of the Sasanian and later periods were called "Šāpur." The name is derived from Old Iranian **xšayaθiya.puθra* "son of king" and originally must have been a title, which came to be used, at least from the last decades of the 2nd century CE, as a personal name, although its appearance in Parthian king-lists of Arabic-Persian histories (e.g., Biruni, *Chronology*, pp. 117-19) is anachronistic. The attested forms include: Parth. šhypwhr, Sasanian šhpwr-y, Manichean Pahlavi š'bwhr, Book Pahlavi šhpwhl, Arm. šapowh, Syriac šbwhr, Sogdian š'p(')wr, Gk. Sapur, Sabour and Sapuris, Lat. Sapores and Sapor, Ar. Sābur and Šābur, Pers. Šāpur, Šāhpur, Šahfur, etc. (see Nöldeke, *Kārnāmak*, pp. 60-61; Justi, *Namenbuch*, p. 284; Fluss, col. 2326; Sundermann, 1981, p. 171; Back, pp. 260-61; Garsoïan, pp. 406-407; Gignoux, 1986, pp. 161-2; Huyse II, pp. 5-6).

Šāpur I's co-rulership and accession. Šāpur I was the son of Ardašir I and "Lady Myrōd" (ŠKZ, Gk. l. 49). He participated in his father's campaign against the Arsacids (Ṭabari I, p. 819, confirmed by the victory relief of Ardašir I at Firuzābād, see *EIr* II, pp. 377-9). Ardašir "judged him the gentlest, wisest, bravest and ablest of all his children" (Masʿudi, *Moruj* II, p. 159), and nominated him as his successor in an assembly of the magnates (Skjærvø,

1983, 3/1, pp. 58-60). He appears in Ardašir's investiture reliefs at Naqš-e Rajab and Firuzābād as the heir apparent (Hinz, 1969, pp. 56ff and passim), and our data indicate that he later shared rulership with his father (Ghirshman, 1975; Calmeyer, pp. 46-7, 63-7). Balʿami (ed. Bahār, p. 884) states that "Ardašir placed with his own hand his own crown upon Šāpur's head," and Masʿudi (*Moruj* II, p. 160) confirming this, adds that Ardašir then retired to serve God and lived for a year or longer. The testimony of the Cologne Mani Codex that in Mani's twenty-fourth year, i.e., in (24+ 216=) 240, Ardašir "subjugated the city of Hatra and King Šāpur, his son, placed on his head the great (royal) diadem" (Henrichs–Koenen, 1975, pp. 18, 21), also indicates a period of synarchy. In late 242, the Emperor Gordianus III sent a letter from Antioch in Syria to the senate claiming that he had removed the threat "of Persian kings" *(reges persarum*) from the city (*SHA*: *Gordiani Tres* 27. 5), which means that in 242 Persia had two kings. Indeed, Ardašir's late coins continues his usual reverse type of an elaborate fire altar and the legend: *NWR[’] [Z]Y [’r]t[x]štr* "Fire of Ardaxštar" but it portrays him facing a youthful prince – symbolically representing Šāpur and a new legend: *mzdysn bgy shpwhry MLK’ ‘ yr’n MNW štry MN yzd’n* "Divine Šāpur King of Iran whose seed is from gods" (Lukonin, 1969, pp. 55, 164, 166, Pl. II no 283; Ghirshman 1975, p. 258; Mossig-Walburg, 1980, pp. 117, 119-20; idem, 1990, pp. 112-13). Šāpur's own coins show him wearing his famous mural crown and a fire altar flanked by two attendants. Clearly, Ardašir issued that series when he appointed Šāpur co-regent. A rock-relief at Salmās in Azarbaijan (Hinz, 1965; 1969, pp. 135-39) depicting two horsemen *both* wearing Ardašir's lower-type crown, must also date from the period of synarchy. Another, at Dārābgerd (Hinz, 1969, pp. 145-152; see also *EIr*., VII, p. 7), represents a victory of Šāpur I over the Romans but the king wears Ardasir's crown, thereby symbolizing the shared victory of the father and the son (Ghirshman, 1971, pp. 94-103; Shahbazi, 1972).

