

The Two Eyes of the Earth: The Problem of Respect in Sasanid-Roman Relations

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BECAUSE of the specific nature of the written sources describing relations between Rome and Iran during the third to seventh centuries A.D., research on Near Eastern history of the era seems focused on the military conflicts and descriptions of warfare.¹ But equally fascinating are the diplomatic relations between the two empires, especially the protocol of receiving embassies which developed during the four centuries of mutual contacts.² The main topic of this paper is: can

¹ E. Kettenhofen, *Die römisch-persischen Kriege des 3. Jahrhunderts n. Chr. nach der Inschrift Sāhpuhrs I. an der Ka'be-ye Zartošt* (Wiesbaden 1982); K. Mosig-Walburg, *Römer und Perser: vom 3. Jahrhundert bis zum Jahr 363 n. Chr.* (Gutenberg 2009); K. Maksymiuk, *Geography of Roman-Iranian Wars: Military Operations of Rome and Sasanian Iran* (Siedlce 2015).

² Z. Rubin, "Diplomacy and War in the Relations between Byzantium and the Sassanids," in P. Freeman and D. Kennedy (eds.), *The Defence of the Roman and Byzantine East* (Oxford 1986) II 677–695; A. D. Lee, "Embassies as Evidence for the Movement of Military Intelligence between the Roman and Sassanian Empires," in *The Defence* 455–461; S. Diebler, "Les hommes du roi. Sur la représentation souveraine dans les relations diplomatiques entre Byzance et les Sassanides d'après les historiens byzantins du sixième siècle," *Studia Iranica* 24 (1995) 187–218; M. Mazza, *Cultura, guerra e diplomazia nella tarda antichità* (Catania 2005); A. D. Lee, "Treaty-making in Late Antiquity," in P. de Souza and J. France (eds.), *War and Peace in Ancient and Medieval History* (Cambridge 2007) 107–119; M. Whitby, "Byzantine Diplomacy: Good Faith, Trust and Co-operation in International Relations in Late Antiquity," in *War and Peace* 120–140; A. Piras, "Ritualità della comunicazione: scambi di lettere tra Bisanzio e la Persia," *Bizantinistica. Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Slavi* 11 (2009)

we assume, based on the language of diplomacy and developed protocol, that Iran and Rome perceived each other as equal partners; and consequently, can we observe mutual respect in the relations between both states? In the context of the diplomatic protocol we should ask whether communication in both verbal and ritual modes was understood in the same way by Iranian kings and Roman emperors,³ for this affected the relations of the two empires of Late Antiquity.

Diplomatic steps that did not originate directly from military actions were the wishes sent by the rulers to each other on the occasion of accession to the throne. The earliest event of that kind was the sending of gifts to Probus (276–282) by Bahrām II (276–293), mentioned in the *Historia Augusta*. It seems that the imperial court misinterpreted this gesture and believed that the *šāhānšāh* sent the gifts to the emperor (who was preparing for war) in order to prevent conflict with its powerful neighbour in the West (*HA Prob.* 17.4–5):

Parthi legatos ad eum mitterent confitentes timorem pacemque poscentes, quos ille superbius acceptos magis timentes domum remisit. fertur etiam epistula illius repudiatis donis, quae rex miserat, ad Narseum talis fuisse: “Miror te de omnibus quae nostra futura sunt tam pauca misisse. habeto interim omnia illa quibus gaudes. quae si nos habere cupiamus, scimus quemadmodum possidere debeamus.”

By this he achieved such fame that the Parthians (*sic*) sent envoys to him, confessing their fear and suing for peace, but these he received with much arrogance and then sent back to their homes in greater fear than before. The letter, moreover, which he wrote to Narseus [i.e. Bahrām], rejecting the gifts which the king had sent, is said to have been as follows: “I marvel that you have sent so few of the riches all of which will shortly be ours. For the time being, keep all those things in which you take such pleasure. If ever we wish to have them, we know how we ought to get them.” (transl. Magie)

301–316; E. Nechaeva, *Embassies, Negotiations, Gifts. Systems of East Roman Diplomacy in Late Antiquity* (Stuttgart 2014).

³ M. Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth: Art and Ritual of Kingship between Rome and Sasanian Iran* (Berkeley 2009).

We can assume with no doubt that such diplomatic actions took place during the reign of Diocletian (284–305). The inscription of Narseh (293–302) from Pāikūlī describing the events of 293 names the Roman emperor in the list of the rulers sending regards to the new king (NPi 91):

Pārsīg: APn kysly W hlwm’/[dyk?] PWN l’pyklyhy W ‘št/[yhy]
W ‘lmy YKOY[M]WN[d]

Pahlav: [...] / W ‘štpy W šyrkmkpy / HQAYMWnt

and Caesar and the Romans were in gratitude(?) and peace and friendship with me (transl. Skjærvø)

Naturally the inscription, of a purely propagandistic nature, must have meant the imperial envoy and not the presence of the emperor himself at the Iranian court. The first treaty between Iran and Rome in 244⁴ should be understood as a direct and forceful expression of the will of the great king (ŠKZ 5/4/9):

Pārsīg: ud filipos kēsar amāh ō nemastīg āmad, ud gyān xūn
dēnār panzsad-hazār ō-n dād, (ud) ped bāz ēstād.

