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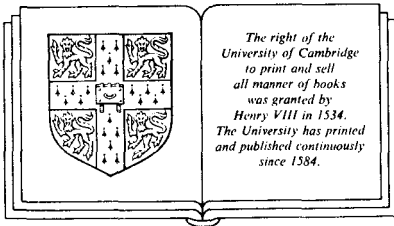
Volume 3(I)

THE SELEUCID, PARTHIAN
AND SASANIAN PERIODS

edited by

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CHAPTER 15

BYZANTIUM AND THE SASANIANS

I

The nearly four centuries of Sasanian rule which separate the accession of Ardashīr I, in the twenties of the 3rd century A.D., from the fall of Yazdgard III, in the middle of the seventh, have long been viewed as a period of bitter enmity between the Iranian and Roman empires. The rise of the Persian Sasanian dynasty has traditionally been interpreted as the victorious reaction of Oriental resentment against the compromises of the over-hellenized Parthian Arsacids. This interpretation reflects the traditional claim of the Sasanians themselves, that they were the descendants of the ancient kings of Iran, and the notions of the contemporary Romans, who likewise saw the new dynasty as the heir of the Achaemenians, the traditional enemies of the Classical world and hence of themselves.¹ Despite these overt proclamations of hostility, the two empires survived side by side as acknowledged equals, and the ambiguity of this situation has been reflected in modern scholarship as well. In recent times, a number of scholars, while recognizing the endemic antagonism of the two rivals, have gone on to argue for striking similarities and consequently for reciprocal influence in the court ceremonials, art, military, legal, fiscal, and administrative institutions of Byzantium and Iran. Some have even gone so far as to consider seriously the claim occasionally made by mediaeval sources that certain of the later Sasanian rulers: Yazdgard I, Khusrau I Anūshīrvān, and especially Khusrau II Parvēz had secretly been converted to Christianity, and to see an irresistible trend toward monotheism in Iran due to Christian influence but ultimately destined to serve the cause of Islam.²

In view of the ambivalent quality of the evidence and of the fact that almost all the points of resemblance and mutual influence are still being seriously challenged, where they have not been rejected outright; finally, because influence has too often been postulated on the basis of

¹ *Kārnāmag* I. vi; Nöldeke, *Ṭabari*, pp. 1-3; Cassius Dio LXXX. iii. 4; Herodian VI. ii. 7.

² Sebēos, *Héraclius* II; John Mamikonian, "Histoire de Daron", in Langlois, *Collections des Historiens* I, p. 363; John the Kat'olikos, *Histoire d'Arménie*, ix; John of Nikiu, *Chronicle*, xcv; Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History* VII. viii; Fredegarius IV. ix; N. Pigulevskaia, *Vizantiia*, pp. 113, 235, 240, 243ff., 248; cf. however, Widengren, *Religions*, p. 273.

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logical similarities rather than on demonstrable historical contact; many aspects of Byzantine–Sasanian relations must perforce remain open at the present time. The entire question should be reviewed cautiously so as to take stock of our knowledge before proceeding any further into hypothesis, no matter how tempting. It seems wisest, therefore, to advance step by step clearing the ground as we go. First, to trace the possible channels of transmission for techniques and ideas from one realm to the other. Then, to examine the evidence that the traditional enemies were acquainted with each other's customs and institutions and that they acknowledged their mutual existence. Only at that point should we be able to raise the question of the demonstrability and degree of reciprocal influence.

Least often considered, the existence of contacts and means of transmission is the aspect of the problem most easily documented. There can be little doubt that enmity did not isolate the two empires from each other. The frontier was gradually rigidified over the centuries through the elimination of the hybrid semi-autonomous Syro-Mesopotamian border states, such as Palmyra, Ḥatra, and Edessa by the end of the 3rd century, through the partition of the buffer kingdom of Armenia in 387, and the final absorption of the autonomous satrapies along the Euphrates–Arsanias, as a result of Justinian's restructuring of the administration of his Armenian territories in 536.¹ Similar results were obtained through the emperor's reconstruction of the elaborate system of border fortifications and the Persian counter-measures recorded in Procopius' contemporary treatise on the imperial "Buildings". Nevertheless, this gradual tightening never achieved anything approaching a hermetic separation. Warfare in the period with which we are concerned was not a matter of static operations but of fluid raid and counter raid which carried the Persian armies to Antioch, Jerusalem, and the suburbs of Constantinople, and Byzantine retaliations to the vicinity of the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon. Hence, both armies had ample opportunity to familiarize themselves with enemy territory. As a consequence of the fortunes of war, the intermediary border zone, including the frontier cities of Dārā, Amida, and Nisibis, as well as a considerable portion of bisected Armenia, found itself alternately under Persian and Byzantine domination. A common language – Armenian in the north, Syriac in the south – and identical customs prevailed on either side of the frontier, linking together related populations split asunder by

¹ *Corpus Juris Civilis*, Novella xxxi; Gagé, pp. 71, 85ff.

political accidents. The Syriac-speaking bishops of imperial Mesopotamia or Osrohene understood their Persian counterparts in Nisibis or Seleucia–Ctesiphon far better than their Greek colleagues in whose councils they could participate only through interpreters.¹ So fluid were parts of the border until the implementation of Justinian's extensive programme that Procopius could still recall a time when "the inhabitants of this region, whether subjects of the Romans or of the Persians, [had] no fear of each other . . . they even intermarry and hold a common market for their produce and together share the labours of farming".² Subsequent agreements steadily restrained additions to existing fortifications.³

Beyond the immediate frontier zone, superficial knowledge was supplemented by exchanges of population. Prisoners were ransomed during periodic truces and peace negotiations. Vast numbers of Syrians were uprooted by Shāpūr I, Shāpūr II, and Khusrau I to be forcibly resettled in the new cities of Gundēshāpūr or Veh–Ardashīr which required a skilled population, while silk workers ruined by the state monopoly in the days of Justinian are said to have migrated voluntarily to Persia in search of employment, and other artisans were sent by the Byzantine emperor himself to work on the palace of Ctesiphon.⁴ Greek mason's marks on the monuments of Shāpūr I's residence at Bīshāpūr attest the presence of such workmen, and the descendants of deported artisans and traders were occasionally to reach positions of considerable importance in subsequent centuries.⁵ Persian mercenaries were to be found in the imperial armies, and the presence of Mazdeans on Byzantine territory is revealed by the clauses guaranteeing their religious freedom incorporated in peace treaties.⁶ As for Christian refugees, persecution drove them from both sides of the frontier at the mercy of recrudescences of Zoroastrian intolerance or of enforced Constantinopolitan official orthodoxy directed against dissident heretical groups.⁷

The status of foreigners was not restricted to the lower strata of society but reached all the way to court circles where they might affect

¹ Jones, pp. 991–4, 1001.

² Procopius, "Buildings" III. iii. 9.

³ Procopius, "Persian War" I. ii. 15; *idem*, "Buildings" II. i. 5; John of Ephesus, *Historia* VI. xxxvi.

⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus XX. vi. 7; Procopius, "Persian War" II. xiv. 1; *idem*, "Anecdota" XXV. 26; Theophylakt Simokattes V. vi. 10; Pigulevskaia, *Villes*, 168, 171, *et al.*

⁵ Ghirshman, *Iran*, p. 151; Pigulevskaia, *Villes*, pp. 161, 236–8.

⁶ Jones, pp. 291, 619; Menander, p. 213; Nöldeke, *Ṭabari*, p. 288.

⁷ Labourt, pp. 117, 131–40, *et al.*

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government policy, be it as Persian palace attendants, officials and senators at Constantinople, or as refugee Pers-Armenian nobility officially received on Byzantine territory, or through the quasi-monopoly on the office of royal physician at Ctesiphon held by Christians, many of whom were imperial envoys, despite the scriptural strictures against foreign healers preserved in the *Dēnkart*.¹ The presence of Christian wives in the harem of the king of kings and the asylum granted by Khusrau I to the pagan philosophers driven from Athens by Justinian's closing of the Platonic Academy in 529 are balanced by the welcome extended at the imperial court to Sasanian pretenders or to the distinguished ecclesiastical scholar, Paul the Persian, who expounded his doctrinal views in the presence of the emperor Justin I and instructed high Byzantine officials before his return to his native land, presumably to assume the function of metropolitan of Nisibis.²

Additional means of communication were provided by periodically re-confirmed trade agreements. These affected most particularly the all important trade in Chinese raw silk, required for the Byzantine luxury industries supplying the court, over which the Sasanians kept absolute monopoly, despite various imperial diplomatic attempts to by-pass their control, until the silk cocoons were finally smuggled into Syria and acclimatized there after 552.³ To be sure, these contacts were normally reduced to a few frontier cities in which the customs bureaus were located and duty collected: Callinicum on the Roman side, Nisibis in Mesopotamia and Artaxata of Armenia for the Persian territory, and merchants were forbidden to circulate elsewhere for security reasons.⁴ Even so, some relations with the natives must have been established, since in the 6th century Byzantine agents acted in conjunction with Persian traders. At a more official level, the peace treaty of 561 stipulated for joint commissions supervising cases of contraband or international litigations.⁵

As we should logically expect, the closest relations were maintained between the Christian communities flourishing not only in the border districts, but in most Iranian cities as a result of the Sasanian extensive

¹ Jones, pp. 135, 552, 567; Labourt, pp. 219ff; *Dēnkart* VIII. 37. 14.