The date of Šāpur's coronation has been much debated. The testimony of his courtier Ābnun (see below) that the Romans marched against Persia "in the 3rd year of Šāpur, king of kings," proves that Šāpur's accession was in 240, as Henning (1957, pp. 117-8 [= 1977, II, pp. 516-7]) calculated from the evidence of Bišāpur's inscription that separates Ardašir's royal fire from that of his son by 16 years. He further correctly interpreted (ibid., pp. 118-9 [= 1977, II, pp. 717-8]) the Manichean report (in Ebn Nadim, *Fehrest*, p. 328) that the day of Šāpur's coronation "was Sunday, the first of Nisan, when the sun was in Aries" with reference to Sunday 12 April, 240. A magnificently executed rock-relief at Naqš-e Rajab symbolically commemorates Šāpur's investiture: Ohrmazd, on

horseback, offers the diademed ring of royalty to Šāpur, who is likewise mounted, but his figure is mutilated by subsequent vandalism.

Wars with Rome. Eastern writers have vague ideas of Šāpur's wars with Rome, making a single campaign out of them with the capture of Valerian as its conclusion (Nöldeke, *Geschicter der Perser,* p. 31 n. 3). The ŠKZ inscription and rock-reliefs agree with Roman sources (collected and discussed by Fluss, Ensslin, Maricq and Honigmann, Mazzarino, Winter, Kettenhofen, Dodgeon and Lieu) that there were three campaigns. The first (242-4) came upon Hatra's capture. The Roman account (given in the official biography of Gordian [*Gordiani Tres* 23.4; 26.3 to 24.3] and supplemented by brief references in later Roman historians), is briefly as follows. In 242, Gordian set out against the Persians with "a huge army and great quantity of gold," and wintered in Antioch. There he fought and won repeated battles, and drove out Šāpur from the Antioch, Carrhae and Nisibis, routed him at Resaina (modern Ra's al-'Ain, near Nisibis) and forced him to restore all occupied cities unharmed to their citizens. "We have penetrated as far as Nisibis, and shall even get to Ctesiphon," he wrote to the senate. But that was not to be. Philip the Arab, prefect of the guard, hatched plots, convinced the soldiers to proclaim him joint emperor, and undermining the authority of Gordian, hastily retreated towards the Roman frontier. During the retreat Gordian perished. Most said that he was murdered by Philip's agents, but Eusebius of Caesarea heard that "Gordianus was killed in Parthia"; Zosimus (who follows the official account) relates that Gordianus was killed deep in enemy's land, and a garbled version in Zonaras (12.17) reports that "the young emperor" was overthrown from his horse in a battle, broke his thigh, and died of his wound. All say that Philip then swore friendship or made "a most shameful treaty" with Šāpur and ended the war. He even ceded Armenia and Mesopotamia but later broke the treaty and seized them.

Since 1940, it has been possible to contrast this version with the Persian view, given by Šāpur himself in the KZ trilingual inscription (Back, pp. 290-94; Huyse, 1999, I, pp. 26-8). "Just as we were established on the throne, the emperor Gordianus gathered in all of the Roman Empire an army of Goths and Germans and marched on Āsōristān (Assyria), against Ērānšahr and against us. On the edges of Assyria, at Misiḵē [on the Euphrates as it flows close to the Tigris], there was a great frontal battle. And Gordianus Caesar perished, and we destroyed the Roman army. And the Romans proclaimed Philip emperor. And Philip Caesar came to us for terms, and paid us 500,000 dinars as ransom

for his life and became tributary to us." A courtier of Šāpur called Ābnun set up a fire as an oblation when "it was heard that the Romans had come and Šāpur the King of kings had smitten them and had worsted them [so that they fell into our captivity] (Tavoosi and Frye, pp. 25-38; Gignoux, 1991, pp. 9-17; Livshits and Nikitin, pp. 41-44; MacKenzie, 1993, pp. 105-109; Skjærvø, 1992, pp. 153-60; Sundermann, 1993).