Pahlav: W plypws kysr LN OL nymstyk ATYt W gy’n DME dynr
IIII-C ALPYN OLYN YNTNt pty b’z HQAYMWt.

Greek: Φίλιππος ὁ Καῖσαρ εἰς παράκλησιν ἦλθεν καὶ τ[ῶ]ν
ψ[υ]χῶν α[ὐ]τῶν ἀντίτειμ[α] π[ε]ντακοσίαν χειριάδα δηναρίων
ἡμεῖν ἔδοτο καὶ εἰς φόρους ἡμεῖν ἔστη.

and Philip Caesar came to terms to us, and, as ransom for the life,
he gave us 500,000 denars, and became tributary to us. (transl.
Asha)

But the agreement of 298⁵ was a result of peace negotiations which were led, on the Iranian side, by *hazārūft* Affarbān (Ἀφφαρβᾶν), the commander of elite forces and a close friend of the king. Petrus Patricius in the speech of king Narseh’s envoy to

⁴ E. Winter, *Die sasanidisch-römischen Friedensverträge des 3. Jahrhunderts n. Ch.* (Frankfurt 1988) 97–107.

⁵ R. C. Blockey, “The Romano-Persian Peace Treaties of A.D. 299 and 363,” *Florilegium* 6 (1984) 29–36; E. Winter, “On the Regulation of the Eastern Frontier of the Roman Empire in 298,” in D. French and C. S. Lightfoot (eds.), *The Eastern Frontier of the Roman Empire* (Oxford 1989) 555–571.

the emperor Galerius (305–311) adds the phrase that Rome and Iran were for all the world like two eyes, two lights which should co-exist and not resort to mutual destruction (Petrus Patr. fr.13 *FHG*):

φανερὸν ἐστὶ τῷ γένει τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὅτι ὡσπερανεὶ δύο λαμπτήρες εἰσὶν ἢ τε Ῥωμαϊκὴ καὶ Περσικὴ βασιλεία· καὶ χρὴ καθάπερ ὀφθαλμοὺς τὴν ἐτέραν τῇ τῆς ἐτέρας κοσμεῖσθαι λαμπρότητι καὶ μὴ πρὸς ἀναίρεσιν ἑαυτῶν ἀμοιβαδὸν μέχρι παντὸς χαλεπαίνειν.

It is obvious to all mankind that the Roman and the Persian Empires are just like two lamps; and it is necessary that, like eyes, the one is brightened by the light of the other and that they do not angrily strive for each other's destruction. (transl. Winter)

It must be remembered that the author, writing 250 years after the events described, used the diplomatic language developed in the sixth century. Comparison of Iran and Rome to the two eyes of the world is found in the letter of Xusrō Parvēz (591–628) to the emperor Maurice (582–602) quoted by Theophylact Simocatta (4.11.2):

δύο τισὶν ὀφθαλμοῖς τὸν κόσμον καταλύμπεσθαι πάντα ἄνωθεν καὶ ἐξ ἀρχῆς τὸ Θεῖον ἐπραγματεύσατο, τουτ' ἐστὶ τῇ δυνατοτάτῃ τῶν Ῥωμαίων βασιλείᾳ καὶ τοῖς ἐμφρονεστάτοις σκῆπτροις τῆς Περσῶν πολιτείας.

God effected that the whole world should be illumined from the very beginning by two eyes, namely by the most powerful kingdom of the Romans and by the most prudent sceptre of the Persian state. (transl. Whitby)

The details of the proceedings of Byzantino-Iranian diplomacy can be observed in the peace negotiations that resulted in the treaty of 562 between Justinian (527–565) and Xusrō Anōšīrvān (531–579).⁶ Justinian was represented by the magister

⁶ I. Shahîd, "The Arabs in the Peace Treaty of AD 561," *Arabica* 3 (1956) 181–213; S. Verosta, "Die oströmisch-persischen Verträge von 562 n. Chr. und ihre Bedeutung für das Völkerrecht," *AnzWien* 102 (1965) 153–156; A. Gariboldi, "Le clausole economiche della Pace dei 50 anni (561/62)," *Bizantinistica. Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Slavi* 11 (2009) 249–259; A. Panaino, "Il

officiorum Petrus, Īzad Gušnasp of the Parthian clan Mehrān⁷ acted on behalf of the Great King. In his introductory speech Petrus announced that he came at the Emperor's order, to transform the armistice into lasting peace. He mentioned the greatness of the Roman state and emphasized that the belief that the capture of Antioch and other Roman territories by Xusrō would end the war was nothing but a delusion (Menander Prot. fr.11 *FHG*):

καὶ μὴ τις ὑμᾶς ἀπατάτω λογισμὸς ὡς νενικήκατε Ῥωμαίους ἐπηρμένους τῷ τὴν Ἀντιόχειαν ἀλῶναι πρὸς ὑμῶν καὶ ἄλλα Ῥωμαϊκὰ χωρία.