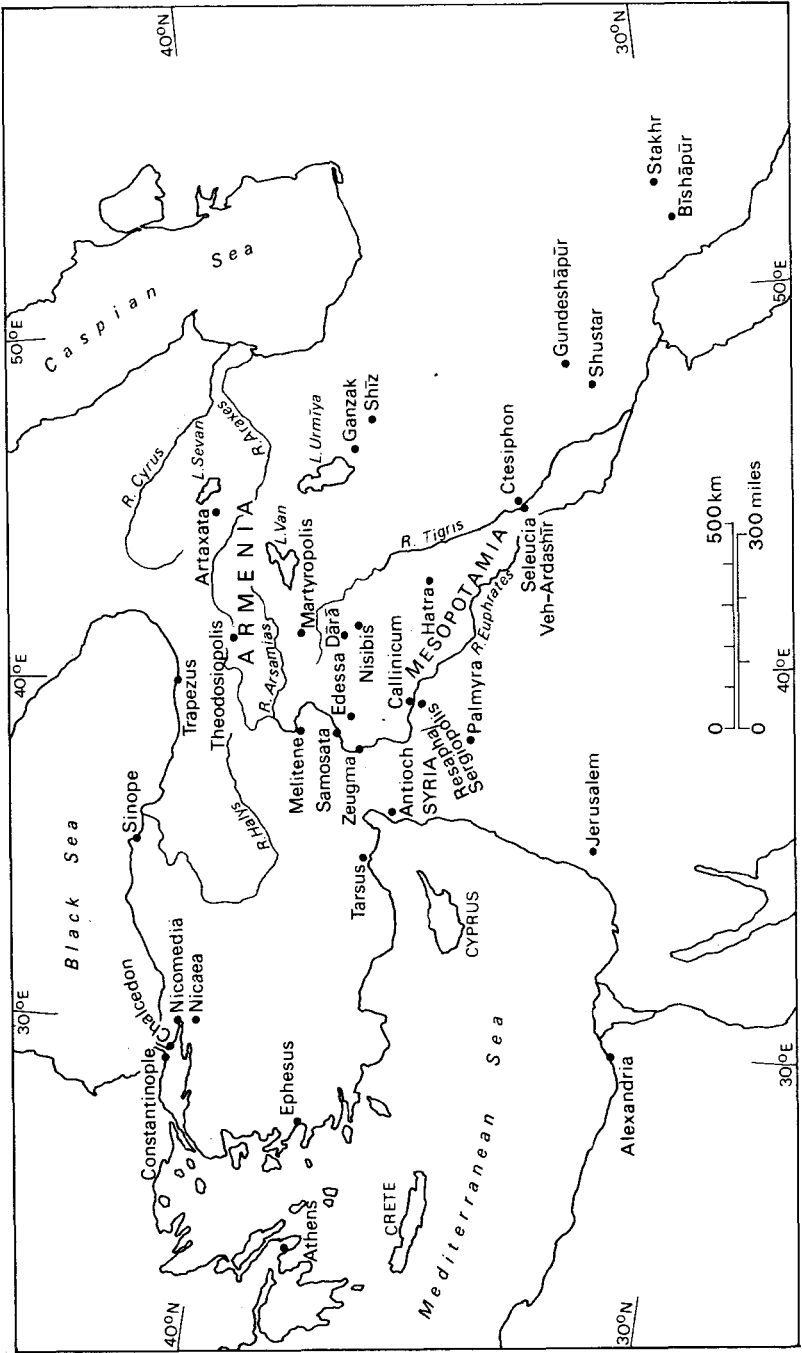
² Agathias II. xxviii-xxxi; Mercati, p. 17; Labourt, p. 167; Vööbus, *School of Nisibis*, pp. 152-3, 170-2, *et al.*

³ Procopius, "Persian War" II. xxv. 1-4; *idem*, "Gothic War" IV. xvii. 1-7; Pigulevskaia, "Torgovlia shelkom", pp. 187-8. [See further pp. 547ff in this vol. on silk trade.]

⁴ *Corpus Juris Civilis, Codex Justinianus* IV. 63. 4; Petrus Patricius, "Fragmenta" xiv; Menander, p. 212; Procopius "Anecdota" xxv. 13-26; Jones, pp. 826-7.

⁵ John of Ephesus, "Lives" xxxi; Menander, pp. 212-13.

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Map 12. The Byzantine-Sasanian borderlands.

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re-settlement policies. Mesopotamian bishops were regularly used as plenipotentiaries by both sides and seized the occasion of ransoming their coreligionists and of maintaining their contacts with communities lying over the border.¹ Christian clerics from Persia such as the future patriarch of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Mar 'Aba, the creator of the Armenian alphabet, Mesrop Maštoc^e, or the Armenian savant, Ananias Širakac^ei, travelled to Constantinople to learn Greek and perfect their education.² Meanwhile, the Orthodox, Nestorians, and Monophysites travelled back and forth proselytizing and ordaining bishops for foreign sees.³ We have already noted that persecuted minorities systematically sought haven in enemy territory. The most significant such move from an intellectual point of view resulted from the closing, ordered on doctrinal grounds by the emperor Zeno in 489, of the great theological "School of the Persians" located at Edessa. The imperial decree directed against the spread of Nestorian beliefs unacceptable to the Byzantine court shifted the intellectual and spiritual centre of Nestorian Christianity to Persian Nisibis, where the exiled scholars settled to re-create their famous seat of learning, to translate Greek religious and philosophical texts, and to found local schools throughout the area. Of similar importance was the great medical school founded by Nestorian refugees at Gundēshāpūr, which was to outlive the Sasanian state.⁴ The ties linking the Christian communities together were so close that they repeatedly led the Persian authorities to regard them, probably with good reason, as potentially disloyal nests of spies and imperial informers. All the repeated attempts of the official Nestorian Church of Persia to dissociate itself from Byzantium and stress its disagreements with Constantinopolitan doctrine, all the protestations by Persian church councils of their loyalty to the king of kings failed to break altogether the accepted equation of Christian with Byzantine supporter and to disabuse the Sasanian authorities. Persecution normally followed the resumption of hostilities between the two empires.⁵

¹ *Synodicon Or.*, pp. 255, 256, 276-7, 293, 532-6; Evagrius v. xix; Menander, pp. 258-9; Theoph. Sim. iv. xiv; Anonymous Guidi, pp. 18-19; Labourt, pp. 87, 124, 242-3; Garsoïan, "Nersēs", "Hiérarchie chrétienne", *passim*.

² *Liber Turris*, p. 44; Cosmas Indicopleustes II, p. 24, VIII, pp. 315-16. Koriwn, "Biographie de Mesrob", in Langlois, *Collection* II, p. 12; Abeyan, I, p. 395; Vööbus, *School of Nisibis*, p. 162, *et al.*

³ Labourt, p. 124; Honigmann, *Evêques*, pp. 4, 69.

⁴ Vööbus, *School of Nisibis*, *passim*; Garsoïan, "Armenia", pp. 347-8; Pigulevskaia, *Villes*, pp. 246-7; Labourt, pp. 140-1, 289-301; Christensen, p. 242.

⁵ *Synodicon Or.*, pp. 256, 258, 260-1, 276, 293-4, 318, 320, 334, 340, 390-1, 456, 461, 470-1, 551, 580-1, 585-6; Labourt, pp. 110-18, 126-8, 231, 347; Widengren, *Religions*, pp. 312, 314; Garsoïan, *loc. cit.*

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At the highest official level, reciprocal contacts were maintained by means of an elaborate diplomatic protocol. Embassies moved constantly back and forth not only to discuss truces and negotiate peace treaties, but also to bring formal notification of new accessions even in time of war. These ambassadors were normally received with elaborate courtesy, so that a failure to observe the normal ceremonial was regarded as a deliberate act of defiance.¹ The negotiations often took place on the border, but a clause of the peace treaty of 561 stipulated that envoys should be sped on their way by means of the public post system maintained by both realms, and distinguished personages such as Khusrau I's representative, Yazd-Gushnasp, or the Byzantine master of offices, Peter the Patrician, were singled out for special favour at the court of the sovereigns to whom they were accredited.² Cooperative action was taken by bi-partisan trade and judicial commissions, and provisions were made for the joint defence of the Caucasian passes against the incursions of northern nomads threatening both realms. Bilingual corps of interpreters verified the accuracy of the texts of treaties consigned to both powers. The glimpse we are given into the make-up of the frontier commissions indicates that they provided a common ground where local dignitaries including the Persian governor, the Byzantine commander in chief of the district, and local bishops might meet to settle points of disagreement, necessarily becoming acquainted in the process.³ The closest and best example of bilateral cooperation is afforded by the sojourn of Khusrau II on Byzantine territory, when the fugitive prince met with an honourable reception and support, exchanged reciprocal courtesies with the emperor Maurice, and was ultimately set back on his throne through joint military operations. In sign of gratitude for the help he had received, the young Persian king was to dedicate gifts bearing Greek inscriptions at the imperial shrine of Saint Sergius of Resapha through the intermediary of the bishop of Antioch, who accepted these offerings with the permission of Constantinople.⁴

Under these circumstances, there seems to be no warrant for treating

¹ Menander, *passim*; *Chronicon Paschale*, *passim*; Amm. Marc. xvii. v. 1-2, 15; xiv. 2-3; Procopius, "Persian War", I. ii. 15; Theoph. Sim., III. xii; Sebēos, *Héraclius*, xxiv; John of Ephesus, *Historia* vi, xxi.