Scholarly analyses have shown that Sāpur's account while defective is superior to the Roman version, which fails to explain why the Romans having routed Šāpur near Nisibis and marched to the gates of Ctesiphon would want to buy a "most shameful peace"? As Kettenhofen puts it (pp. 35-6): "It is understandable that Roman national pride transferred the responsibility of the defeat, in which Gordian III became the first Roman emperor to lose his life on enemy battlefield, to Philip. On the other hand, the feeling of the Sasanian triumph was immortalized in several rock-reliefs of Šāpur I, and the victory at Misiḵē was mentioned by a boastful Šāpur as the *single* military event within this first campaign."

Having removed the Roman threat and enriched his treasury by exacting heavy ransom, Šāpur brought the Roman protectorate of western Armenia under Persian control (Kettenhofen, pp. 87-97, 100-107, 114-23). He also commemorated his victory on several rock reliefs in Fārs (see below), the most relevant of which is at Dārābgerd which shows the youthful emperor Gordian prostrate under the horse of Šāpur who wears Ardašir's crown and receives another Roman (Philip) with benediction. Curiously, Philip also celebrated and called himself victor over the Persians *(Persicus/Parthicus Maximus*, see Winter, pp. 107-10) once he was in a safe distance from them.

While Western sources on Šāpur's second campaign (252-6) are meager, contradictory and hostile, his is full and fairly coherent (Maricq, 1958; Back, pp. 294-306; Huyse, 1999, I, pp. 28-33). "The Caesar lied and did harm to Armenia," he begins, with reference to Roman interference in Armenia and possibly refusal of "tribute" payment. Šāpur invaded Mesopotamia in about 250, but a serious trouble in a district of Khorasan "necessitated his presence there." He marched thither and settled its affair (Ṭabari I, p. 826 with Markwart, *Capitals*, p. 52). Then he resumed the invasion of Roman territories. "And we annihilated a Roman force of 60,000 at Barbalissus [modern Qalʿat al-Bālis, on the left bank of the Euphrates in Syria] and we burned and ravaged the province of Syria and all its dependencies; and in that one campaign we conquered from the Roman empire the following forts and cities [some thirty-

six of them are named].”

The available data indicate that there were several campaigns conducted in the course of the years 253-6, with Antioch, the prestigious and rich capital of the Roman East, as the ultimate goal (Kettenhofen, 1982, pp. 50-78, 83-89, summarizing the researches of Sprengling, Henning, Ensslin, Maricq, Honigmann, Rostortzeff, Baldus). During the first phase of the war, Šāpur must have retaken Armenia and appointed his son Hormozd-Ardašir as the “Great King of Armenians,” a prestigious title created evidently to placate the proud Armenians. Georgia submitted or was taken and made into a specially honored province placed under a very high-ranking Sasanian official, the *bidaxš* (*EIr* IV, pp. 242-44). The Sasanian borders on the north were thus secured, allowing direct guarding of the Caucasian passes (see DARBAND). After defeating the main Roman army at Barbalissos, Šāpur divided his forces, leading one army himself he penetrated deep into Syria all the way to the coast and plundered what he found, while Hormazd-Ardašir took the other and invaded Lesser Armenia and Cappadocia. The burning and looting show that Šāpur had no intention of keeping the conquered lands, but he did deport a large number of the populations and settled them in his own cities (see below).

Repeated skirmishes led to a new large-scale war in 260. “And in the third campaign, we set upon Carrhae and Edessa, and as we were besieging Carrhae and Edessa, Valerian Caesar came against us, and with him was a force [later specified as totaling 70,000] from the province (*hštr*) of the Goths and Germans [most Roman provinces are named]. And on the far side [= west] of Carrhae and Edessa a great battle took place for us with Valerianus Caesar. And we with our own hands took Valerian Caesar prisoner and the rest who were the commanders of this army, the Praetorian Prefect, and the senators, and the officers all of these we took prisoners and we led them away into Persis (Pārs). And we burned with fire, and we ravaged, and we took captive and we conquered the province of Syria, and the province of Cilicia, and the province of Cappadocia. And in that campaign we conquered from the Roman Empire [thirty-six cities are named with their dependent districts]. And we led the men from the Roman Empire, namely, from the Anērān [un-Iranian lands], away with the booty; and we settled them in our own Iranian empire– in Persis, Parthia and in Ḵuzestān and in Āsōristān [=Babylonia], and in the other provinces, province by province, whenever we, or our father, or our forefathers or our ancestors had royal estates” (Maricq, 1965, pp. 52-6; Back,

pp. 306-29: Huyse I, pp. 33-43; detailed commentary in Kettenhofen, pp. 97-126).