Do not be led astray by the conviction that you have conquered the Romans because you are elated at your capture of Antioch and other Roman towns. (transl. Blockley)

In reply Īzad Gušnasp stated that Xusrō was a great king and did not find the capture of Antioch any outstanding success; he called this victory a mere gem on the king's neck:

Χοσρόης ὁ πάντων ἀνθρώπων, εἶπερ βούλεται, βασιλεὺς οὔτε τὴν Ἀντιοχείας ἄλωσιν ἐγκαλλώπισμά τι καὶ ἐγκώμιον ἑαυτῷ περιτίθῃσιν.

Khosro, the king of all men (if he so wishes), does not use the capture of Antioch for his own self-advertisement or glorification.

The envoy pointed out that it was the Roman side that had asked to end the war:

Ῥωμαῖοι δὲ τὸ σὺνηθες πρῶττονσι περὶ σπονδῶν πρότεροι διαλεμόμενοι Πέρσαις.

For the Romans customarily are the first to offer treaty negotiations to the Persians.

However, he claimed that he was not going to negotiate from

duplice volto del protocollo aggiuntivo sulle minoranze religiose nella 'Pace dei 50 anni',” *Bizantinistica* 273–299.

⁷ Ἰσδουγούσνας, Yazdwsnasp. A detailed account of a mission of Īzad Gušnasp is likely contained in a work compiled by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (*Caer.* 89–90): I. Dimitroukas, “The Trip of the Great Persian Embassies to Byzantium during the Reign of Justinian I (527–565) and its Logistics.” *Byzantina Symmeikta* 18 (2008) 171–184.

the position of the victor, out of a declared love for peace:

ὄμως δεχόμεθα τοὺς λόγους, τὴν εἰρήνην περὶ πλείστου ποιούμεθα.

Nevertheless, since we value peace most highly, we are open to your proposals.

The language of diplomacy suggests that Rome and Iran were fully aware of the differences between the two states, reflected metaphorically in calling them two separate worlds (Malalas 18.66):

ὅτι δὲ μεγάλη δόξα καὶ ἔπαινός ἐστιν ἐν πάσῃ τῇ γῆ παρὰ Θεῷ καὶ ἀνθρώποις τὸ εἰρήνην γενέσθαι μεταξὺ τῶν δύο κόσμων ἐπὶ τῆς σῆς ἡμερότητος καὶ ἡμῶν τῶν γνησίων ὑμᾶς ἀγαπώντων πρόδηλόν ἐστι.

It is clear that great glory and credit is due in all the earth before God and men for the fact that peace has been established between the two worlds. (transl. Canepa)

Both sides considered their sovereignty and the possibility of peaceful coexistence. None of the Roman emperors denied the legal right to the throne of the Sasanian rulers. So for example the actions of Severus Alexander (222–235) after invading Mesopotamia: his envoys did not deny the legitimacy of the rule of Ardašīr (224–242), even though they understood well the circumstances of the change in the throne of Iran, as was expressed in Alexander's speech to the army (Herodian 6.3.5):

Ἄρταξέρξης ἀνὴρ Πέρσης τὸν ἑαυτοῦ δεσπότην Ἀρτάβανον ἀποκτείνας τὴν τε ἀρχὴν ἐς Πέρσας μεταστήσας, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ὑμετέρων ὄπλων [καταθαρήσας] καὶ τῆς Ῥωμαίων δόξης καταφρονήσας, πειρᾶται κατατρέχειν καὶ λυμαίνεσθαι τὰ τῆς ἡμετέρας ἀρχῆς κτήματα.

The Persian Artaxerxes has slain his master Artabanus, and the Parthian Empire is now Persian. Despising our arms and contemptuous of the Roman reputation, Artaxerxes is attempting to overrun and destroy our imperial possessions. (transl. Echols)

What is more important, diplomacy accepted the principle of equality of the two rulers. This was clearly highlighted in the events of 298 when Affarbān pointed out that despite his victory in war Galerius is no better than king Narseh (Petrus Patr. fr.13):

μη̄ χρῆναι μέντοι μηδὲ Ναρσαῖον ἀσθενέστερον τῶν ἄλλων βασιλέων νομίζεσθαι ἀλλὰ τοσοῦτον τῶν ἄλλων βασιλέων Γαλέριον ὑπερέχειν ὥστε αὐτὸν τούτῳ μόνῳ δικαίως Ναρσαῖον ἠττήσθαι καίτοι τῆς τῶν οἰκείων προγόνων ἀξίας καταδεέστερον οὐ γενόμενον.