² Menander, p. 212, clause 3; Procopius, "Gothic War", iv. xv. 19-20, *et al.*

³ Procopius, "Persian War" I. xvi. 6; Theoph. Sim. III. ix. 11; Menander, pp. 213-14; Theophanes I, p. 245, 19-22; *Synodicon Or.*, pp. 532-3, 536.

⁴ Goubert, pp. 149-50; Evagrius, *Historia* vi. xxi; Theoph. Sim. v. i. 7-8; Peeters, "Ex-voto", *passim*.

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the Byzantino-Sasanian epoch merely as one of hostile isolation and continuous wars. No doubt, the instances of direct contact which we have enumerated were largely limited to the frontier zone or to official exchanges and to the Christian communities. Travel within the two empires was severely restricted and supervised even in the case of ambassadors or of Khusrau II himself, whose attendance at all times by an imperial bodyguard and prevention from a visit to Constantinople is suggestive of honourable protective custody.¹ Diplomatic exchanges had to be filtered through the distorting medium of translation. And yet, for all the antagonism and suspicion present, channels of transmission were available most of the time, the frontier was in no sense hermetic, and an official *modus vivendi* had been elaborated between the two great rivals.

As a result of the interpenetration of the Iranian and Byzantine worlds, evidence of their familiarity with each other's beliefs and institutions can be traced back to an early period. Even where the trustworthiness of a particular author has occasionally been impugned, the general tone of the contemporary accounts is primarily historical rather than mythological, whatever may be the fantasies of later writers. Immediately after the accession of Ardashīr I, his Roman opponents do not seem to have grasped the full significance of the Sasanian *coup d'état*, but this ignorance did not last. By the fourth century the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus was usually accurately acquainted with the names of Persian rulers, generals, and provincial governors, as well as with the administrative divisions of the Sasanian empire. In one case at least, his information must be based on direct experience or eyewitness accounts since his description of the decoration of Persian palaces with hunting scenes is fully borne out by archaeological evidence.² The historians of the period of Justinian were equally well informed concerning the realm of Khusrau I, despite occasional errors. In particular Agathias had apparently been able to make use of the material kept in the Persian royal archives through the good offices of the interpreter of the king of kings who transmitted the information to him. Eastern magi on imperial monuments wear correct Iranian dress.³

¹ Procopius, "Gothic War" iv. xv. 20; Theoph. Sim. iv. xiii. 2; Peeters, "Ex-voto", p. 16.

² Amm. Marc. xvi. ix. 3; xviii. v. 3; xxiii. vi. 14; xxiv. ii. 4; vi. 3; vi. 12; Ghirshman, *Iran*, pp. 182-3.

³ Procopius, *passim*; Agathias iv. xxx; but cf. ii. xxvi; Ghirshman, *Iran*, p. 294; Volbach and Hirmer, pp. 152-3, 179.

Our knowledge of the hereditary offices of the Sasanian state rest ultimately as much on the testimony of the seventh century Byzantine historian Theophylakt Simokattes, who apparently likewise had a Persian informant, as on the fragmentary Persian data.¹ Practical details seem to have received as much attention as more exalted subjects. In the 4th century the Byzantine itinerary map known as the *Tabula Peutingeriana* recorded the main routes of the Sasanian empire together with the relays to be found on them and the distances indicated in Persian parasangs rather than Roman miles. Three centuries later, the Pers-Armenian scholar Anania Širakac'i, who was familiar with the geographic and mathematical works of the Hellenistic Alexandrian schools through his studies in Constantinople, gave conversion tables for Byzantine and Sasanian weights and measures.²

Ecclesiastical information was understandably extensive. By 410, at the time of its official recognition, the Christian Church of Persia was accurately informed concerning Orthodox canon law and the early ecclesiastical councils held on imperial territory. Through the medium of the School of Nisibis, the extensive writings of the great theologian Theodore of Mopsuestia, first accepted as orthodox by the Council of Chalcedon, but subsequently condemned by the Justinianic Council of the "Three Chapters" and consequently considered the fountainhead of Nestorian theology, as well as other Greek dogmatic and scientific works, were steadily translated into Syriac and made available to the Sasanian world.³ The lives of the Persian martyrs were familiar to their coreligionists in Byzantine lands who enshrined their deeds in biographies and hymns in which inaccuracies seem to be the result of conformity to hagiographic epic and miraculous conventions rather than to misinformation, since they show considerable acquaintance with the realities of Sasanian society.⁴

Our knowledge of the precise level of Persian information on Byzantium is unfortunately limited by the extreme scarcity of true Sasanian sources and by the romantic semi-legendary character of the later accounts embodied in the *Shāh-nāma* and the historical romances. Even so, the accuracy of the great trilingual victory inscription of Shāpūr I

¹ Theoph. Sim. III. xviii. 6ff.; cf., however, Pigulevskaia, *Vizantiia*, pp. 209-10.

² Miller, pp. 738-44, 781-802, Manandian, pp. 110-14, 116ff.

³ *Synodicon Or.*, pp. 262ff., 278; Labourt, p. 292-301, cf. J. Quasten, *Patrology III* (Utrecht/Westminster, Md., 1963), pp. 401-2ff.; Vööbus, pp. 15, 21, 105, 124 and n. 6 etc.

⁴ John of Ephesus, *Lives*. See Devos, "Martyres", pp. 213-25, and Follieri, "Santi", pp. 227-42, for the reliability of some of these compositions.

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on the so-called Ka'ba-yi Zardusht, one of whose versions was still written in Greek, with its correct identification of the Roman emperors Gordian, Philip the Arab, and Valerian in a period of the mid-third century, when the information of Latin historians on Sasanian affairs was still very hazy, and the exact portrayal of Roman figures on Shāpūr I's victory reliefs, all suggest that the quality of Persian information probably ceded nothing to that of the Romans.¹ Shāpūr's inscription may still curtly refer on occasion to the defeated Roman emperor as "Caesar" without further identification, but a familiarity, reaching considerably beyond generalities, with the intricate formulae of imperial chancery protocol is evidenced in the obvious echo of official Byzantine titulature which heads Khusrau II's letter to the emperor Maurice.² The court of the king of kings even seems to have been acquainted with the coronation ritual of Constantinople, if we are to believe the contemporary account that this was the ceremonial used for the young pretender whom Khusrau II sponsored as the son of the murdered emperor Maurice.³ As in the case of co-operative action, Persian inquiries into foreign techniques and beliefs received sanction from on high. Shāpūr I sought Byzantine artisans for his monuments and cities and ordered a search for Greek scientific works, which he had incorporated into the canonical scriptures.⁴ Khusrau I studied the works of Greek philosophers and encouraged translations and digests, as did the Constantinopolitan court in the case of commentaries on the Christian scriptures produced by the Persian School of Nisibis.⁵

Byzantium and Iran did not stop at the mere accumulation of information on their respective societies. They saw themselves not as fortuitous neighbours but as the only two great powers in an otherwise uncivilized world, as the normal complements in a well ordered and equilibrated universe. In doing this, they perforce acknowledged each other as equal. This concept was formally expressed in Khusrau II's famous letter to the emperor Maurice: "Two eyes has divine regulation granted to the world from the beginning in order to illuminate it: the mighty empire of the Romans and the realm of the Persians governed by the wisest rulers. In these two great powers restless and warlike

¹ SKZ in Sprengling, pp. 15-16; Maricq, "Res gestae", pp. 45-6; Ghirshman, figs. 196-8.

² Theoph. Sim. iv. x. 11. See Goubert, p. 135 for the authenticity of this letter.

³ Anon. Guidi, p. 19.

⁴ *Dēnkart* iv. 413; Zaehner, pp. 8, 10-11, 139, etc.