As the British military officer and historian Sir Percy Sykes has remarked (I, p. 401): “Few if any events in history have produced a greater morale effect than the capture of a Roman Emperor by the monarch of a young dynasty. The impression of the time must have been overwhelming, and the news must have resounded like a thunderclap throughout Europe and Asia.” Understandably, western historians (both ancient and modern, see e.g. Frye 1983, p. 297) have attributed “the greatest humiliation of the Romans” (Nöldeke, p.32 n.4) to the spread of disease and treachery of allies, and claimed that “the aged emperor” was tricked by Šāpur during armistice negotiation and was not taken in the thick of the battle.

When the Persian army spread itself too widely over the Roman East and lost its cohesion, Šāpur evacuated the devastated areas and set out for home, laden with booty and a large number of deportees. He marched through eastern Cilicia and northern Mesopotamia arriving at his capital Ctesiphon, probably in late 260. Part of his baggage train was lost during a raid by Palmyrene Arabs under their sheikh Odenathus. This “minor incident of uncertain date” (Sprengling, pp. 108-109), has been turned by Roman historians and their modern successors (Felix, pp. 809 with literature) into repeated routings of Šāpur by an ally of Rome who “if not restoring Rome’s honor did profoundly damage and disgrace” the Persian king (Nöldeke, p. 32 n. 4). But, as Henning (1939, p. 843 [= 1977, p. 621]) has explained: “The transport through the desert of a very great number of prisoners besides the Persian army was a difficult enterprise; the fact that Šāpur succeeded in this (as proven by the presence of the provincials in Susiana) shows sufficiently how much the usual accounts of the exploits of Odenathus against the Persians on their desert march are exaggerated.”

Šāpur commemorated his victories in his KZ inscriptions and in several rock-reliefs (MacDermot, 1959, pp. 76-80; Hinz, 1969; Girshman, 1971; Herrmann, 1980, 1983, Herrmann-MacKenzie-Howell, 1989; see also SASANIAN ROCK-RELIEFS). That at Dārābgerd was mentioned before. A very badly damaged scene at Bišāpur (I) shows the investiture and triumph of Šāpur combined: the king on horseback receives the diadem of sovereignty from Ohrmazd while under his horse lies Gordianus and kneeling before him is Philip. Nearby a great rock-relief (Bišāpur II) represents in the center Šāpur on horseback, Gordianus prostrate, and Valerian standing at the side of the king who holds

him by wrist. Another carved at Naqš-e Rostam lacks Gordianus but shows Philip (kneeling) and Valerian (standing), and the largest (Bišāpur III) depicts Šāpur and the three Roman emperors in the center, four rows of mounted Iranian dignitaries behind the king, and in front of him four rows of tribute-bearers on foot or with chariots. Finally, a sardonyx cameo of Roman-Persian workmanship pictures Šāpur and Valerian on horseback in hand-to-hand fighting (Ghirshman, 1962, p. 152, fig. 195). All representations of the captive Caesar show him unfettered and in regalia, disproving the rumors (survey in Felix, pp. 66-73) that he was mistreated.