He continued by saying that it was not necessary to think that Narses was weaker than the other kings but rather to see Galerius as that much superior to the other kings so that Narse himself was inferior to him alone, and rightly so, without, however, proving to be lower in dignity than his ancestors. (transl. Winter)

Similar remarks are found, as mentioned above, in the negotiations of Petrus Patricius with Īzad Gušnasp and the statement about capturing Antioch by Xusrō Anōšīrvān.

The absolute equality of the rulers came to be expressed in the courteous claims that the dynasts were relatives. The first attested instance of using “brotherhood” is in the biography of Constantine (306–337) by Eusebius of Caesarea, who cited a letter of the emperor to Šāpur II (309–379) (4.11.1):

οὐ μοι δοκῶ πλανᾶσθαι, ἀδελφέ μου, τοῦτον ἓνα θεὸν ὁμολογῶν πάντων ἀρχηγὸν καὶ πατέρα.

I cannot, then, my brother, believe that I err in acknowledging this one God, the ruler and father of all things. (transl. Richardson)

Alleged family ties became father-son relations as in the letter of Xusrō Parvēz to Maurice (Theophylact Simm. 4.11.11): Χοσρόης ὁ σὸς υἱὸς καὶ ἰκέτης, “Chosroes your son and suppliant” (transl. Whitby). Kavād Šērōē (Šīrūya, 628) turned to his “brother” emperor Heraclius (610–641) (*Chron.Pasch.* 735):

παρὰ Καβάτου Σαδασαδασάχ Ἡρακλείῳ τῷ ἡμερωτάτῳ βασιλεῖ Ῥωμαίων τῷ ἡμετέρῳ ἀδελφῷ πλείστην χαρὰν· ἀπονέμομεν τῷ ἡμερωτάτῳ βασιλεῖ Ῥωμαίων καὶ ἀδελφῷ ἡμῶν.

From Kavadh Sadasadasakh to Heraclius, the most clement Roman emperor, our brother, we offer the greatest thanks. (transl. Greatrex, Lieu)

who in turn called him “son” (Nikephoros *Brev.* 15):

ὁ ἀντέγραφε καὶ Ἡράκλειος, τέκνον τὸν Σειρόην καλῶν καὶ ὡς οὐκ ἦν αὐτῷ ποτε κατὰ γνώμην βασιλέα τῆς ἑαυτοῦ δόξης ἐκπεπωκέναι· διὸ οὐδὲ Χοσρόην.

Herakleios wrote back, calling Seiroes his son and (saying) that it had never been his wish that a king—not even Chosroes—should lose his glory. (transl. Mango)

Employment of particular phrases depended on the current political situation. Xusrō Parvēz called himself Maurice's son because he needed the assistance of imperial armies in his fight with the usurper Bahrām Čōbīn (590–591).⁸

Here one should consider the interpretation of the word “brother.” Was it perceived as a synonym of equality in Iran? We can look to the Iranian concept of the past. According to mythical tradition Ferēdūn divided the world between his three sons: Salm received *Rūm* (West), Tōz/Tūr received *Turkastān* (East), and Īraj/Ēriz inherited *Ērānšāhr* (Abdīh ud Sahīgīh ī Sīstān 5–6):

az fraزندān ī frēdōn salm kē kišvar ī hrōm, ud tur (tūz) kē turkestān ped xʷadāyīh dāšt, ērij (ērēz) ērān dahebed būd, uš be ōzad

From the offsprings of Frēdōn, Salm who ruled over the land of Rome and Tūz who ruled over the land of Turkestān, they killed Ēraj who was the lord of the land of Ērān (transl. Daryae)

Following *Xwadāy-nāmag* both Ferdowsī and Ṭabarī refined this: the elder brothers murdered Īraj, motivated by envy.⁹ In this context, calling a Roman emperor a “brother” was not, in the Persian mindset, purely courtly politeness. According to this concept the Romans were the ancestors of Salm, the killer of his own brother.¹⁰ This story about the heroic Kings is preserved in

⁸ D. Frendo, “Theophylact Simocatta on the Revolt of Wahram Chobin and the Early Career of Khusrau II,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 3 (1989) 77–88; P. Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire* (London 2008) 122–130.

⁹ *Šāh-nāma* 6.7, 6.12; Ṭabarī 226–227.