⁵ Agathias II. xxviii-xxxi; Zaehner, pp. 48-50; Mercati, *Paolo il Persiano, passim*; Duchesne-Guillemin, p. 289; Vööbus, pp. 152-3.

nations are reduced to naught and the lives of men are ever ordered and ruled.”¹ The same sentiments were to be repeated to the emperor in person by the Persian ambassadors: “It is impossible for a single empire to take upon itself the innumerable concerns for the order of the world and to succeed in ruling all the peoples upon whom the sun looks down with the single oar of its wisdom . . .”; they were still remembered in the late Iranian tradition reflected in the *Shāh-nāma*.²

This equality was scrupulously underlined by the diplomatic protocol whereby the two sovereigns ceremoniously addressed each other as “my brother”.³ When speaking of the Persian ruler, Byzantine historians respectfully used the full imperial title of *basileus*, which was gradually acquiring a supernatural aura at Constantinople in the 7th century, rather than any of the lesser formulae reserved for barbarian kings. Even in the distant west, Latin authors referred to the King of Kings as “*imperator Persarum*”, and not by the more common title of *rex*.⁴ In a moment of crisis, Khusrau II stretched courtesy so far as to style himself in his letter Maurice’s “son and suppliant”. If we credit the late testimony of the patriarch Michael the Syrian, writing in the twelfth century on the basis of earlier sources, Khusrau II even put the Persian court into official mourning upon receiving the news of Maurice’s assassination, and subsequently arrogated to himself the role of the murdered emperor’s avenger together with the protection of his purported son, the false Theodosius.⁵

The semi-legendary traditions which gradually clustered around the figures of the great imperial rivals likewise preserved a sense of their close ties based on ultimately similar superhuman backgrounds and mutual concern. The possibility of adoption from one imperial house to the other is repeatedly raised by the sources. The emperor Arcadius, fearing for the safety of his infant son, Theodosius II, is said to have entrusted him on his death in 408 to the guardianship of Yazdgard I, who accepted this responsibility and watched from afar over the welfare of the little emperor through the intermediary of trusted agents, until his own death in 421. On the contrary, we are told that the request of king Kavādh I that Justin I reciprocate one century later by adopting the king’s favourite son, the future Khusrau I, was turned aside by the

¹ Theoph. Sim. iv. xi. 2.

² *Ibid.* iv. xiii. 7–8; Firdausī, tr. Mohl, vii, pp. 80, 84.

³ Amm. Marc. xvii. v. 10; Menander, p. 209.

⁴ Procopius, Theoph. Sim., *et al.*, *passim*. For the west: Fredegarius, iv. ix; Gregory I, “Epistulae” III. 66, 68.

⁵ Theoph. Sim. iv. xi. 11; Michael the Syrian x. xxiv–xxv, pp. 374, 377; Goubert, p. 290 with the sources.

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imperial authorities.¹ Two generations later, as we have already seen, Khusrau II referred to himself officially as Maurice's "son", a relationship apparently accepted by the Byzantine emperor.² Equally interesting is the story of Khusrau II's purported marriage to a daughter of Maurice named Maria, a tale which was to have a great vogue in Oriental literature based on Iranian traditions and which we find expanded into an extended romantic episode in the *Shāh-nāma*.³

The accuracy of these tales is not their most important aspect for us here. At best, the entrusting of Theodosius II to the care of Yazdgard I was a diplomatic courtesy which could not be juridically binding since the boy had already been crowned in his father's lifetime and consequently, as a reigning emperor, could have no legal tutor set over him.⁴ Moreover, the arguments against the adoption of young Khusrau I, which Procopius puts into the mouth of Justin I's advisers, reject the possibility of a true adoption in the case of a foreigner. Still more improbable, and now generally discredited, is the fictitious tale of the marriage of Maria "Caesar's daughter" to the King of Kings, which Byzantine historians significantly ignore altogether despite its later popularity in the East. Khusrau II may well have had a Greek girl named Maria among the Christian women of his harem, since she is known to contemporary Syrian sources, but Byzantine protocol expressly opposed the marriage of imperial princesses outside the realm. We know of no such case up to the 7th century, and the elaborate later explanations that the princesses granted to foreigners were not truly legitimate indicate that this principle was generally obeyed.⁵ The real significance of these dubious tales in the context of this investigation lies in their underlying assumption, evidently fully shared by both societies, that the rulers of Iran and Byzantium were of similar rank and nature and consequently might fittingly become related by adoption or marriage. In view of the supernatural aura which surrounded both these monarchs, the possibility of such unions gave tacit religious, as well as intellectual and political, sanction to the belief in their essential equality.

¹ Procopius, "Persian War" I. ii. 1-10; xi, 6-22. Cf. Agathias I. Prooimion, 23; iv. xxvi. 3-8.

² Theoph. Sim. iv. x. 11; v. iii. 11; Theophanes I, p. 266; Barhebraeus, p. 85; Firdausī VII, pp. 81, 84.

³ Ṭabarī, p. 283; Barhebraeus, p. 85; Mich. Syr., x. xxiii, p. 372; Firdausī VII, pp. 92, 107-11, 135-6, 148-9, 225-9, 233-8, 247; Tha'ālībī, pp. 368, 370, 394, 712; Mirkhond, p. 398.

⁴ Zakrzewski, p. 426.

⁵ Anon. Guidi, p. 10; Luitprand, p. 244; Constantine Porph., pp. 71-5; Goubert, pp. 179-82; Peeters, "Ex-voto", p. 27 n. 3; cf., however, Nöldeke, Ṭabarī, p. 283 n. 2; Pigulevskaja, *Vizantiia*, pp. 107, 241; Zaehner, p. 51.

From the material which we have examined so far, it seems reasonably warranted to accept the existence of constant contacts as well as of reciprocal awareness and recognition between the Byzantine and Iranian worlds. The propitious climate for the interpenetration of the two great contemporary societies was seemingly present. Under these circumstances, we should reasonably expect to find considerable proof of clear cases of influence from one civilization to the other. And yet, uncontrollable evidence of such influence unexpectedly remains rather disappointing to date. The tendency of more recent scholarship in many areas has been to query relationships postulated or accepted by earlier generations rather than to intensify them. This may be no more than a passing phase resulting from an acknowledgement of the still highly unsatisfactory level of our information, but the time does not yet seem to have come for a definitive demonstration of direct and fundamental influence from either side. Superficial borrowings can be attested on a number of occasions, still unconnected parallels have often been noted, and several tempting hypotheses presented, but these are scarcely sufficient to support a thesis of massive or significant impact.

At a purely technical level interchanges can often be observed, particularly in the military sphere where the almost continuous state of war constantly tested defences and forced the adoption of similar tactics for survival. It seems likely that the late Roman armies, traditionally based on the infantry legions, acquired for obvious reasons corps of heavily armoured cavalry, the *cataphracti* or *clibanarii*, who corresponded to similar formations in the Sasanian forces, though even here the probability of a gradual modification within the Roman system as the result of centuries of wars against the Parthians, rather than a direct borrowing in the 3rd century, has recently been suggested. It may also be advisable to remember that the armament of the two armies was not identical: the all-important bow, the characteristic weapon of Persia from antiquity, came into increasingly greater use in the imperial armies, but the Sasanian weapon was considerably lighter and consequently less penetrating than the one used by Byzantine archers, who may therefore have developed their particular technique in wars against other peoples.¹ In the opposite direction, poliorcetic devices, such as

¹ Procopius, "Persian War" I. xviii. 32-4; Gabba, pp. 65 n. 66, 68, 73; E. Darkò, "Influences touraniennes sur l'évolution de l'art militaire des Grecs, des Romains et des Byzantins", *Byzantion* x (1935), p. 467; xii (1937), p. 129.

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rams, *balistae*, and movable towers, as well as various systems of fortifications, were apparently borrowed by the Persians from the Romans, so that the defence methods of the Sasanians were greatly superior to those of the Arsacids. Khusrau I built an elaborate system of fortifications running parallel to Justinian's reconstruction of the imperial *limes*, and the armies of the two rivals were probably quite evenly matched, thus causing the essential stability of the frontier until the 7th century, despite occasional successful raids deep into the interior.¹ When, however, we turn away from purely practical aspects of weaponry to less tangible effects, the evidence becomes even less conclusive. At the beginning of the present century, Inostrantsev argued persuasively that the theories of Sasanian tacticians, which we find preserved in later works, had been inspired by Byzantine strategical treatises, thus showing a definite literary as well as concrete filiation between the two. This theory has been widely accepted since.² Nevertheless, many of the postulated similarities between Iranian tactics and those recommended by such Greek works as the *Strategikon* attributed to the emperor Maurice, need not always derive from a deliberate literary imitation. The drawing up of battle lines with soldiers facing away from the sun, or the precaution of laying in ample supplies in times of siege can surely be attributed as much to common sense as to foreign influence.³

On a similar technical level, the sojourn of Roman prisoners and artisans in Iran and their occasional return home has supported the tracing of their influence in various forms of minor arts. There seems to be little reason to doubt that Romans worked on the famous "Caesar's" dam at Shushtar or on the monuments of Bīshāpūr, whose mosaics show unmistakable western affinities both in style and in the technique itself, which is characteristically classical and foreign to the Iranian tradition. Evidence of their work has likewise been observed on most of the other monuments of Shāpūr I's favourite residence. The materials and workmen sent by Justinian I to work on the palace of Khusrau I at Ctesiphon have also left marks of their passage.⁴ Dionysiac motifs appeared in Iranian silver and the outstanding quality of Roman glassworks directly or indirectly stimulated Sasanian competition. The highly developed silk working techniques for which Syria was famous

¹ Christensen, p. 212; Frye, p. 220; Inostrantsev, p. 55; Nyberg, pp. 316-26.