Account of the rest of Šāpur's reign. Šāpur's triumph increased the prestige of the Sasanian empire, confirming her position as the rival of the Roman state, and one of "the two guardians of order and progress in the world" (Petrus Patricius in Müller, *Fragmenta* IV, p. 188 no. 13). His campaigns deprived the enemy from resources while restoring and substantially enriching his own treasury, and the Roman deportees, mainly artisans and skilled workers, helped to revitalize Persia's urban centers, industries and agriculture (Pigulevskaya, pp. 127-31; see also *EIr* IV, pp. 287-88). The incorporation of so many non-Iranians into Šāpur's empire necessitated the coining of a new royal title: "King of Kings of Ērān ['Iranians'] and Anērān ['un-Iranians']," which appeared regularly in his inscriptions and became the customary title of later Sasanian sovereigns. Many of the deportees were Christians, and no longer persecuted, they prospered and multiplied in Ḵuzestān, Persis and eastern Iran, built churches and monasteries and even set up bishoprics (*Chronicle of Se'ert* II, p. 221). Greek and Syriac came into wider use (Brock, chap. IV, pp. 91-5), and various books on sciences (particularly astronomical works, including Ptolemy's) were translated into Pahlavi (Taqizadeh, 1939, p. 133, citing Ebn Nowbaḵt apud Ebn Nadim, pp. 238-9; Henning, 1942, p. 245 (= 1977, I, p. 111; Pingree, *EIr* II, p. 859). Also, an unprecedented period of "town building" (i.e., fortifying an existing one or renovating and enlarging it and then re-naming it) followed (Pigulevskaya, pp. 127-31). Thus, Misiḵē was re-named Pērōz-Šāpūr and served as the main military magazine (*anbār*, hence its other name Anbār) on the western front (Maricq, 1958, pp.352-56; Honingmann-Maricq, pp. 112-30). Abaršahr was re-founded as Nēv-Šāpūr>Nišāpur ('Excellent (is) Šāpur': Markwart, *Provincial Capitals*, p. 52; Ḥamza, p. 48.) and part of Susa was re-named Hormazd-Ardašir (Le Strange, *Lands*, p. 219). Šād-Šāpūr "Happiness of Šāpur" was the official name given to Rimā (Markwart, *Ērānšahr*, p. 41), a district in Kaškar. Gondēšāpur was "founded" on the site of an old town called Bēṯ Lapaṭ, some 10 km south of the

city of Dezful, to house the deported Antiocheans. The city of Bišāpur seems to have been the king's foundation and he built many monuments there, and carved rock-reliefs in a nearby gorge, the Tang-e Čowgān. In a cave above the gorge his colossal statue, originally over twenty feet high (Moqaddasi, pp. 444-45; Ghirshman, 1971, I, pp. 179-85; Pls. XXVIII-XXXII; Rice), still exists.

Šāpur tells us that he had other achievements "which we have not inscribed here, besides all this" (Back, pp. 327-29; Huyse I, p. 44). Even at old age he remained fully active, as his feat of archery witnessed by kings, princes, magnates and nobles and recorded in a bilingual inscription at Hājiābād shows (Najmābādi; MacKenzie, 1978, pp. 499-501; Back, p. 546 n. 245).

Religious Policy. In all of his documents Šāpur refers to himself as *mzdysn* ('Mazda-worshipping'). His KZ inscription covers his religious foundations and wars in equal length. He felt he had a mission in history: "For the reason, therefore, that the gods have so made us their instrument (*dstkrt*), and that by the help of the gods we have sought out for ourselves, and hold, all these nations (*štry*) for that reason we have also founded, province by province, many Varahrān fires (*ʾtwry wlhlʾn)*, and we have dealt piously with many Magi (*mowmard*), and we have made great worship of the gods" (Huyse I, p. 45). Šāpur founded *pad nām ādur* ('named fires') for himself and his immediate family, and established "endowments" for them (Back, pp. 330-67; Huyse I, pp. 45-52). Šāpur ends his inscription by re-emphasizing that "we are zealous of the service and worship of the gods, and are the instruments of the gods," and that "with the assistance of the gods" he had achieved all his works (Back, pp. 368-70; Huyse I, pp. 63-4).

The Magus Kartir tells us that Šāpur showed favor towards Zoroastrians and allowed their priests to accompany his army on his Roman campaigns. But his devotion did not induce him to elevate Zoroastrianism as the *only* religion of the empire, and there is no evidence that an organized state church existed during his time. According to the *Dēnkard* (ed. Madan, pp. 412-13, ed. and tr., Shaki, 1981, pp. 116, 119): Šāpur "collected the non-religious writings on medicine, astronomy, movement, time, space, substance, accident, becoming, decay, transformation, logic and other crafts and skills which were dispersed throughout India, Roman and other lands, and collated them with the Avesta, and commanded that a copy be made of all those (writings) which were flawless and be deposited in the Royal Treasury. And he put forward for deliberation the annexation of all those pure (teachings) to the Mazdaean

religion." The surviving Zoroastrian books contain elements of Hellenistic and Indian scientific thoughts (see *EIr* II, pp. 859, 861), proving that Šāpur's effort in making the Avesta an "authorized" encyclopedia of his time was fairly successful. On the other hand, his religious tolerance benefited all his subjects: Christians (see above), Jews (Neusner II, pp. 44 ff., 48ff.), and Manicheans. But though Mani tried hard and even wrote a book in the name of Šāpur (see ŠĀBUHRAGĀN), he failed to convert him. The two were ideologically irreconcilable. Besides, Šāpur held that he himself was the instrument of God and would not have tolerated a rival for that position.