¹⁰ M. Canepa, “Distant Displays of Power, Understanding Cross-Cultural Interaction Among the Elites of Rome, Sasanian Iran, and Sui-Tang China,”

the *Avesta*.¹¹ Zoroastrianism was already firmly established as the Iranian religion by the fourth century A.D.¹² What is more, Šāpur II decided to consolidate Mazdaism by ordering Ādurbād-ī Mahrspandān to make a final redaction of the *Avesta* (*Dēnkird* IV 321–322):

Šābuhr šāhān šāh ī hormizdān hamāg kišwarīgān pad paykārišn yazdān āhang kard ud hamāg gōwišn ō uskār ud wizōyišn āwurd pas az bōxtan ī ādūrbād pad gōwišn ī passāxt abāg hamāg ōyšān jud-sardagān ud nask-ōšmurdān-iz ī jud-ristagān ēn-iz guft kū nūn ka-mān dēn pad sū dēn dīd kas-iz ag-dēnih bē nē hilēm wēš abar tuxšāg tuxšēm ud ham gōnag kard

Šāpūr, the king of kings, son of Hormizd, induced all countrymen to orient themselves to god by disputation, and put forth all oral traditions for consideration and examination. After the triumph of Ādurbād, through his declaration put to trial by ordeal (in disputation) with all those sectaries and heretics who recognized (studied) the Nasks, he made the following statement: “Now that we have gained an insight into the Religion in the worldly existence, we shall not tolerate anyone of false religion, and we shall be more zealous.” (transl. Daryae)

It is possible that the first Sasanian version of the *Avesta* could have been written down already in this century.¹³ From the reign of Šāpur II the royal ideology reoriented towards the mythical Kayāniāns, and derived the origin of the Sasanians from the Avestan dynasties.¹⁴ When Šāpur II was replying to Constantine

Ars Orientalis 38 (2010) 128.

¹¹ Čīhrdād *Nask*, *Yasht* 13.143; A. Shapur Shahbazi, “Iraj,” *Encycl.Iran.* VIII.2 (2004) 200–202.

¹² K. Maksymiuk, “Zaratusztrianizm w okresie sasanidzkim. Zarys problematyki,” in O. Kiričuk and M. Omelčuk (eds.), *Istoriā religij v Ukraïni: naukovij šoričnik* 26 (Lviv 2016) 15–24.

¹³ K. Hoffmann, “Zum Zeicheninventar der Avesta-Schrift,” in: W. Eilers (ed.), *Festgabe deutscher Iranisten zur 2500 Jahrfeier Irans* (Wiesbaden 1975) 316–325.

¹⁴ A. Shapur Shahbazi, “Early Sasanians’ Claim to Achaemenid Heritage.” *Nāme-ye Irān-e Bāstan* 1 (2001) 61–74; M. Canepa, “Technologies of Memory in Early Sasanian Iran: Achaemenid Sites and Sasanian Identity.”

who called him “brother,” he must have been aware of Iranian tradition, but Constantine was most likely not. For the Western tradition and concept, using “brother” was clearly associated with equality; but it might be understood differently by Iranians.

Another problem in the interpretation of Romano-Iranian relations is the phrase “brother of Sun and Moon,” applied to the rulers. In the letters exchanged between Šāpur and Constantius (Amm. Marc. 17.5.3):

Rex regum Sapor, particeps siderum, frater Solis et Lunae, Constantio Caesari fratri meo salutem plurimam dico.

I Sapor, King of Kings, partner with the Stars, brother of the Sun and Moon, to my brother Constantius Caesar offer most ample greeting. (transl. Rolfe)

This phrase thus appears to be one of the elements of the royal titlature of Iranian kings.¹⁵ How should one interpret the fragment of the letter from Kawād I (488–496, 498–531) to Justinian in which the king of the kings, “Sun of the East,” addresses the emperor as “Moon of the West” (Malalas 18.44):

Κωάδης βασιλεὺς βασιλευόντων ἡλίου ἀνατολῆς Φλαβίῳ Ἰουστινιανῷ Καίσαρι σελήνης δύσεως.

Kawād king of kings, of the rising sun, to Flavius Justinian Caesar, of the setting moon (transl. Maksymiuk)

It might seem that the expression mentions two parallel civilizational centers: Western (Moon) and Eastern (Sun).¹⁶ But it should be borne in mind that in the Iranian conception, the world was not divided into East and West. According to Avestan tradition, *Ērānšahr* was the centre of the world.¹⁷ It was at first

AJA 114 (2010) 563–596; K. Maksymiuk, “Ram Horns as Sacral Royal Regalia of Šāpur II,” in O. Kiričuk and M. Omel’čuk (eds.), *Istoriâ religij v Ukraïni: naukovij šoričnik* 28 (Lviv 2018) 17–29.

¹⁵ M. R. Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians: Political Ideology in Post-Hellenistic and Late Antique Persia* (Cambridge 2011) 34.

¹⁶ J. Wiesehöfer, “From Achaemenid Imperial Order to Sasanian Diplomacy: War, Peace, and Reconciliation in Pre-Islamic Iran,” in K. A. Raaflaub (ed.) *War and Peace in the Ancient World* (Oxford 2007) 133.