² Inostrantsev, pp. 42-81; Christensen, p. 218; Pigulevskaia, *Vizantiia*, pp. 232-3.

³ On the *Strategikon* and its problems see Dain, pp. 344-6; and G. Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, 2nd ed. (Berlin, 1958), I, p. 418.

⁴ Ghirshman, *Iran*, pp. 135, 137-66, 200, figs. 180-6; *idem. Bichâpour II*; Porada, pp. 195, 214, 220.

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were apparently imported into Iran, turning the country from its position of middleman for the raw material into a potential rival for the imperial industries.¹ Reciprocally, Sasanian influence has long been acknowledged in a number of decorative motifs in Byzantine architecture, in Antiochene mosaics, and particularly in the splendid figured silks covered with real and fabulous animals which were to carry the fame of imperial workshops all the way to western Europe.²

At a higher, more purely artistic level however, the opinion of scholars becomes sharply divided. The powerful impact of Greek art on Sasanian Persia and vice versa: the Parthian origin of hieratic frontality in late Roman and Byzantine portraits, the indebtedness of Sasanian bas-reliefs to Roman models, even the controversial hypothesis of the presence of a Persian domed prototype lying in the background of much of Byzantine architecture, among others, have found ardent champions to this day. Without attempting to raise here the multiple thorny problems of Irano-Byzantine art, which will find a fuller treatment elsewhere in this work,³ or of the tantalizing "Oriental" elements which abound in Western Romanesque architecture, which also lie beyond the scope of this chapter, it may be worth mentioning that a note of caution has been sounded by scholars working on either side of the frontier. Differences in building techniques and architectural principles, the absence of traceable links between eastern and western monuments of a similar type, the possibility of internal evolution on the basis of native traditions rather than foreign contact, the need to evaluate recent archaeological discoveries, while in no way invalidating the thesis of artistic interrelations, all suggest nevertheless the need for another serious re-examination of the evidence and consequently of the nature and degree of reciprocal influence.⁴

In intellectual matters, Persia proved far more curious and receptive than Byzantium, so that the visible current is unmistakably one-sided. The imagination of Iran was struck by the figures and events of the land of "Rūm", which play so large a part in the epic tradition of the *Shāh-nāma*, and in the romantic literature,⁵ but the same cannot be said

¹ Ghirshman, *Iran*, pp. 238, 247; Ettinghausen, "A Persian Treasure".

² *Ibid.*, pp. 290ff., 306, 315; Krautheimer, p. 225; Grabar, p. 56.

³ See pp. 1127-29.

⁴ Ghirshman, *Iran*, pp. 145-6, 151, 158, 186, 247, but cf. pp. 283-315; Krautheimer, pp. 232-3; Bianchi Bandinelli, "Forma artistica"; Schlumberger, pp. 383-93; cf., however, Herzfeld, pp. 306-40.

⁵ Firdausī, *passim*. Also in the Persian version of the Alexander romance and in learned and folk literature; cf. J. Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature* (Dordrecht, 1968), pp. 154-66.

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of Constantinople. Except its unavoidable inclusion into historical and geographical accounts or patriotic poems, for a concern with the lives of Persian martyrs, and for its possible role in the transmission of the didactic Buddhist tale of "Barlaam and Joasaph" by way of Christian Syria or the Caucasus, Persia remains strangely absent from Byzantine literature.¹ The same lopsided pattern is observable in more scholarly works. Greek scientific and philosophical treatises of the Hellenistic and Neo-Platonic schools, the works of Plato, Aristotle, Ptolemy, and Porphyry were translated in Iran under the auspices of Shāpūr I and Khusrau I, or at the Christian schools of Nisibis and Gundeshāpūr whence they were eventually transmitted to Islam and then passed back to the west.² Despite Agathias' sneers at Khusrau's classical scholarship and intellectual pretensions, Greek philosophy was unquestionably appreciated and to some degree assimilated by the Persians, who introduced it even into their sacred scriptures. Traces of Aristotelian concepts of cosmology and of his doctrines of matter, form, and the mean are evidently present in parts of the Zoroastrian tradition even where they are not always suited to their new surroundings. The inclusion of foreign scientific material is explicitly acknowledged by the *Dēnkart*.³ The influence of Neo-Platonic thought has also been claimed for the religio-socialist Mazdakite movement which convulsed Iran in the days of Kavād I. These ideas would presumably have been brought in much earlier by a certain Bundos who had lived in Rome at the time of Diocletian before coming to Iran. In this case, the unbridged gap of two centuries between Bundos' journey and Mazdak's proselytizing, and the far clearer relationship between Mazdakism and Manichaean ideas current in Iran since the third century had led to the challenge of this thesis, though not of the presence of Neo-Platonic works among the Greek books found in the Sasanian realm.⁴ But no equivalent interest in Zoroastrian thought can be observed in Byzantium whose intellectual tradition, be it artistic or scientific, remained rigidly Hellenic and Christian. At the same time, if we look more closely at the sources of

¹ St. John Damascene? *Barlaam and Joasaph*, tr. G. R. Woodward and H. Mattingly (London-New York, 1914) (LCL); *The Balavariani (Barlaam and Josaphat)*, tr. D. Lang (London, 1966); S. Impellizeri, *La Letteratura bizantina da Costantino agli Iconoclasti* (Bari, 1965), pp. 168, 285-6.

² Nallino, *passim*; O'Leary, pp. 8, 18, 26, 34-5, 46-52, 61-3, 66-72, 78-9, 83-4, 92 etc.; Pagliaro, p. 15.

³ Zaehner, pp. 8-11, 48-50, 139-43, 251-3, 267, etc.

⁴ Malalas, *Chronographia* xi, pp. 309-10; Altheim and Stiehl, "Mazdak und Porphyrius"; *Ein asiatischer Staat*, pp. 370-2; Pigulevskaia, *Villes*, pp. 196-204; Duchesne-Guillemin, p. 286. [Cf. ch. 27(a), pp. 995, 997, 1020 in this volume.]

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Greek influence on Persian intellectual and spiritual life, it becomes immediately evident that this influence can properly be called Byzantine only in so far as it was presumably transmitted to Persia in the days of the Sasanians, if we accept the late testimony of the *Dēnkart*. In content, the Greek works studied in Iran from the 3rd to the 7th century were exclusively Hellenistic. In this sense they were cut off from the contemporary deeply Christian Byzantine civilization both on chronological and religious grounds. The reading of these works in the schools of Constantinople and Ctesiphon may indicate parallel development but not necessarily intellectual communications, since they remained to a considerable degree extraneous to both traditions and derived from a distant past.

When we shift to a consideration of the Christian communities through which the influence of orthodox Constantinople should properly have been exerted, the situation alters in form but not really in essence. We have already said that constant connections were maintained among the Christian groups living on either side of the frontier and that theological works were actively translated into Syriac. Such activities do not in themselves, however, automatically imply the extensive rapports with either capital which would have made of these communities a significant link between the two civilizations. The official church of Persia from its recognition in 410 to the end of the Sasanian dynasty was Nestorian in confession, though its doctrinal rivals, the Monophysites, had established themselves in Armenia and made serious inroads elsewhere by the 7th century. But in the eyes of Constantinople, the Nestorians in 431 and the Monophysites in 451 had been condemned as heretics by oecumenical councils. As such, they were both cut off from orthodox church circles, subject to legal sanctions and severe persecution, and in many cases, such as that of the School of the Persians, they preferred the jurisdiction of the King of Kings to that of the emperor. They might maintain their relations with their coreligionists in Armenia, Antioch, or Alexandria, but not with imperial Constantinople whose language was not theirs traditionally or liturgically, and where even the head of the Persian church on an official mission might find himself in serious difficulties if he did not compromise with his conscience and accept compulsory communion with the orthodox patriarch.¹

On the other side of the frontier, the status of Christians remained

¹ Goubert, p. 137; Labourt, p. 243; Garsoïan, "Hiérarchie", pp. 190ff.