Šāpur died of illness in the city of Bišāpur (Polotsky, p. 42) probably in May 270, in his thirty-first year of reign (Henning, 1957, p. 116 [= 1977 II, p. 515]; on the figures given for his regnal years see Taqizadeh, 1943-46, pp. 281-7) and was succeeded by his heir to the throne, Hormazd-Ardašir. He was survived by two other sons: Bahrām Gēlān Šāh and Narseh, king of "India," Sakastān and Turān all the way to the Sea of Oman; both were destined to ascend the throne. Another son, Šāpur Mēšān Šāh, died before his father but left six sons and one daughter who held exalted positions.

Šāpur I in national tradition. Ṭabari (I, p. 836) remarked: "the Persians had well-tried Šāpur already before his accession and while his father still lived on account of his intelligence, understanding and learning as well as his outstanding boldness, oratory, logic, affection for the subject people and kindheartedness." Then when he came to the throne, Ṭabari continues, he showed such generosity towards the nobility and commoners and took such care in running the state benevolently but efficiently that "he became renowned everywhere and gained superiority over all kings." Ṭaʿālebi (*Ḡorar*, p. 487) echoes a similar report and adds: "Šāpur even surpassed Ardašir in generosity and oratory."

With that fame, and with a legacy so richly documented by easily accessible inscriptions and rock-reliefs, it is most surprising that the national history knows so little about Šāpur and introduces him as the subject of several tales (best recounted in the *Kār-Nāmag ī Ardaxšīr ī Pābagān* and the *Šāh-nāma)* intended to legitimize Sasanian claim to royalty by linking Ardašir, his son and grandson to the Parthian families of Ardavān and Mehrān (symbolized as Mehrak). One concerns his birth. When Ardašir slaughtered the family of the Arsacid king Ardavān, a daughter escaped in disguise, was taken by the victor as a concubine. She became with child and disclosed her lineage, whereupon the king ordered an old advisor to put her to death. Since Ardašir was

childless, the old man disobeyed the order and when a son was born to the girl, he called him *Šāh-pur* 'son of the king' and raised him in secret. Years later, when Ardašir grew old and regretted leaving this world childless, the old man revealed the truth. Elated, Ardašir had the lad placed in a crowd of boys of the same age and similar physic and dress, and ordered them to play polo in front of the palace. Ardašir recognized Šāpur at the first glance, and the lad proved his worth when he alone dared to enter the royal portico and approach the king fearlessly to retrieve a ball, which had gone astray. The meeting ended joyfully, and Šāpur was proclaimed heir to the throne.

A similar story is told about Šāpur's wife and son. Ardašir faced grave danger in fighting rebels, the most tenacious of whom was the Persian magnate Mehrak. Finally, an Indian sage informed him that his kingdom would see peace only when two families, those of Ardašir and Mehrak, rule it. Ardašir so feared the House of Mehrak that he ordered its annihilation, only a single daughter of extraordinary beauty and physical strength escaped and lived in obscurity among the shepherds. Šāpur met her on a hunting excursion and married her. Their son Hormozd was raised secretly until Ardašir recognized him by chance. In this way the two houses were united and, as had been prophesized, Hormozd brought peace and unity to Ērānšahr.

Apart from such legends, the national tradition also knows of a testament that Šāpur supposedly left to his son Hormozd (Ṭabari, I, p. 831; Mas'udi, *Moruj* II, pp. 165-66; partially quoted by Ṭaʿālebi, *Ḡorar*, pp. 495-98 and ʿĀmeri, pp. 286, 296-303, 314-18, 331, 421, 427, 429-33, 435-6, 444). It concerned regulations intended to strengthen the imperial policy, and may have been a later composition mirroring Sasanian political ideology in general.

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