¹⁷ T. Daryaeae, “The Idea of *Ērānšahr*: Jewish, Christian and Manichaean

ruled by the Kayāniāns and then by their descendants, the Sasanian dynasty.¹⁸ It should also be pointed out that in the Avestan hierarchy the Sun stands above the Moon.¹⁹ Calling Justinian “the Moon of the West” could be interpreted as a disguised insult.

It was a duty of the rulers of Iran, the sole holders of *farrah*, to attempt to unite the world under their rule.²⁰ In this context, placing the three empty chairs, symbolically dedicated to Chinese, Turkic, and Roman rulers, in the audience hall in Ctesiphon by Xusrō Anōšīrvān was a mark of subduing all of the kingdoms to the Iranian monarch.²¹ It should be assumed therefore that the Sasanian concept of the world was different from the one which suggests equality of both states on the basis of the language of diplomacy.

An interesting point relevant to the question of mutual respect of the rulers is provided by the material objects associated with the diplomacy. As an example, one may use the obelisk base in the hippodrome in Constantinople. The relief shows the homage of Iranian envoys paid to the emperor Theodosius I (379–395). This scene is on the western face of the monument, so the ambassadors who accompanied the emperor could not see it. It is therefore hard to defend the idea of mutual respect.

A diplomatic protocol developed in the sixth century and

Views in Late Antiquity,” in C. G. Cereti (ed.), *Iranian Identity in the Course of History* (Rome 2010) 91–108.

¹⁸ T. Daryaee, “Historiography in Late Antique Iran.” in A. M. Ansari (ed.), *Perceptions of Iran: History, Myths and Nationalism from Medieval Persia to the Islamic Republic* (London 2014) 65–76.

¹⁹ *Ardā Wirāz-nāmag* 2.8–9.

²⁰ *Kāmāmag ī Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān* 4.15; G. Gnoli, “Farr(ah),” *Encycl.Iran.* IX.3 (1999) 312–319; M. Canepa, “Building a New Vision of the Past in the Sasanian Empire: The Sanctuaries of Kayānsih and the Great Fires of Iran,” *Journal of Persianate Studies* 6 (2013) 64–90.

²¹ *Fārsnāma* 97; T. Daryaee, “Sasanians and their Ancestors,” in A. Panaino and A. Piras (eds.), *Proceedings of the 5th Conference of the Societas Iranologica Europea I* (Milan 2005) 287–293.

unified the court rituals in Constantinople and Ctesiphon. The principles of mutual diplomatic contacts were designed in the utmost detail. One could even say that a certain choreography of receiving of envoys was created and that a characteristic system of signs and symbols was shaped. But the perfect object that can be used to understand the reception of the symbols in their own cultural sense is an equestrian figure of Justinian I from Augustaion in Constantinople.²² Procopius provides a detailed description of the sculpture and, what is even more important, adds his explanation of the meaning of the figure. In his opinion, the emperor watched the rising sun being directed against the Persians. In his left hand, Justinian held the globe, symbolizing the entire earth and sea subdued to him by the power of the cross that crowned the globe. Procopius highlights the fact that the emperor was shown unarmed, thereby explaining his power as originating more from spiritual superiority. The gesture of an extended hand is interpreted by Procopius as an order to the Persians to stay within their borders (*Aed.* 1.2.10–12):

βλέπει δὲ πρὸς ἀνίσχοντά που τὸν ἥλιον, τὴν ἠνιόχησιν ἐπὶ Πέρσας, οἶμαι, ποιούμενος. καὶ φέρει μὲν χειρὶ τῇ λαίῳ πόλον, παραδηλῶν ὁ πλάστης ὅτι γῆ τε αὐτῷ καὶ θάλασσα δεδούλωται πᾶσα, ἔχει δὲ οὔτε ξίφος οὔτε δοράτιον οὔτε ἄλλο τῶν ὅπλων οὐδέν, ἀλλὰ σταυρὸς αὐτῷ ἐπὶ τοῦ πόλου ἐτίκειται, δι' οὗ δὴ μόνου τὴν τε βασιλείαν καὶ τὸ τοῦ πολέμου πεπóρισται κράτος. προτεινόμενος δὲ χεῖρα τὴν δεξιὰν ἐς τὰ πρὸς ἀνίσχοντα ἥλιον καὶ τοὺς δακτύλους διαπετάσας ἐγκελεύεται τοῖς ἐκείνῃ βαρβάροις καθῆσθαι οἴκοι καὶ μὴ πρόσω ἰέναι. ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ᾧδὲ πη ἔχει.