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precarious despite their avowals of loyalty, effusive praise of the king, and periodic proclamations of toleration. Too much should not be made of the wishful thinking of distant authors who attributed Christian beliefs to some of the Persian rulers. Zoroastrianism was and remained the state religion of Iran under the Sasanians, and apostasy from Mazdaism was forbidden and severely punished. Some of the repressive measures directed against the Christians were undoubtedly precipitated by their intrigues with Byzantium or by internal dissensions, but the King of Kings did not and could not normally favour Christianity in any serious sense. As the guardian of the state religion, he would have undercut his authority and endangered his position by such a policy. Hormizd IV, wishing to repress the too-powerful Magians, may have answered them that his throne has need of its back as well as its front feet; Procopius could praise from afar the high-mindedness of Yazdgard I a century earlier; Maurice's emissary, bishop Domitian of Melitene, might flatter himself that he would convert young Khusrau II; the steady chronological synchronization between Christian persecution and the renewals of the Byzantine war make all too patent the purely political aspects of royal tolerance in Iran. Christians for the King of Kings were either useful or potentially disloyal subjects, their beliefs were of no real interest to him, and the conversion of Persians, as against Syrians and other minority groups, remained rare and severely repressed.¹

With the dissociation of the Persian church from Constantinople following their doctrinal split, the period of mass persecutions which had marked the reigns of Shāpūr II and Yazdgard II in the 4th and 5th centuries came to an end. The status of Christians improved perceptibly. But even in the case of Maurice's "adopted son" Khusrau II, there is no reason for believing in a crypto-conversion, which belongs to a romantic Christian mythology and is explicitly rejected by the Iranian tradition in the *Shāh-nāma*.² Neither the patriarch of Constantinople, John the Faster, nor pope Gregory the Great took the intentions of the young king during his sojourn on Byzantine territory seriously. His famous gifts to Saint Sergius of Resapha, made at a time when Khusrau's reconquest of his throne depended on Maurice's favour, suggest little more than opportunism or a superstitious desire to

¹ Nöldeke, *Ṭabarī*, p. 268; Procopius, "Persian War" I. ii. 8; Goubert, pp. 144-5; Peeters, "Ex-voto", pp. 29-41, 44 n. 1, *et al.*

² Firdausī VII, pp. 145-8; Goubert, pp. 172-5.

placate all powers, supernatural as well as worldly, which is amply illustrated by the king's simultaneous building of churches and fire temples.¹ After Maurice's death in 602 and the exploitation of his friendship to the murdered emperor to resume the Byzantine war, Khusrau returned to the normal pattern of alternate toleration and repression. The personal favour of the king was extended to certain individuals, Christians were found in high places and even in the royal household, but the romantic aura surrounding the figure of Khusrau's Christian favourite Shirin and the tales of her power in the state have occasionally overshadowed the martyrdom of important Christian officials and bishops in the same period. The most that imperial negotiations could obtain at the height of Byzantine-Sasanian co-operation in 591 was an edict of toleration on the basis of the *status quo* forbidding all proselytizing. Neither the enforced vacancy of the patriarchal throne of Seleucia-Ctesiphon between 609 and 628, nor the sack of Jerusalem in 614 with its removal to Persia of the relic of the True Cross, nor the fear expressed by the Syrian clergy that Khusrau II intended to extirpate their church, nor finally their relief at his death, argue for the favourable dispositions of the King of Kings.²

In no real sense, therefore, can we postulate a gradual christianization of the Sasanian empire which might be taken as an indication of the influence of its Greek neighbour. On the contrary, the Syrian and Armenian Christians never appreciably infiltrated into the Iranian core of the empire, and, simultaneously, they fared best within it when their beliefs had made them *personae non gratae* at Constantinople. Consequently, throughout the Sasanian period Armeno-Syrian Christianity maintained a sort of extraterritoriality in both realms. Their communities clung together and shared information, but these interchanges did not extend far outside their boundaries or have serious effect on the ruling establishments. Those communities may perhaps be taken as a remnant of the hybrid third world which had disappeared politically with the clarification of the Irano-Byzantine frontier and the elimination of the local dynasties, but as such they lay outside the mainstream of both civilizations. The same may incidentally be said of the Manichaeans who, despite their syncretism of Christian and Iranian beliefs, were equally abhorrent to Byzantium, whose militant orthodoxy was

¹ John of Nikiu, xcvi; Gregory I, "Epistulae" III. 68; Nöldeke *Ṭabarī*, p. 353; Goubert, p. 172ff.; Peeters, "Ex-voto", *passim*.

² Theoph. Sim., VI. xii. 6; John of Nikiu, xcvi; Anon. Guidi, p. 28; Labourt, pp. 224-34.

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outraged by the dualism of those whom it viewed as heretics, and to the Persians, who rejected the Manichaean opposition of spirit and matter as incompatible with their own purely spiritual dualism.¹

III

Some of the most elaborate theses of interaction between Byzantium and Iran have been concerned with the governmental institutions of both empires: the indebtedness of Iranian legal thinking and of the great tax reform of Khusrau I in the 6th century to late Roman and Byzantine models, and reciprocally, the imitation of Sasanian court ceremonial by Diocletian and his successors, or the effect of the military and administrative re-structuring which accompanied Khusrau I's fiscal policy on the developing pattern of Byzantine provincial administration in which military and civilian powers were reunited in the units known as *themes*. But even in this area, where considerable work has already been done, the evidence remains inconclusive or tends toward a decrease rather than a stress on the importance of foreign factors.

The similarities recently postulated between the summary codifications in books eight and nine of the *Dēnkart* or the collection of juridical decisions composing the *Mātigān ī hazār dātastān* ("The Book of a Thousand Judgements") and Roman legislation rest on unsatisfactory Persian texts presenting such exceptional problems of translation and interpretation, and such serious divergences in form and spirit from the Roman legal tradition, that they cannot at present provide sufficient bases for conclusions.² The thesis presented by Pigulevskaia and Altheim that the fiscal-poll and land tax-reform of Khusrau I described by Ṭabarī was based on the system introduced into the Roman empire by Diocletian rests on insufficient evidence.³ As has been observed by Pigulevskaia herself, the particular parallel to the Iranian tax system cannot be found in any Roman imperial legislation, with the sole

¹ Kartir, *KKZ* in Sprengling, *Iran*, p. 51, l. 10; F. C. Burkitt, *CAH* XII, 504-14; Widengren, *Religions*, pp. 331-41; *idem*, *Mani and Manichaeism* (London, 1965), *passim*; Duchesne-Guillemin, pp. 272, 280-2, *et al.* For the use of Manichaeans as political agents by the Persians, however, as was done on occasion with Christian hierarchs, see W. Seston, *Dioclétien*, pp. 151-6, etc.; *idem*, "Authenticité", p. 352; Volterra, "La costituzione di Diocleziano . . . contro i Manichei".

² A. G. Perikhanian (ed.), *Sasanidskii Sudebnik* (Erevan, 1974); and this vol. p. 680. Pigulevskaia, *Villes*, pp. 102-3; Pagliaro, pp. 15-16, cf. 25-6.

³ Pigulevskaia, "Reform"; *idem*, *Villes*, pp. 109, 229; *idem*, *Vizantiia*, pp. 119-20; Altheim and Stiehl, *Ein asiatischer Staat*, pp. 129-255; Nöldeke, *Ṭabarī*, pp. 240-7.

exception of a single title in the so-called "Roman-Syrian Law-code", whose origin and date are open to considerable controversy, and of which no Pahlavi translation is known to have existed. The cited fiscal terminology, presumably showing a Greek derivation, in the Babylonian *Talmud* is not entirely conclusive, while the pattern of the tax payments in three instalments found in Byzantium as well as Iran is too common to be probative.¹ Still more seriously, economic historians of the late Roman empire have expressed increasing doubts as to our knowledge of the Diocletianic tax system, and voiced the opinion that the pattern of taxation was not uniformly applied throughout his empire but varied from province to province.² Furthermore, the particular system characteristic of Syria in the Diocletianic pattern is the very one found both in the "Roman-Syrian Law-code" and in the new Sasanian institution.³ Hence, there seem to be reasonable grounds for thinking that Khusrau's tax structure was simply a continuation of local Syrian traditions, not only adopted by the Sasanians, but surviving and flourishing under Islam, rather than the importation and copy of a general late Roman model which we cannot as yet identify with precision.

In the case of the court ceremonial, the extensive demonstration given by Alföldi has shown that the innovations attributed to Diocletian have a long train of precedents in the Roman imperial tradition. Consequently, while early 4th century imperial protocol unquestionably contained numerous oriental elements, as had been the case in the Hellenistic monarchies, these cannot be reduced to a simple borrowing of Sasanian ritual in this period.⁴

Finally, the parallel drawn by Stein between the system of military administration attributed to Khusrau I, whereby the supreme high command of the Iranian army was divided between four commanders, or *spāhbad*s, and soldiers were granted land along the borders in return for military service, while at the same time the authority of the prime minister, the *vuzurg framadār*, gradually declined; and the Byzantine theme system of the 7th century in which the formerly divided civilian

¹ P. J. Bruns and E. Sachau, *Syrisch-römisches Rechtsbuch aus dem V Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1880), cxxi, p. 33; E. Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher* (Berlin, 1907), p. 136; Pigulevskaia, "Reform", pp. 148-9; *idem*, "Siriiskii Zakonnik"; *idem*, *Vizantiia*, pp. 221-4.

² See Palanque in Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire* I, pp. 441-3 n. 44 for the historiography of this question.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 442; Déléage, p. 254ff; Jones, pp. 62-3; cf. Nöldeke, *Ṭabarī*, pp. 241-7.

⁴ Alföldi, "Ausgestaltung"; *idem*, "Insignien"; W. Ensslin, "The End of the Principate", *CAH* XII (1939), p. 357; cf., however, H. Mattingly, "The Imperial Recovery", *ibid.*, p. 337 and Palanque in Stein, *Histoire du Bas-empire* I, p. 437 n. 20.