And he looks toward the rising sun, directing his course, I suppose, against the Persians. And in his left hand he holds a globe, by which the sculptor signifies that the whole earth and sea are subject to him, yet he has neither sword nor spear nor any other weapon, but a cross stands upon the globe which he carries, the emblem by which alone he has obtained both his Empire and his victory in war. And stretching forth his right hand toward the rising sun and spreading out his fingers, he commands the bar-

²² J. Raby, “Mehmed the Conqueror and the Equestrian Statue of the Augustaion,” *ICS* 12 (1987) 305–313.

barians in that quarter to remain at home and to advance no further. (transl. Dewing)

Would Iranian envoys arriving in Constantinople understand the meaning of the figure in the same way? In the gesture of the raised hand in iconography of the coinage of Sasanian kings²³ or of reliefs (e.g. that of Ardašīr at Naqš-e Rājab) we will understand that for the Iranians this gesture meant respect or subduing.

The language of diplomacy best exemplified in the metaphor of comparing Rome and Iran to two lights, two eyes of the earth that have to coexist, rather than try to annihilate each other, should not obscure the mutual distrust or open hostility of both states. Agathias in the sixth century, when mentioning the proposal to transfer the raising of young Theodosius II (408–450) to Yazdgerd I (399–420),²⁴ names the Iranian king as the worst enemy, the stranger barbarian, a cheater and a heathen (Agath. 4.26.6):

ἐμοὶ δὲ δοκεῖ ὁ τοῦτο ἀγάμενος οὐ τῇ πρώτῃ ὀρμῇ τοῦ βουλευ-
ματος τὸ εὐλογον κρίνειν, ἀλλὰ τῷ ὕστερον ἀποβεβηκότι. ἐπεὶ
πῶς ἂν εἶχεν κλαῶς ἀνδρὶ ὀθνεῖω καὶ βαρβάρῳ καὶ γένους
ἄρχοντι πολεμιωτάτου καὶ ὅπως αὐτῷ μετῆν πίστεώς τε καὶ
δικαιοσύνης ἡγνοημένῳ καὶ πρὸς γε τὰ ἐς θεὸν πεπλανημένῳ
παραδοῦναι.

But whoever expresses admiration for this decision is, in my opinion, judging it in the light of later events and not by the logic of the original situation, since it hardly could have made sense to entrust one's nearest and dearest to a foreigner and a barbarian, the ruler of a bitterly hostile nation, a man who in matters of honour and justice was an unknown quantity and who on top of everything else was the adherent of a false religion. (transl. Soward)

It must be borne in mind that the majority of the 'western' literary sources, e.g. Ammianus, Procopius, Agathias, or Mala-

²³ Yazdgerd II (439–457): R. Göbl, *Sasanian Numismatics* (Braunschweig 1971) I/2; Pērōz (457–484): I/1v, or Kawād I: I/1.

²⁴ Procopius *Wars* 1.2.1–10; R. C. Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy. Formation and Conduct from Diocletian to Anastasius* (Leeds 1992) 46–59.

las, were written in a time of constant wars with the Sasanians, and none of the authors was an unbiased observer, always describing events from the Roman perspective. It is, therefore, natural for these authors to depict Iran in a biased, negative light. Of course, the picture of the Persians in these sources is not uniformly negative.²⁵ The authors write somewhat respectfully about the military skills of their opponent, as in this way they could justify Iranian successes in wars against Rome (e.g. an opinion about Šāpur of Ray from Mehrān).²⁶ In non-Iranian sources a positive picture of Yazdgerd I, who reigned in a period of Romano-Iranian peaceful coexistence in the fifth century,²⁷ can be found.²⁸ An almost idealized picture of the state ruled by

²⁵ Av. Cameron, "Agathias on the Sassanians," *DOP* 23/24 (1969/70) 69–183; H. Börm, *Prokop und die Perser. Untersuchungen zu den römisch-sasanidischen Kontakten in der ausgehenden Spätantike* (Stuttgart 2007), esp. 247–275; J. W. Drijvers, "Ammianus Marcellinus' Image of Sasanian Society," in J. Wiesehöfer and P. Huysse (eds.), *Ērān ud Anērān: Studien zu den Beziehungen zwischen dem Sasanidenreich und der Mittelmeerwelt* (Stuttgart 2006) 53–66, and "A Roman Image of the 'Barbarian' Sassanians," in R. W. Mathisen and D. Shanzer (eds.), *Romans, Barbarians, and the Transformation of the Roman World. Cultural Interaction and the Creation of Identity in Late Antiquity* (Farnham 2011) 67–76; T. Briscoe, "Rome and Persia: Rhetoric and Religion," in D. Dzino and K. Parry (eds.), *Byzantium, its Neighbours and its Cultures* (Brisbane 2014) 155–168; C. Morley, "Beyond the Digression: Ammianus Marcellinus on the Persians," *Journal of Ancient History and Archaeology* 3 (2016) 10–25; L. Carrara et al. (eds.), *Die Weltchronik des Johannes Malalas: Quellenfragen* (Stuttgart 2017).

²⁶ K. Maksymiuk, "A New Proposal for the Identification of the Sasanian Commander Mermerōēs of Byzantine sources: Šāpur of Ray from Mehrān," in M. B. Panov (ed.), *The Byzantine Missionary Activity and its Legacy in Europe* (Skopje 2017) 93–98.