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and military administration of the province was replaced by military districts, whose commanders simultaneously holding civilian powers replaced the paramount authority of the praetorian prefect, and whose armies were composed of local recruits granted small landholdings against service in the army; has been decisively rejected by the majority of Byzantine scholars.¹ Without attempting to raise here the *vexata quaestio* of the origin of the imperial theme system, which has provoked so much controversy in recent years, it will be possible to note that the painstaking demonstrations already given that the thematic pattern was not a sudden innovation by the emperor Heraclius or his successors, before or after the great Persian campaign of 622–9, but a long drawn out evolution reaching back to late Roman times, militates against the possibility of deliberate imitation.² Nor is the parallel between the two administrative systems as close as would appear at first glance. The equation between the loss of prestige of the Sasanian vuzurg framadār and the gradual elimination of the Roman praetorian prefect can be made only if we abstract the fact that Iran boasted a single prime minister while Diocletian had established four prefects for the empire. Similarly, the presence in Byzantium of initially four (or perhaps three) themes before the system was spread to the entire imperial territory is not identical with Khusrau I's division of his whole realm into four quarters each under the command of a spāhbad. Lastly, Lemerle and Karayannopoulos' reminder that we have as yet no evidence whatsoever for the existence of soldier-farmers in Byzantium before the 10th century challenges the all important association between the administrative pattern of the themes emerging in the 7th century and local recruiting.³ Thus, none of the explanations recently presented for the development of themes on Byzantine territory can any longer be brought into agreement with Stein's postulated Iranian model. In none of the administrative institutions of the two states can we, therefore, observe at present a clear cut case of imitation or borrowing. Nor can the recent Marxist interpretation of a similar stage of feudal development simultaneously reached by the two societies and providing a basis for their equation be reconciled with the centralized bureaucratic

¹ Stein, "Ein Kapitel"; Pigulevskaia, *Vizantiia*, p. 217; Christensen, pp. 518–26; cf. on the opposite side Karayannopoulos, "Thèmes byzantins", p. 476–7; Ostrogorsky, pp. 96–8 and p. 96, n. 1, p. 97, nn. 1–2; Pertusi, "Thèmes byzantins", p. 27, *et al.*

² Karayannopoulos, "Thèmes byzantins", pp. 477, 484, 492, 501, etc.; Pertusi, "Nuova potesi", p. 150, *et al.*

³ Lemerle, "Esquisse", pp. 70–4; Karayannopoulos, "Thèmes byzantins", pp. 492–500.

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structure characteristic of the Byzantine empire until long after the 7th century.¹

In retrospect, the challenge of so many supposed points of coincidence has left us a degree of traceable influence between the two world powers of the early Middle Ages which is far less extensive than could be expected from the clear evidence of their mutual contact and recognition. Technical borrowing was undoubtedly carried on among craftsmen and military tacticians. Reciprocal artistic reactions seem manifest even where their precise course needs further clarification, though the fundamental traditions often remained divergent beneath the surface. Intellectual relations, particularly in the more strictly scientific and scholarly areas, undoubtedly took place, but they were altogether one-sided and curiously anachronistic in content. The evidence for parallel administrative institutions is inconclusive at best. Relatively little Christian penetration into the truly Iranian world, as distinct from the Syro-Armenian border society, can be shown. All in all, the degree of reciprocity is low and its quality often superficial.

We can only speculate on the reasons for this rather disappointing showing. Many of the more obvious parallels in beliefs and institutions between the two states: the theory of the absolute centralized monarchy with supernatural overtones, the concept of religion in terms of an official state church, the increasing militarization of the state, are all explicable in terms of co-existence in a single world, sharing the ideas, problems and general climate of the times; and in many ways both states were heirs to a common Hellenistic past in which classical and eastern elements had already been blended. The similarity in response to identical stimuli need not imply an essential similarity. Under the superficial likeness lay fundamental differences which never altered and cannot be disregarded: irreconcilable religious antagonism in a profoundly religious world; the opposition between the Iranian traditional allegiance to a concept of hereditary legitimacy based on a clan structure of society and the continuing Byzantine adherence, *de jure* if not always *de facto*, to the Roman constitutional principle that the imperial office was an elective magistracy as well as a divinely ordained function; the ultimate reliance of the Iranian state, despite the centralizing reforms of the Sasanians, on a hereditary aristocracy and priesthood distributed among rigidly defined castes, as against the relative mobility of Byzantine society culminating throughout this period in an aristocracy of office rather than birth.

¹ Pigulevskaia, *Vizantiia*, pp. 250-1.

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The acceptance by both sides of the general premise that Byzantium and Iran were destined to share the rule of the world made of them rivals as much as partners. Behind the bland courtesy of diplomatic clichés ran a deep vein of enmity, and, what was perhaps still more damaging, mutual contempt. To the Zoroastrians Byzantium remained the heir of Alexander the Great, “the emperor of Rūm” of the Iranian tradition, the sacrilegious burner of the sacred text of the Avesta preserved at Stakhr. Perpetuating the Sasanian tradition, Ṭabarī makes of Ardashīr I the avenger of Darius III.¹ For all of his fostering of western ways, Shāpūr I gloatingly spread the record of his humiliation of the Romans on every one of his monuments. Firdausī’s version of Khusrau II’s final victory over Bahrām Chūbīn shows the king rejecting the aid of the boastful Romans to rely exclusively on the valour of his Iranian nobles.² No less on the Greek side, the comments of Procopius on Persian native arrogance, the belittling of Khusrau I’s learning by Agathias, Theophylakt Simokattes’ characterization of Khusrau II as a “barbarian” and his accusation of perfidy against the Persian king at the siege of Martyropolis, echoed by John of Nikiu’s allegation that the King of Kings had treacherously plotted to poison his Roman allies, all bode equally ill for the reaching of a common understanding.³ Both world cultures, proud of their great historical past, firmly wrapped in the assurance of their own superiority, could not willingly accept the lessons of the enemy, nor would such lessons suit their characteristic societies. Persia evinced a certain interest in the ancient learning of Greece, which she helped preserve and transmit to the Islamic world, but a contemptuous disregard for foreign achievements remained to the end the hall-mark and the Achilles’ heel of Byzantium.

Chronologically, the parallel political courses of the two empires led to divergence rather than coalescence. For all of the open belligerence of his policy, a taste for Hellenic ideas and styles had still marked court circles in the days of Shāpūr I, with his use of the Greek language in his great inscription, his incorporation of Greek learning into the scriptures, his patronage of Manichaean syncretism, and his use of Greek artists for his residence at Bīshāpūr and elsewhere. But this taste fades rapidly into nothingness, despite a possible fleeting revival due to Khusrau I’s interest in classical philosophy and Justinian’s loan of

¹ Abel, “La figure d’Alexandre”; Nöldeke, *Ṭabarī*, p. 3.

² Firdausī vi, pp. 119–39, especially pp. 125, 129; Ghirshman, *Iran*, pp. 152–61.

³ Procopius, “Persian War” i. xi. 4, 9; Agathias ii. xxviii; Theoph. Sim. v. iii. 4–7; xiii. 1; John of Nikiu, *Chronicle*, xcvi.

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imperial workmen for the royal palace of Ṭāq-i Kisrā at Ctesiphon. Particularly remarkable is the seeming absence of any such revival in the early days of Khusrau II, in the period of closest political co-operation between Iran and Byzantium. No putative rapprochement due to a sharing of a feudal social pattern or to monotheistic tendencies in Zoroastrianism can be demonstrated in the late Sasanian period. If the suggested increase in toleration of the Iranian state toward Christianity after the 5th century perhaps lessened the gap between the two religious antagonists, the growing religious orientation of the Byzantine court, which from the late 6th century turned political wars into crusades and retaliated for the sack of Jerusalem by the destruction of the royal fire temple at Ganzak in Āzarbāijān, served to push them once more asunder.¹ A useful index of the depth of irreconcilability between the two adjacent worlds may perhaps be provided by the incapacity of Armenia, torn between its imperial religious and intellectual tradition and its Iranian social structure, to come to rest in either sphere or to achieve political stability between them. The Athenian philosophers fleeing the empire of Justinian received both asylum and welcome at the court of Ctesiphon, but a few years later, unable to adapt themselves or accept an alien world, they were themselves to beg the King of Kings to allow them to return home.²

¹ Theoph. Sim. II. iii. 4, 9; Sebēos, *Héraclius*, xxvi; Theophanes, *Chronographia* I, pp. 307-8; *et al.*

² *Agathias* II. xxxi.

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The abbreviations used in the bibliographies and footnotes are listed below.

- AA* *Archäologischer Anzeiger* (Beiblatt zum Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts) (Berlin)
- AAWG* *Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen* (Phil. Hist. Klasse) (Göttingen)
- AAntASH* *Acta antiqua academiae scientiarum Hungaricae* (Budapest)
- AArchASH* *Acta archaeologica academiae scientiarum Hungaricae* (Budapest)
- AB* *Analecta Bollandiana* (Brussels)
- Acta Iranica* *Acta Iranica* (encyclopédie permanente des études iraniennes) (Tehran-Liège-Leiden)
- Aevum* *Aevum* (Rassegna di Scienze Storiche Linguistiche e Filologiche) (Milan)
- AGWG* *Abhandlungen der (königlichen) Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen* (Berlin)
- AI* *Ars Islamica = Ars Orientalis* (Ann Arbor, Mich.)
- AION* *Annali: Istituto Orientale di Napoli* (s.l. sezione linguistica; n.s. new series) (Naples)
- AJSL* *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature* (Chicago)
- AKM* *Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* (Leipzig)
- AMI* *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* (old series 9 vols 1929-38; new series 1968-) (Berlin)
- Anatolia* *Anatolia* (revue annuelle d'archéologie) (Ankara)
- ANS* American Numismatic Society
- ANSMN* *American Numismatic Society Museum Notes* (New York)
- ANSNM* American Numismatic Society Numismatic Notes and Monographs (New York)
- ANSNS* American Numismatic Society Numismatic Studies (New York)
- Antiquity* *Antiquity* (a periodical review of archaeology edited by Glyn Daniel) (Cambridge)
- AO* *Acta Orientalia* (ediderunt Societates Orientales Batava Danica Norvegica Svedica) (Copenhagen)
- AOAW* *Anzeiger der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Phil. Hist. Klasse) (Vienna)
- AOH* *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* (Budapest)
- APAW* *Abhandlungen der Preussischen (Deutschen) Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Phil. Hist. Klasse) (Berlin)
- Apollo* *Apollo* (The magazine of the arts) (London)
- ArOr* *Archiv Orientalní* (Quarterly Journal of African, Asian and Latin American Studies) (Prague)
- Artibus Asiae* *Artibus Asiae* (Institute of Fine Arts, New York University) (Dresden, Ascona)

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- ASIR *Archaeological Survey of India*. Reports made during the years 1862- by Alexander Cunningham, 23 vols. Simla-Calcutta, 1871-87.
- BASOR *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* (Baltimore, Maryland)
- BCH *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* (Athens-Paris)
- BCMA *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* (Cleveland, Ohio)
- BEFEO *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient* (Hanoi-Paris)
- Berytus* *Berytus* (archaeological studies published by the Museum of Archaeology and the American University of Beirut) (Copenhagen)
- BMQ *British Museum Quarterly* (London)
- BSO(A)S *Bulletin of the School of Oriental (and African) Studies* (University of London)
- Byzantion *Byzantion* (Revue Internationale des Études Byzantines) (Brussels)
- CAH *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 12 vols; 1st edition 1924-39 (Cambridge) (Revised edition 1970-)
- Caucasica* *Caucasica* (Zeitschrift für die Erforschung der Sprachen und Kulturen des Kaukasus und Armeniens) 10 fascs (Leipzig, 1924-34)
- CII *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* (Oxford)
- CIIR *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum* (London)
- CRAI *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres* (Paris)
- CSCO *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* (Paris, Louvain)
- CSEL *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Vienna)
- DOAW *Denkschriften der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Phil. Hist. Klasse) (Vienna)
- East and West* *East and West* (Quarterly published by the Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Orient) (Rome)
- EI *Epigraphia Indica* (Calcutta)
- Eos *Eos* (Commentarii Societatis Philologiae Polonorum) (Bratislava-Warsaw)
- EPRO *Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain* (Leiden)
- Eranos* (Acta Philologica Suecana) (Uppsala)
- ERE *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, 13 vols (Edinburgh, 1908-21)
- GCS Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte (Leipzig, Berlin)
- Georgica* *Georgica* (a journal of Georgian and Caucasian studies) nos. 1-5 (London, 1935-7)
- GJ *The Geographical Journal* (London)

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- Gnomon* *Gnomon* (Kritische Zeitschrift für die gesamte klassische Altertumswissenschaft) (Munich)
- Hellenica* *Hellenica* (reueil d'épigraphie de numismatique et d'antiquités grecques) (Paris)
- Historia* *Historia* (Journal of Ancient History) (Wiesbaden)
- HJAS* *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (Cambridge, Mass.)
- HO* *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, ed. B. Spuler (Leiden-Cologne)
- HOS* *Harvard Oriental Series* (Cambridge, Mass.)
- IA* *Iranica Antiqua* (Leiden)
- IJ* *Indo-Iranian Journal* (The Hague)
- IndAnt* *The Indian Antiquary*, 62 vols (Bombay, 1872-1933)
- Iran* *Iran* (journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies) (London-Tehran)
- Iraq* *Iraq* (journal of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq) (London)
- JA* *Journal Asiatique* (Paris)
- JASO* *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (New York)
- JASB* *Journal (and proceedings) of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Calcutta)
- JASBB* *Journal of the Asiatic Society Bombay Branch* (Bombay)
- JCOI* *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute*, 29 vols (Bombay, 1922-35)
- JCS* *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* (New Haven, Conn.)
- JESHO* *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* (Leiden)
- JHS* *Journal of Hellenic Studies* (London)
- JMBRAS* *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Singapore)
- JNES* *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (Chicago)
- JNSI* *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India* (Bombay)
- JRAS* *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (London)
- JRS* *The Journal of Roman Studies* (London)
- Kairos* *Kairos* (Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft und Theologie) (Salzburg)
- Klio* *Klio* (Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte) (Berlin)
- Kuml* *Kuml* (Aarbog for Jysk Arkæologisk Selskab) (Aarhus)
- KSIIMK* *Kratkie soobshcheniya o dokladakh i polevykh issledovaniyakh Instituta istorii materialnoi kultury AN SSR* (Moscow)
- KZ* *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung, begründet von Adalbert Kuhn* (Göttingen)
- LCL* Loeb Classical Library
- MDAFA* Mémoires de la délégation archéologique française en Afghanistan (Paris)
- Mesopotamia* *Mesopotamia* (Rivista di Archeologia, Faculta di Lettere e filosofia) (University of Turin)
- MMAB* *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* (old series 1905-42; new series 1942-) (New York)

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- Le Muséon*
Museum *Le Muséon* (Revue d'Études Orientales) (Louvain-Paris)
Museum (art magazine edited by the Tokyo National Museum) (Tokyo)
- NC *Numismatic Chronicle* (London)
- NGWG *Nachrichten von der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen* (Göttingen)
- Numismatica* *Numismatica* (Rome)
- OLZ *Orientalische Literaturzeitung* (Berlin-Leipzig)
- Oriens* *Oriens* (journal of the International Society for Oriental Research) (Leiden)
- Orientalia* *Orientalia* (a quarterly published by the Faculty of Ancient Oriental Studies, Pontifical Biblical Institute) new series (Rome)
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- PBA *Proceedings of the British Academy* (London)
- Philologus* *Philologus* (Zeitschrift für das klassische Altertum) (Stolberg, etc., now Berlin)
- PO *Patrologia Orientalis* (ed. R. Gaffin and F. Nau) (Paris)
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- RGG *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 2nd ed., 6 vols (Tübingen, 1927-32); 3rd ed., 7 vols (Tübingen, 1957-65)
- RHR *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* (Paris)
- RIN *Rivista Italiana di Numismatica e Scienze Affini* (Milan)
- RN *Revue Numismatique* (Paris)
- RSO *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* (Rome)
- Saeculum* *Saeculum* (Jahrbuch für Universalgeschichte) (Freiburg-Munich)
- SBE Sacred Books of the East (Oxford)
- SCBO Scriptorum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis (Oxford)
- Semitica* *Semitica* (Cahiers publiés par l'Institut d'Études Sémitiques de l'Université de Paris) (Paris)
- SHAW *Sitzungsberichte der heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Phil. Hist. Klasse) (Heidelberg)
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- SPAW* *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen (Deutschen) Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Phil. Hist. Klasse) (Berlin)
- StIr* *Studia Iranica* (Leiden)
- Sumer* *Sumer* (journal of archaeology and history in Iraq) (Baghdad)
- SWAW* *Sitzungsberichte der Wiener (Österreichischen) Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Phil. Hist. Klasse) (Vienna)
- Syria* *Syria* (Revue d'art oriental et d'archéologie) (Paris)
- TITAKE* *Trudi Iuzhno-Turkmenistanskoi Archeologicheskoi Kimpleknoi Ekspeditsii*, 6 vols (Moscow, 1949-58)
- TM* *Travaux et mémoires* (Centre de Recherche d'Histoire et Civilization de Byzance) (Paris)
- T'oung Pao* *T'oung Pao* (Archives concernant l'histoire, les langues, la géographie, l'ethnographie et les arts de l'Asie orientale) (Leiden)
- TPS* *Transactions of the Philological Society* (London)
- VDI* *Vestnik drevnei istorii* (Moscow)
- WVDOG* *Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft* (Leipzig)
- WZKM* *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* (Vienna)
- YCS* *Yale Classical Studies* (New Haven, Conn.)
- ZA* *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* (Berlin)
- ZDMG* *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (Wiesbaden)
- ZN* *Zeitschrift für Numismatik* (Berlin)

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CHAPTER I

I. Sources

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CHAPTER 15

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