²⁷ S. McDonough, "A Second Constantine? The Sasanian King Yazdgerd in Christian History and Historiography," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1 (2008) 127–141.

²⁸ J. W. Drijvers, "Rome and the Sasanid Empire: Confrontation and Coexistence," in P. Rousseau (ed.), *A Companion to Late Antiquity* (Malden 2009) 441–454; H. Börm, "A Threat or a Blessing? The Sasanians and the Roman Empire," in C. Binder et al. (eds.), *Divan. Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean* (Duisburg 2016) 624–633; K. Maksymiuk, "Znachenije okhrany kavkazskikh prokhodov v otnosheniyakh

Xusrō Anōšīrvān, rule was based on unity of φιλοσοφία and βασιλεία, is found in the context of the arrival of seven Neoplatonic philosophers to the court in Gondīšāpur in 532.²⁹ A specific instance that might provide an argument for the favourable perception of Iran by the inhabitants of the border zone is the desertion of the Roman garrison of Beroea in 540, when the soldiers voluntarily “went into the land of Persia.”³⁰

These isolated examples should not blur the real and general relations between the rulers of the both states, which are revealed in the actual deeds of the monarchs. The kings of Iran demanded of the Roman emperors participation in the defense of the Caucasian border, but, what is important, their demands were not prompted by financial problems of the state. The required regular, annual payments, although relatively low, allowed their interpretation as signs of dependence.³¹ A hint that permits such an interpretation of mutual relations is a fragment describing the diplomatic mission of Zemarchos to the Turks in 568–572,³² when one of the chieftains posed a question to the

mezhdū Vizantiyey i sasanidskim Iranom (363–506 gg.)” *Caucaso-Caspica* 2 (2017, in press).

²⁹ Agathias. 3.2.30–31; U. Hartmann, “Geist im Exil. Römische Philosophen am Hof der Sasaniden,” in M. Schuol et al. (eds.) *Grenzüberschreitungen. Formen des Kontakts zwischen Orient und Okzident im Altertum* (Stuttgart 2002) 123–160; D. Marcotte, “Chosroès I^{er} et Priscien: Entretiens de physique et de météorologie,” in C. Jullien (ed.), *Husraw I^{er} – Reconstructions d’un règne. Sources et documents* (Paris 2015) 285–304.

³⁰ Procopius *Wars* 2.7.37; K. Maksymiuk, “Mass Deportations in Syria and Northern Mesopotamia under the rule of Xusrō I Anōšīrvān (540–542),” in F. Puell de la Villa and D. García Hernán (eds.), *War and Population Displacement. Lessons of History* (Brighton 2018) 51.

³¹ H. Börm, “‘Es war allerdings nicht so, daß sie es im Sinne eines Tributes erhielten, wie viele meinten...’ Anlässe und Funktion der persischen Geldforderungen an die Römer (3.–6. Jh.),” *Historia* 57 (2008) 327–346; K. Maksymiuk, “Die finanziellen Abrechnungen in den persisch-römischen Kriegen in den Zeiten der Sasaniden,” *Historia i Świat* 5 (2016) 149–157.

³² M. Dobrovits, “The Altaic World through Byzantine Eyes: Some Remarks on the Historical Circumstances of Zemarchus’ Journey to the Turks,”

Roman legates (John of Ephesus *HE* 6.23):

Tell me, is it true what the Persians say, that the king of the Romans is their slave, and pays yearly tribute as a slave? (transl. Payne Smith)

The real relationship between the two states is illustrated by the letter of Xusrō II Parvēz, in which the king foregoes all diplomatic jargon and calls the emperor Heraclius his meaningless servant (Ps.-Sebeos 123):

In the 34th year of king Khosrov he wrote a letter to Heraclius as follows: “Khosrov, honoured among the gods, lord and king of all the earth, and offspring of the great Aramazd, to Heraclius our senseless and insignificant servant. (transl. Thomson)

On the basis of these considerations, I fully agree with the view of Nina Garsoïan: “Behind the bland courtesy of diplomatic clichés ran a deep vein of enmity, and, what was perhaps still more damaging, mutual contempt.”³³ The idea of a shared language and tokens of communication should be re-examined and, in my opinion, is totally incorrect. The reception of the symbols and interpretation of the signs was determined by different cultural traditions. The Sasanians did not see contradiction in calling the Romans their brothers and enemies at the same time. They understood differently the symbolic language, as was discussed in the example of the raised hand. These facts allow a better and fuller understanding of the relations between Rome and Iran in Late Antiquity.³⁴

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³³ N. Garsoïan, “Byzantium and the Sasanians,” in E. Yarshater (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran III* (1983) 591.

³⁴ These are the results of the work carried out under the research theme No. 452/16/S, financed by the grant of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.